



The history of the Logis de Forge

Mouthiers-sur-Boëme
(Charente)

The Middle Ages and the Hundred Years War

1337-1453

Since the year 1000, the Forge estate, with its wooded hill, the Boême river that flows through it and the abundant crystal waters of the resurgence, has attracted people.



If a group of Benedictine monks built a small monastery near the site, it was, following the monastery tradition, to make the most of the presence of water to irrigate the agricultural ground. They also created a fish tank to ensure a supply of fish and installed a forge to make agricultural tools. Fields of iron ore deposits were close, already known and exploited by the Romans, and the surrounding woods enabled them to heat the metal.

In the 11th century the monks built monastic buildings (which were completely destroyed during the Hundred Years War) around the abbey-church which was classified as a Historical Monument. The latter, in spite of the modifications undertaken over the centuries, remains an exceptional testament to Roman Art in Charente today.

The period of the Middle Ages was very prosperous for both the monastery and the village of Mouthiers, as it coincided with the crusades and pilgrimages to Saint-Jacques de Compostelle, one of the most popular for Christians. In fact the monks welcomed the pilgrims, who were often accompanied by artists and merchants. They must have inspired the oriental motifs found on the capitals of the church. This is also why we find a Saint-Jacques shell sculpted in a stone on top of a pilgrim with his staff, and two symbolic animals by his side, the eagle (Saint-Jean) and the elephant (baptism and eternity).

The village of Mouthiers-sur-Boême (*monasterium*) takes its name from the ancient monastery and the name of the Boême river is a word which means "swamp". As for the Forge site, its origin comes from the installation of a iron mill by the monks.

The seigneurie at La Roche-Chandry which overlooked the village of Mouthiers was one of the four largest in Charente and stretched out over the whole parish and the surrounding villages. For this reason, Guillaume de La Roche-Chandry donated his church in Mouthiers and its land (including the Forge site) to the Saint-Martial de Limoges Abbey by charter in 1094.

Over the following centuries, the Forge site became a dependant stronghold of the La Roche-Chandry seigneurie :

- in 1233, Allin de Forge, as a *dominus*, meaning a Lord of Forge, was quoted in a document kept in the Charente Regional Archives (réf.ADH2 75).
- in 1319, Huques de Chandry donated the mill and the estate to Galhard, bishop of Angoulême, then, in 1330, to Ayquelin, the bishop (réf.AD-G 95).
- in 1358, Geraud de Chandry acknowledged Bishop Ayquelin (réf.AD-G95).

Architecturally, on the Forge site, there are hardly any traces of construction from this period apart from large stone walls in the North part of the current house and an arched gothic room, lit by three lancet windows which was used as a cellar and kept for provisions. This room leads to the pond through an underground tunnel. One can therefore imagine a fortified house, built on flat rock, overhanging the resurgence which ensured the protection of the forge mill and, with the other fief, the Chatellenie of La Roche-Chandry.

During the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), the region and the Laroche-Chandry castle was the scene of incessant combat between the two enemy sides. When the English took possession, they held them to ransom, stole and set the castle, abbeys, farms and fields on fire.

This explains why there is little trace of the evolution of the Forge site during this sombre period in the history of the region.



From the 16th to the 18th century

It was probably in the 16th century that the Logis was built on the site of the small fortress overhanging the Forge resurgence.

In 1485, the logis de Forge was built upon the site of a small fortress overhanging the resurgence.

The two narrow towers on the west facade and a round tower with a spiral staircase on the side of the courtyard of honour on the east, date from this era.

There are two roof dormers at the top of the towers, one

decorated with the Saint-Jacques de Compostelle shell and the other with two animals strangely associated : the eagle



and the elephant on top of a pilgrim with his staff, containing a second shell.

The body of the main house today has two floors with mullioned windows on the courtyard side. It has kept its monumental fireplace, its stone floor in the entrance and its original paving slabs.

The Wars of Religion (1562-1598) which bloodied France and particularly the Charente regions undoubtedly contributed to the absence of documentation on the evolution of Forge during this period. One must wait for the Édict of Nantes (1598) for King Henry IV to wipe out the disastrous economic consequences.

But let's first go back to the history of Forge at the start of the 17th century. Several families succeeded one another at Forge during these two centuries :

The 7th of January 1539, Aymar le Coq, lord of Forge, leased the land to H. Charron, miller, for the «culture of vineyard, cereals and saffron»; he became Mayor of Angoulême in 1547.

