

= Catherine de ' Medici 's building projects =

Catherine de ' Medici 's building projects included the Valois chapel at Saint @-@ Denis , the Tuileries Palace , and the Hôtel de la Reine in Paris , and extensions to the château of Chenonceau , near Blois . Born in 1519 in Florence to an Italian father and a French mother , Catherine de ' Medici was a daughter of both the Italian and the French Renaissance . She grew up in Florence and Rome under the wing of the Medici popes , Leo X and Clement VII . In 1533 , at the age of fourteen , she left Italy and married Henry , the second son of Francis I and Queen Claude of France . On doing so , she entered the greatest Renaissance court in northern Europe .

King Francis set his daughter @-@ in @-@ law an example of kingship and artistic patronage that she never forgot . She witnessed his huge architectural schemes at Chambord and Fontainebleau . She saw Italian and French craftsmen at work together , forging the style that became known as the first School of Fontainebleau . Francis died in 1547 , and Catherine became queen consort of France . But it wasn 't until her husband King Henry 's death in 1559 , when she found herself at forty the effective ruler of France , that Catherine came into her own as a patron of architecture . Over the next three decades , she launched a series of costly building projects aimed at enhancing the grandeur of the monarchy . During the same period , however , religious civil war gripped the country and brought the prestige of the monarchy to a dangerously low ebb .

Catherine loved to supervise each project personally . The architects of the day dedicated books to her , knowing that she would read them . Though she spent colossal sums on the building and embellishment of monuments and palaces , little remains of Catherine 's investment today : one Doric column , a few fragments in the corner of the Tuileries gardens , an empty tomb at Saint Denis . The sculptures she commissioned for the Valois chapel are lost , or scattered , often damaged or incomplete , in museums and churches . Catherine de ' Medici 's reputation as a sponsor of buildings rests instead on the designs and treatises of her architects . These testify to the vitality of French architecture under her patronage .

= = Influences = =

Historians often assume that Catherine 's love for the arts stemmed from her Medici heritage . " As the daughter of the Medici , " suggests French art historian Jean @-@ Pierre Babelon , " she was driven by a passion to build and a desire to leave great achievements behind her when she died . " Born in Florence in 1519 , Catherine lived at the Medici palace , built by Cosimo de ' Medici to designs by Michelozzo di Bartolomeo . After moving to Rome in 1530 , she lived , surrounded by classical and Renaissance treasures , at another Medici palace (now called the Palazzo Madama) . There she watched the leading artists and architects of the day at work in the city . When she later commissioned buildings herself , in France , Catherine often turned to Italian models . She based the Tuileries on the Pitti palace in Florence ; and she originally planned the Hotel de la Reine with the Uffizi palace in mind .

Catherine , however , left Italy in 1533 at the age of fourteen and married Henry of Orléans , the second son of King Francis I of France . Though she kept in touch with her native Florence , her taste matured at the itinerant royal court of France . Her father @-@ in @-@ law impressed Catherine deeply as an example of what a monarch should be . She later copied Francis ' policy of setting the grandeur of the dynasty in stone , whatever the cost . His lavish building projects inspired her own .

Francis was a compulsive builder . He began extension works at the Louvre , added a wing to the old castle at Blois , and built the vast château of Chambord , which he showed off to the emperor Charles V in 1539 . He also transformed the lodge at Fontainebleau into one of the great palaces of Europe , a project that continued under Henry II . Artists such as Rosso Fiorentino and Francesco Primaticcio worked on the interior , alongside French craftsmen . This meeting of Italian Mannerism and French patronage bred an original style , later known as the first School of Fontainebleau . Featuring frescoes and high @-@ relief stucco in the shape of parchment or curled leather strapwork , it became the dominant decorative fashion in France in the second half of the sixteenth

century . Catherine later herself employed Primaticcio to design her Valois chapel . She also patronised French talent , such as the architects Philibert de l 'Orme and Jean Bullant , and the sculptor Germain Pilon .

