



THE HISTORY OF POSTMAN CHEVAL'S IDEAL PALACE (1836/1924)

One day in April, 1879, returning from his daily round, country postman Ferdinand Cheval, then aged 43, stumbled upon a stone that was so unusual that it reminded him of a dream sinking slowly into oblivion: a fairytale palace beyond imagining.

Night after night, he spent thirty-three years of his existence in modelling this monument to obstinacy in what was originally his vegetable garden. Inspired by the countryside he walked through each day, illustrated magazines that he distributed during his rounds, and finally by postcards that began to appear in 1890, he built a palace the like of which was to be found nowhere else in the world.

Some mocked him, some criticized him, but over a period of 33 years he worked on 10,000 days, spending 93,000 hours on building his Palace, on which he engraved "the work of one man".

He completed his Palace at the age of 76 and was then brave enough to spend another 8 years building his own equally unusual tomb, in the cemetery of the village of Hauterives. He died aged 88 and is buried there. Before he died, he had his biography* certified as being "true and correct", attesting that he built his palace alone.

Independent of all artistic movements, calling on no recognized architectural technique, the Ideal Palace is now considered a world reference of outsider art. The Palace was ardently defended by André Malraux and was declared a historical monument in 1969 as a work of naive art. Ferdinand Cheval was the source of inspiration for many artists who paid tribute to him: André Breton, Pablo Picasso, Tinguely, Max Ernst, Niki de Saint-Phalle to name but a few.

*"In the evening at nightfall
when mankind is at rest, I work on my
palace. My pains will be known to no-one".*

* Ferdinand Cheval's notebook n° 3, February 1914

BUILDING THE MONUMENT

THE **EAST** FACADE

This is where Postman Cheval started to build his palace. He started in the middle with the Source of Life over which a lion and a dog are watching. He continued to the right, successively building St. Amadeus' Cave, Socrates, the Egyptian temple, world architecture and a tomb with a double slab where he thought he would be buried. For reasons of public health, his application was refused.

To balance his façade at the other end, he built the Hindu temple, where strange animals intermingle, together with a niche for his faithful wheelbarrow. Then come the three giants, Caesar, Archimedes, Vercingétorix. At the top, he made his lush, exotic Tower of Barbarism. He spent 20 years on this totally baroque, proliferating façade.

THE **SOUTH** FACADE

He continued along the south façade, which consists mainly of an antediluvian museum where he placed the stones that were dear to his heart. You can see a remarkable mineral tree inhabited by strange birds and small animals.

THE **WEST** FACADE

The west façade is part of a deliberately universalist vision. Here Postman Cheval makes styles from all cultures and all religions cohabit: the Arab Mosque, the Hindu Temple, the Swiss Chalet, the Square House of Algiers, and the Mediaeval Castle. This façade is structured by columns on which he wrote his name. It invites you to travel and gives access to the extraordinary Primitive Sculpture Gallery.

THE **NORTH** FACADE

It is probably here that the Postman Cheval completed his monument. Here he was at the height of his powers. The modelling is very rich, and the façade teeming with life. Snakes, a deer, an alligator, a pelican, a frog, the Phoenix, the Minotaur and other strange, repetitive figures live together under the eye of Adam and Eve. This is about hell, paradise, life and death. "From a dream I awoke Queen of the World".