- **Isaac de Liquire**, Lord of Coutaubière and Forge in 1623.
- In 1668, **Jeanne de Liquire** pays tribute to Lord Rochandry and, in 1671, leased the wheat and nut oil mill to Jean Gaillard for 3 years. It is said that she was Louis Regnaud's widow, knave of Palus.
- **Catherine Guy**, widow of Luc Vigier in 1695.
- **François Gaston Houlier**, Lord of Plassac had married Jeanne Vigier, daughter of Luc Vigier (1711).
- **Raphael Houlier** and his mother Jeanne Vigier in 1744.
- **Jean Préveraud de la Bussière** (widower of Marie Houlier) in 1766.
- In 1768, the Forge estate was sold by Jean Préveraud, Lord of La Bussière to **Lady Marie Monneraud**, widow of Jean Cadiot, knave of Ponthenier and Laudeber who lived in Angoulême. (cf. description of the property in the sales contract)
- On the 10th January 1781, **Bernard Sazerac** bought the estate

and the prestigious Logis de Forge from Cadiot's widow, allowing him to call himself from then on Sazerac de Forge

- When her husband passed away in 1791, the widowed **Thérèse de Bresme** inherited the property and she remarried to Mr Civadier. She sold Forge to her son Laurent in 1809.

In a less heated political climate, without internal conflicts, the region progressively rediscovered economic prosperity that it hadn't had for many years, in industrial terms (porcelaine, smelting, paper), in agricultural terms (eaux-de-vie and agriculture) and commercial terms (export of the products mentioned earlier).

The development of the Forge activities were in three of the above-mentioned sectors.

Agriculture : the wheat and nut oil mills replaced the ironworks of the monks from the beginning of the 17th century, making the most of the hydraulic energy coming from the resurgence and enabling the mill wheels to function all year long.

During this period, **the exploitation of the agricultural domain** (cultivation, vineyards, livestock and woods) **and the mills** (wheat and nut oil) **was systematically entrusted by the owners to the farmers** (contract farming) :

- In 1623, the farmer was **Jean Texier** and he had to pay 425 Tournais pounds to Isaac de Liquire every year.

From the wheat and nut oil mill to the paper mill...



- In 1677, the farmer was **Jean Gaillard**.
- In 1695, it was **Jean and Pierre Verquin**.
- In 1744, it was **Jacques Petiot** who had to pay the owner, Jeanne Vigier, 150 Tounois pounds per year, a wheat pipe, 4 chicken pairs, 2 pairs of capons, plus the royal taxes.

When the sale of the Forge estate took place, on the 1st May 1768, from Jean Preveraud de la Bussière to Lady Marie Monneraud, Cadiot's widow, for a sum of 4200 pounds, the livestock consisted of 2 drawing bulls, 21 ewes, a pig and seeds.

In 1770, **Jean Bouilland**, a farmer, stood up to the new owner who wanted him to terminate the contract.

Some buildings like stables, pigsties and woodsheds still exist from this agricultural era.

Thanks to the profits generated by his father Louis Sazerac in the eaux-de-vie

business, his son **Bernard** was able to purchase the Forge estate on **10th January 1781** and this authorised him to carry the name **Sazerac de Forge** for him and his family (réf. Pr. Gilles Bernard, Le Cognac - À la conquête du monde Éditions Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux - page 47).

As from 1782, Bernard Sazerac de Forge lost no time in starting up the production of high quality paper (lease signed by Bernard Sazerac on the 27th December 1782 with Jean Retailaud to manage the paper mill).

From then on, Forge had a new destiny with the creation of a large paper mill which was to accompany the traditional cultivation of the vines on the hills.