The death of Henry II from jousting wounds in 1559 changed Catherine 's life . From that day , she wore black and took as her emblem a broken lance . She turned her widowhood into a political force that validated her authority during the reigns of her three weak sons . She also became intent on immortalizing her sorrow at the death of her husband . She had emblems of her love and grief carved into the stonework of her buildings . She commissioned a magnificent tomb for Henry , as the centrepiece of an ambitious new chapel .

In 1562 , a long poem by Nicolas Houël likened Catherine to Artemisia , who had built the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus , one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World , as a tomb for her dead husband . Artemesia had also acted as regent for her children . Houël laid stress on Artemesia 's devotion to architecture . In his dedication to L 'Histoire de la Royne Arthémise , he told Catherine :

You will find here the edifices , columns , and pyramids that she had built both at Rhodes and Halicarnassus , which will serve as remembrances for those who reflect on our times and who will be astounded at your own buildings ? the palaces at the Tuileries , Montceaux , and Saint @-@ Maur , and the infinity of others that you have constructed , built , and embellished with sculptures and beautiful paintings .

= = Valois Chapel = =

In memory of Henry II , Catherine decided to add a new chapel to the basilica of Saint Denis , where the kings of France were traditionally buried . As the centrepiece of this circular chapel , sometimes known as the Valois rotunda , she commissioned a magnificent and innovative tomb for Henry and herself . The design of this tomb should be understood in the context of its planned setting . The plan was to integrate the tomb 's effigies of the king and queen with other statues throughout the chapel , creating a vast spatial composition . Catherine 's approval would have been essential for such a departure from funerary tradition .

= = = Architecture = = =

To lead the Valois chapel project , Catherine chose Francesco Primaticcio , who had worked for Henry at Fontainebleau . Primaticcio designed the chapel as a round building , crowned by a dome , to be joined to the north transept of the basilica . The interior and exterior of the chapel were to be decorated with pilasters , columns , and epitaphs in coloured marble . The building would contain six other chapels circling the tomb of Henry and Catherine . Primaticcio 's circular design solved the problems faced by the Giusti brothers and Philibert de l 'Orme , who had built previous royal tombs . Whereas de l 'Orme had designed the tomb of Francis I to be viewed only from the front or the side , Primaticcio 's design allowed the tomb to be viewed from all angles . Art historian Henri Zerner has called the plan " a grand ritualistic drama which would have filled the rotunda 's celestial space " .

Work on the chapel began in 1563 and continued over the next two decades . Primaticcio died in 1570 , and the architect Jean Bullant took over the project two years later . After Bullant 's death in 1578 , Baptiste du Cerceau led the work . The building was abandoned in 1585 . Over two hundred years later , in 1793 , a mob tossed Catherine and Henry 's bones into a pit with the rest of the French kings and queens .

= = = Tomb = = =

Several of the monuments built for the Valois chapel have survived . These include the tomb of Catherine and Henry ? in Zerner 's view , " the last and most brilliant of the royal tombs of the Renaissance " . Primaticcio himself designed its structure , which eliminated the traditional bas @-@ reliefs and kept ornamentation to a minimum . The sculptor Germain Pilon , who had provided

statues for the tomb of Francis I , carved the tomb 's two sets of effigies , which represented death below and eternal life above . The king and queen , cast in bronze , kneel in prayer (priants) on a marble canopy supported by twelve marble columns . Their poses echo those on the nearby tombs of Louis XII and Francis I. Pilon 's feel for the material , however , invests his statues with a greater sense of movement .

Before they were destroyed in the Revolution , the remains of the king and queen lay in the mortuary chamber below . Catherine 's effigy suggests sleep rather than death , while Henry is posed strikingly , with his head thrown back . From 1583 , Pilon also sculpted two later gisants of Catherine and Henry wearing their crowns and coronation robes . In this case , he portrays Catherine realistically , with a double chin . These two statues were intended to flank the altar of the chapel . Pilon 's four bronze statues of the cardinal virtues stand at the corners of the tomb . Pilon also carved the reliefs round the base that recall Bontemps ' work on the monument for the heart of Francis I.