PLAN FOR VISITING THE PALACE

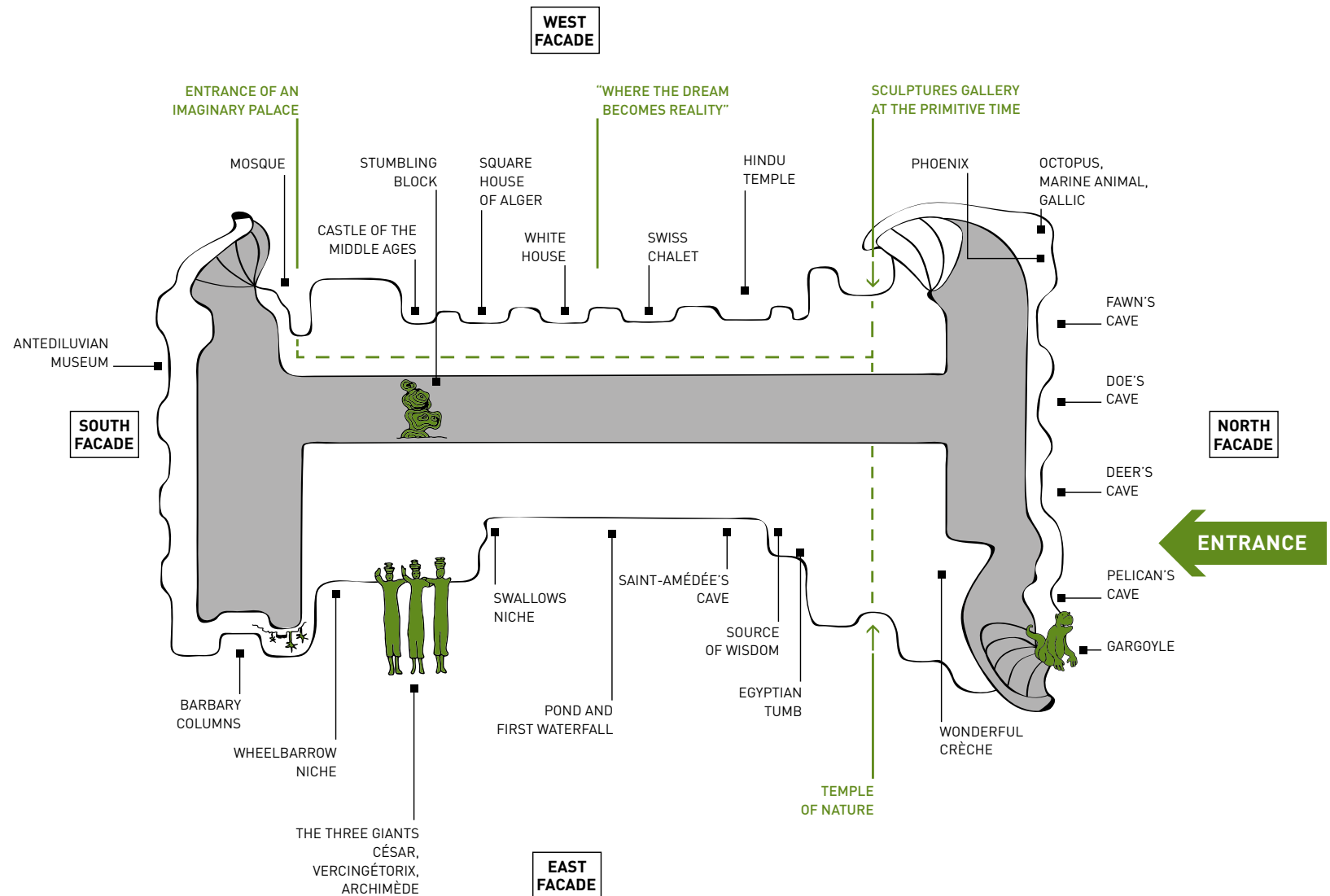
THE TERRACE

This is where Postman Cheval chose to place his "stumbling block", the stone that led to the construction of the Ideal Palace. It presides close the tree of life. The terrace offers a fine view of the top of the monument: pilgrims, birds and turrets. Three steps give access to it.

THE GALLERY

The entrance to an imaginary palace decorated with a frieze of shells, chandeliers, and dream-like modelling, it reveals a fascinating bestiary. It is dotted with quotes engraved by Postman Cheval, expressing his labour, his modesty, and his dreams of grandeur: "This rock will one day tell many things." A poem can be read on it, entitled "Ton Idéal, ton Palais - Your Ideal, your Palace" sent to Postman Cheval by a Grenoble poet Emile Roux Parassac in 1904. This poem gave its name to the monument.

In 1912, he completed his work issuing a challenge to the world: "1879-1912, 10,000 days, 93,000 hours, 33 years of trials: let anyone more stubborn than me set to work".



IN THE MUSEUM AREA

THE BIOGRAPHY OF POSTMAN CHEVAL

Ferdinand Cheval was born in Charmes, a small village near Hauterives in 1836. Born into a poor rural family, he went off to work with his father. He became an apprentice baker and did casual work before returning to Hauterives, where he became a country postman at the age of 31. He did this job until he retired at the age of 60. From his first marriage with the young, pretty Rosalie Revol two boys were born, the first of whom died young. Then his wife died. A few years later, he married Claire-Philomène Richaud. From this marriage, Alice was born. She died aged 15. This was very hard for Joseph Ferdinand Cheval, and on the family tomb he wrote "Alice, bitterly missed".