Following the death of Bernard Sazerac de Forge in 1791, his widow, Thérèse de Bresme, managed the paper mill during the «terror era»; the mill had the 2 cylinders, 12 piles, 3 containers and employed 18 workers and 10 women. Her son Laurent

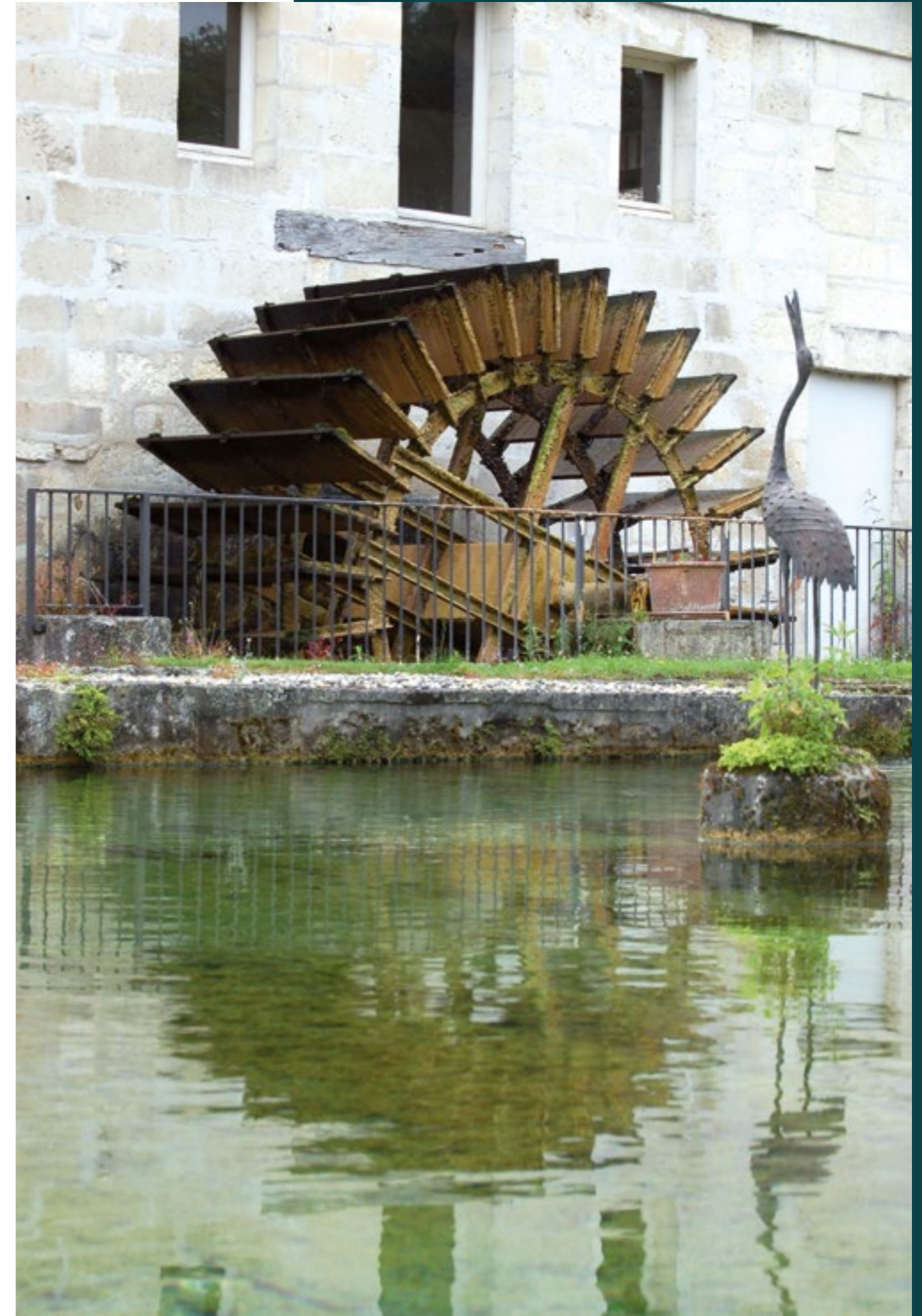
took over the management of the mill in 1803 until his death in 1849.

The different paper varieties with the watermarks of the period are part of the private collection belonging to the current owners.

In architectural terms, the paper mill replaced the wheat and nut oil mills. The beautiful stone paper dryers, that can still be seen today, were built around the pond fed by the resurgence.

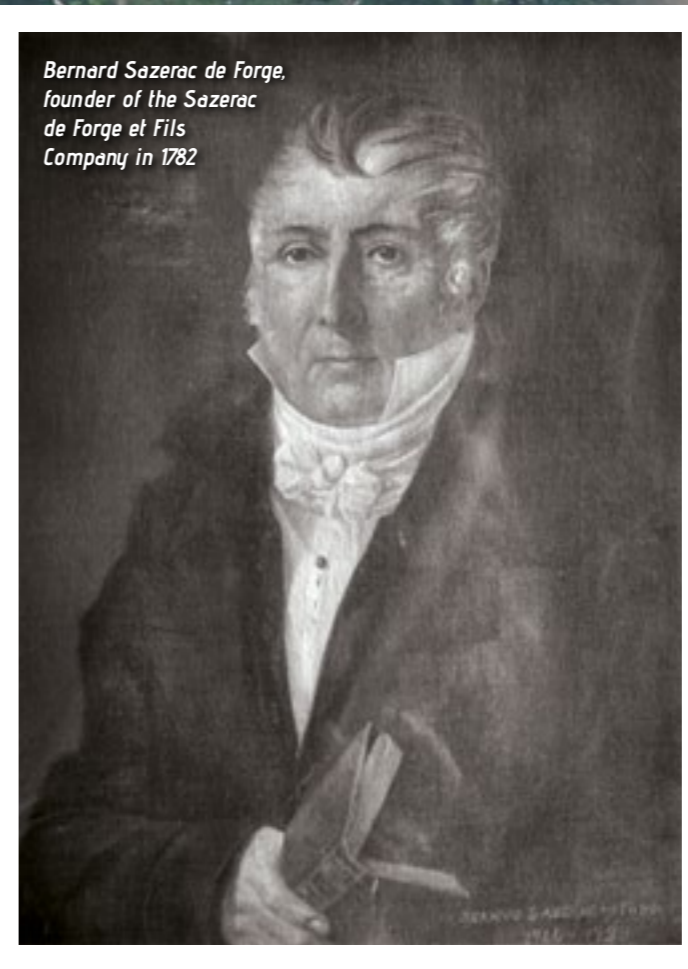
Major renovation and modernisation works led by Bernard Sazerac de Forge had been carried out on the Logis de Forge to ensure the new owner and his family a stature worthy of social status and business success.

Moreover, the "small living room" was decorated in an exceptional way (canvases painted in the "Four Seasons" after Lancret) by an aristocratic Lady who had taken refuge at Forge, hidden by Bernard Sazerac de Forge, at the beginning of the French Revolution.



The 19th century

This was a period of great prosperity and opening to the world for the two Charente regions. Development of traditional economic with sectors such as *cognac* (from 1870 onwards, phylloxera ravaged the Charente vineyards affecting the winegrowers and dealers until the beginning of the 20th century), *paper industry* and *ironworks*.



Bernard Sazerac de Forge,
founder of the Sazerac
de Forge et Fils
Company in 1782



For the Sazerac de Forge family, the Forge estate had three advantages, two of which were part of the economic context of this period :

- it was firstly **the presence of the vineyards on the hills** giving a plentiful supply of quality wine to the family business, Sazerac de Forge et fils which, led by Laurent and his sons, enabled international development ;
- then it was the **papermill**, which, since its creation by Bernard in 1786, had functioned at full speed producing quality paper. In 1880, adapting to new demand, the Forge mill began to specialise in the **manufacture of boxes** until 1932 ;
- finally, the Forge house, restored by Bernard and Laurent, became the **summer residence for the family** who got together regularly to appreciate the rural pleasures of being 12 km from Angoulême.

THE VINEYARDS AT FORGE

In the letters from Laurent and his sons (1833-1854), who used to go regularly to Forge, one finds comments on the surrounding vineyards on several occasions :

- 14th June 1836, letter from Laurent to Leonide :
"Everyone talks about the beauty of the vineyards and it is not just at Forge, where I have come from, where they speak about abundance"
- 23rd May 1844, letter from Laurent to Leonide :
"Hippolyte and I visited the vineyards yesterday. Nothing is more beautiful: the amount of sets, the force of these sets and the vigour of these vines; there will probably be abundance in the surroundings. The weather has become beautiful with an agreeable heat."
- 31st May 1844, letter from Laurent :
"Yesterday we visited our vineyards at the Coyeux mill (Jurignac) and those surrounding us. We saw some on the way and we questioned some winemakers and ascertained that we have lovely vineyards everywhere."
- 7th June 1844, letter written by Hippolyte and signed by Laurent :
"It was when we arrived back from Forge that our manager signed here (written by Laurent by hand). I've just got back from Forge: the vineyards are superb and are starting to flower."