BUILDING THE IDEAL PALACE

How did this dream palace arise out of Postman Cheval's imagination? During his long rounds, when he did over 40 kms per day on foot, this dream started to take shape. Drawings, materials, construction techniques, inspiration, and some rare photos of Joseph Ferdinand Cheval at work.

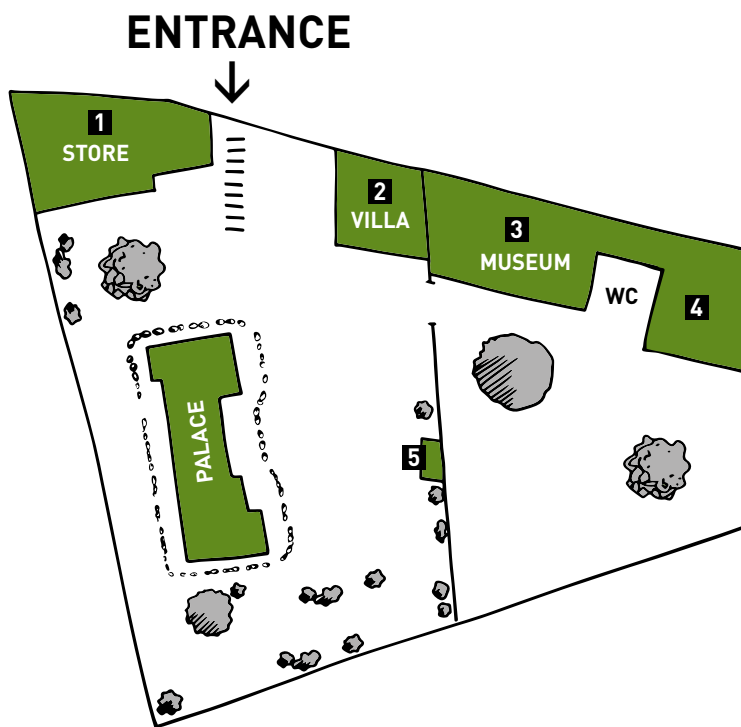
FROM LABOUR TO RECOGNITION

After the time of labour came that of curiosity and recognition. In 1905, the first visitors arrived at the Ideal Palace of Postman Cheval while he was still alive. He welcomed them and showed them round his monument. In the 1930s, shortly after his death, artists began to discover this unique work and unanimously recognized it as a work of art in its own right.

TRIBUTES FROM ARTISTS

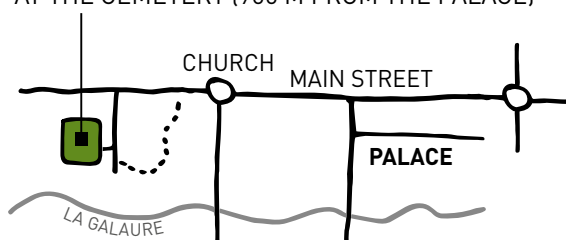
André Breton, Max Ernst, Denise Belon, Pablo Picasso, Jacques Brunius, Gaston Bachelard, Brassai, Dorothea T, Robert Doisneau, Willy Ronis, Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, Francoise Mallet-Joris, Etienne Martin, Erro, Suzanne Sontag, Jean Messagier, Bernard Buffet, Henri Ughetto, Louis Pons, Sanfourche, Hervé Di Rosa, Charlélie Couture, Bernard Rancillac, Ben, Nils Udo, Titouan Lamazou, Louis Poulain, Bernard Pras...

SITE PLAN



- 1 STORE**
BOOK STORE, POSTCARDS,
SOUVENIRS, GIFT IDEAS IMAGINED
BY LOCAL CREATORS...
- 2 VILLA ALICIUS**
BUILT BY THE POSTMAN CHEVAL,
HE LIVED IN THIS HOUSE WITH
HIS WIFE, NATIONAL LABEL
"HOUSE OF FAMOUS PEOPLE".
- 3 MUSEOGRAPHIC SPACE**
- 4 WORKSHOP**
CREATION PLACE, CONFERENCES,
EXHIBITIONS, ARTIST RESIDENCY.
- 5 BELVEDERE**
IT WAS BUILT BY THE POSTMAN CHEVAL
TO OFFER TO THE VISITOR A GOOD VIEW
OF THE MAJESTIC EAST FAÇADE.

GRAVE OF THE POSTMAN CHEVAL AT THE CEMETERY (900 M FROM THE PALACE)



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