THE PAPER MILL

At first, the Sazerac de Forge family themselves worked on the paper mill ; the day to day management was carried out by "paper masters" on site such as Jean-Emmanuel Desbrousse-Latour from 1810 onwards, then the Gaillard brothers until 1850. From that date onwards, following the death of Laurent and Léonide in 1849, the family decided to lease the Forge mill to two large regional papermaker families, the Lacroix family and the Laroche family.

During this period, "wide-angled" paper (75 x 106 cm), "small notebook" paper, "roman" paper, "Jesus" paper and "double lys" paper, were produced for the Russian market.



Paper forms



THE HOLIDAY HOME

The Logis de Forge became a holiday home for the Sazerac de Forge family who would go there frequently, firstly by stage-coach then, as of 1852, by train. In fact, the new railway line Paris-Angoulême-Bordeaux went through the village of Mouthiers-sur-Boème where there was a station, making family trips much easier.

There they would breathe the country air, they would go fishing, also getting crayfish in the clear waters of the Boème and they would play music in the living room at Forge.

Hence, Enos de Lafarque du Tauzia, who was courting Laurent's daughter, Hortense Sazerac de Forge, had written a beautiful poem to his fiancée for her name day in 1824 and thus started his epistle :

"I pay you a pure tribute, on this date, in this enchanting place" (at the Forge castle), then he flatters his future parents-in-law.

"You are my treasure, and the only one on earth who is gracious, like a second mother, and who lavishes me at all times" (M^{rs} Sazerac de Forge)

And then, for his future father-in-law, *"Would I say the noble virtues of this wiseman, adored as the best father that ever was?" (M^r Sazerac de Forge).*

In 1861, Raymond de Lafarque-Tauzia, son of the above mentioned Enos, also wrote a magnificent poem boasting about the charms of Forge of which he had kept wonderful childhood memories.

Music played a profound part in the family with Hippolyte who, not only played the cello, but had also composed a "Serenade for Cello and Piano", a copy of which can be found at the BNF in Paris.

Some notes and memories of Isabelle Sazerac de Forge (1876 to 1893), Léonide's daughter, enable us to relive the family atmosphere at Forge during this period punctuated by the death in 1873 of her father Adhemar Sazerac de Forge. The Forge estate then became a joint possession between Albert and three of his sisters.

It was only in 1911 that Albert Sazerac de Forge and his wife Marguerite de Beaucé, wishing to end the joint possession, bought the Forge estate, a place where they would enjoy happy days (and also sadder days) with their three daughters, Élisabeth, Geneviève and Anne.

Let's now enter the 20th century.



Geneviève Sazerac de Forge with friends in a small boat on the pond of Forge



Print of February 1844



Excerpts from the First Serenade for cello with piano accompaniment, by Hippolyte Sazerac de Forge

Clarisse de Lafarque du Tauzia daughter of Enos de Lafarque du Tauzia and Hortense Sazerac de Forge (in Forge around 1850)



The 20th century

Albert and Marquerite's family divided their time between Angoulême and Forge and the papermill activities stopped for good in 1932.



Marquerite de Beaucé,
wife of Albert
(1855-1942)



Geneviève
Sazerac de Forge
(1891-1969)

On the 21st May 1901, their oldest daughter, Élisabeth, married a young and splendid officer, the Viscount Edmond des Prades de Fleurette, who was a pupil at the Polytechnic School. She had inherited a beautiful oval face with large brown eyes and a slender silhouette from her mother, Marquerite de Beaucé. From her father, Albert, she had inherited musical talent from the Sazerac de Forge family and played the piano wonderfully.

As a young wife, she had followed her husband who was working in Nancy in the 2nd division of the Cavalry but she fell ill and died on the 6th April 1905 at the young age of 24. One can imagine her parents despair. Overwhelmed with grief, Edmond de Fleurette went off to China on deployment for several years under the direction of the commanding officer d'Ollone and wrote marvellous letters to his parents-in-law (who had stayed at Forge).

Geneviève, the youngest daughter, devoted herself to music from a very young age (family tradition) and left for Paris in the 1920's to study at the Conservatoire de Musique.

But she stayed loyal to Forge and returned frequently to visit her parents who she loved very dearly.

Following the death of her father Albert (1924) and then her



mother Marquerite (1942), Geneviève became the owner of Forge. As an organist in Paris, Angoulême and Dax, she arranged transcriptions for organ of works by Haydn, Frescobaldi and Monteverdi (Couronnement de Poppée). She was also a pupil of Nadia Boulanger and Marcel Dupré who visited her on several occasions at Forge.

She would come every year to Forge for Easter and would return to Paris in the autumn, making the most of her stay there to devote her time to the preservation of this family residence. She managed to classify the site as a graded estate in 1943, and, outpacing our modern estate owners, she accepted for a film "Pontcarral" to be made with natural decor, which was very successful during the German occupation.

In the 1950's, when she found out that the district council in Mouthiers-sur-Boëme was going to destroy the old cemetery near the church, she suggested getting a very pretty 17th century stone cross to place in the walkway at Forge. It is said that she hid a document, the contents of which are unknown to this day, inside the column.

Geneviève Sazerac de Forge died in 1969 and left the Forge estate in her will to a first cousin on her mother's side, Bertrand de Beaucé, who she particularly valued. Bertrand gave it in turn to his son Ghislain de Beaucé in 1971, who had just married Martine Palluat de Besset.

On becoming owners - with youthfulness on our side - (Martine was 24), we set about continuing the restoration that Geneviève had started, and renovated all the village buildings, at the same time respecting the site and the original architecture. The six historic buildings (old paper dryers, mill, dovecote and farmhouse) are today very comfortable and make up a residential village with three years period leases that contribute to the upkeep of the estate.

As the Forge house and the village buildings refound their life, we became aware of the interest that these architectural buildings presented - the tender and light Charente stone, the abundance and clearness of the water irrigating the whole property, and finally the presence of a crescent shaped wooded hill, surrounding the natural environment of the estate with elegance.

We had understood that Forge, with each stone and each building and through its numerous aspects - either religious (monks), political, agricultural (cognac), industrial (paper), residential or natural - testified to the history of both Charente and that of the large Sazerac de Forge family. And it is true that water has always been the source of life and activity.

Then came the time of the gardens with the 21st century.



The 21st century

The Logis de Forge and the drying houses were completely restored and Ghislain and Martine live there permanently. It has become a family residence again where they entertain their children and grandchildren.

Excerpt from the Arcades review - summer 2014
Article written by Jean Marcheur



In June 2005, Ghislain and Martine, aware of the patrimonial and historical interest of the estate, managed to gain entry, with the Minister of Culture, into the Historical Monuments Inventory for both the dwelling and the whole of the village buildings at Forge.

Then came the time of the gardens with the label "remarkable gardens" attributed in June 2004 by the Minister of Culture and followed by the opening of the gardens to the public.



THE FORGE GARDENS OR THE REFLECTING WATERS

This unique beauty spot made them want to add a natural jewel by creating gardens. In order to do this, it was important to respect the natural heritage and to show it to an advantage, to be in harmony with the magic of the estate and to feel the simmering of the water and the quivering of the light.

It was also necessary to be receptive to contemporary design while at the same time being inspired by the gardens visited during their trips abroad. And this is where, in the creation of these gardens, they were influenced by the work of the contemporary landscape architects, like the "Mirror of Paradise" by the Spaniard Fernando Caruncho, and also the "Gardens in Motion" by Gilles Clément.

Remembering their trips in the creation of the Forge Gardens, the owners not only used Japanese landscape techniques by showing the water to an advantage and nature that we find in the famous Kyoto gardens, but also the ponds and the light in the Alhambra gardens in Granada and the waterfalls, sculptures and cypress in the Renaissance gardens in Italy.

A CRYSTAL CLEAR WATER CHASM

At the bottom of the Logis patio is a first garden surrounded by a dry stone wall and box trees. Originally, it was an orchard with a few fruit trees lined along a path leading from the patio steps to the gate. In the centre of this garden, a canal was created. It is lined on both sides with stone and decorated with roses, gauras and garden holyhock clumps. At sunrise, the pond water shows a reflection of a 17th century stone gate and at sunset, the stone steps and the Logis facade. Laurels, rose bushes, tamarisk and pereskia clumps fill the space.

A small square pond, moved on purpose due to the axis of the Logis, completes the scenery. Its angles correspond to the four cardinal elements. It is surrounded by preles; these ferns date from the dinosaur era.

Adjoining this enclosure, a significant water feature is fed by a resurgence which springs from a natural funnel measuring 5 metres both in diameter and depth. The aquatic plants that fill

this crystal water gulf gives it unreal blue and green colours.

On the bank, on the west side, two stone grinding wheels from the nut oil mill with their circular form remind us of the mill wheel that one can see turning in the distance and are a witness of one of the activities which took place at Forge in the 15th century. The Logis and the hamlet seem to float on a large body of water, a vast scene animated by the movements of the waves, the subtle variations of the light, the flight of the heron and the majestic gliding of the swans.



This unique site, where
vegetal, mineral and water
 answer each other, inspired the owners of the
 place to create a whole world of gardens...



LET NATURE TAKE ITS COURSE

Crossing a bridge on the Boème river, a vast pond appears, created by the owners in 1990 and fed by a source discovered by a neighbouring witch. This water piece inspired by Japanese gardens is covered with white and pink water lilies.

A hillock moving towards the West gives a bird's eye view of the pond and the collection of waterlilies and allows one at sunset to contemplate the reflection of the hill on the water.

A pavilion is in the centre of a clearing surrounded with bald cypress (taxodium) whose autumn colours are exceptional (brick red/reddish brown); this pavilion, where one can sit under the climbing roses and clematis, enables longer contemplation and, in the evening, the reflection of the moon, hanging above the hill, can be seen in the pond.

Another bridge brings one to the "Garden in Motion", originally marshy ground but which was stabilised by the creation of an heart shaped artificial river and lined with silver willow. In this area, it was all about working with nature without pretence and at the same time leaving nature to express itself. The paths regularly kept for walking purposes contrast with a garden overflowing with fantasy. The richness of the ground and the presence of water enable a large diversity of plants.



SUBTLE WATER GAMES

Another bridge crosses the weir whose crystal water flows into the Boème river with a sonorous drop. A little further, a new area takes on a slightly Tuscan feel : **two vast rectangular ponds**, fed by fan-shaped waterfalls, reflect the foliage of the hill ; they are surrounded by Italian cypress that give the space a stately rhythm.

Right at the end of one of the mirror canals, four columns made of stone from Saint-Même have been recently installed to establish a mineral transition with the hill where the plants prevail.

Between each pair of columns, the water falls directly into the river. Depending on the viewpoint **these columns can be aligned or can form the foundations of a roman temple**; they are reflected with grace, in the pond water and the river.

At the extremity of the other mirror canal, floating on a pond surrounded with stone slabs, water gushes in a powerful jet of shells from a **fountain with five bronze nymphs** by a sculptor from Bordeaux from the Belle Epoque. Beds of flowering shrubs bring pastel colours to this structured space.

Near the mill wheel, identically restored and turning permanently, there is **a pool with emerald shades** where the water gleefully flows onto the stone gutters.

A new bridge leads into **a small garden inspired by the**



Renaissance period where lavender and climbing roses are in abundance. Below, in **a vegetable garden**, fruit and vegetables grow mixed with dahlias and volubilis.

From there, **a long path rejoins the Fouquebrune road along the Boème river**, where a stone dating from the Middle Ages and, on the right, **a 17th century stone cross** can be seen on the banks.

Over all these years devoted to the creation of the gardens, the owners have learned to watch the light, its inflections, its leaks and its subtle games on the water. They have also learned the art of perspectives and the harmony of colours. And in this way, they have thus understood that **to emphasise these spaces, it was necessary to enter into a permanent dialogue with the plants, the minerals, the light and the reflecting waters.**



Books and guides which talk about Jardins du Logis de Forge



- **Parcs et Jardins de Poitou-Charentes et de Vendée**
(éditions Christine Bonneton de Pamela de Montleau)
- **La Charente d'antan à travers la carte postale ancienne**
(Pamela de Montleau et Jacques Baudet)
- **Guide du patrimoine botanique en France**
(éditions Actes Sud de Jean-Pierre Demoly et Franklin Picard)
- **Petit Futé La France des jardins**
- **Parcs et jardins en France Guide de charme** (éditions Rivages)
- **Guide Balado Poitou-Charentes** (éditions Mondéo)
- **Charente Plaisirs** (éditions Confluences d'Alain Blasi)
- **Guide Michelin - collection Patrimoine de France**
Découvrez nos plus beaux Parcs et Jardins (2013)

« These 207 parks and gardens are spread throughout the territory ; no doubt that you will discover them with as much pleasure as our team will have surveyed them. From the sublime grandeur of Versailles to the moving tranquility of the Logis de Forge in Charente, there is something for everyone! »

Philippe Orain, collections manager