= = = Statuary = = =

In the 1580s , Pilon began work on statues for the chapels that were to circle the tomb . Among these , the fragmentary Resurrection , now in the Louvre , was designed to face the tomb of Catherine and Henry from a side chapel . This work owes a clear debt to Michelangelo , who had designed the tomb and funerary statues for Catherine 's father at the Medici chapels in Florence . Pilon 's statue of St Francis in Ecstasy now stands in the church of St Jean and St François . In art historian Anthony Blunt 's view , it marks a departure from the tension of Mannerism and " almost foreshadows " the Baroque .

Pilon had by this time developed a freer style of sculpture than previously seen in France . Earlier French sculpture seems to have influenced him less than Primaticcio 's decorations at Fontainebleau : the work of his predecessor Jean Goujon , for example , is more linear and classical . Pilon openly depicts extreme emotion in his work , sometimes to the point of the grotesque . His style has been interpreted as a reflection of a society torn by the conflict of the French wars of religion .

= = Montceaux = =

Catherine 's earliest building project was the château of Montceaux @-@ en @-@ Brie , near Paris , which Henry II gave her in 1556 , three years before his death . The building consisted of a central pavilion housing a straight staircase , and two wings with a pavilion at each end . Catherine wanted to cover the alley in the garden where Henry played pall mall , an early form of croquet . For this commission , Philibert de l 'Orme built her a grotto . He set it on a base made to look like natural rock , from which guests could watch the games while taking refreshments . The work was completed in 1558 but has not survived . The château ceased to be used as a royal residence after 1640 , and had fallen into ruin by the time it was demolished by revolutionary decree in 1798 .

= = Tuileries = =

After the death of Henry II , Catherine abandoned the palace of the Tournelles , where Henry had lain after a lance fatally pierced his eye and brain in a joust . To replace the Tournelles , she decided in 1563 to build herself a new Paris residence on the site of some old tile kilns or tuileries . The site was close to the congested Louvre , where she kept her household . The grounds extended along the banks of the Seine and afforded a view of the countryside to the south and west . The Tuileries was the first palace that Catherine had planned from the ground up . It was to grow into the largest royal building project of the last quarter of the sixteenth century in western Europe . Her massive building schemes would have transformed western Paris , as seen from the river , into a monumental complex .

To design the new palace , Catherine brought back Philibert de l 'Orme from disgrace . This

arrogant genius had been sacked as superintendent of royal buildings at the end of Henry II 's reign , after making too many enemies . De l 'Orme mentioned the project in his treatises on architecture , but his ideas are not fully known . It appears from the small amount of work carried out that his plans for the Tuileries departed from his known principles . De l 'Orme is said to have " taught France the classical style ? lucid , rational and regular " . He notes , however , that in this case he added rich materials and ornaments to please the queen . The plans therefore include a decorative element that looks forward to Bullant 's later work and to a less classical style of architecture .

For the pilasters of Catherine 's palace , de l 'Orme chose the Ionic order , which he considered a feminine form :

I will not go on to other matters without pointing out to you that I chose the present Ionic order , from amongst all others , in order to ornament and to give lustre to the palace , which Her Majesty the Queen , mother of the most Christian King Charles IX , today is having built at Paris ... The other reason why I wanted to use and to show the Ionic order properly , on the palace of Her Majesty the Queen , is because it is feminine and was devised according to the proportions and beauties of women and goddesses , as was the Doric to those of men , which is what the ancients have told me : for , when they decided to build a temple to a god , they used the Doric , and to a goddess , the Ionic . Yet all architects have not followed that [principle] , shown in Vitruvius 's text ... accordingly I have made use , at the palace of Her Majesty the Queen , of the Ionic order , on the view that it is delicate and of greater beauty than the Doric , and more ornamented and enriched with distinctive features .

Catherine de ' Medici was closely involved in planning and supervising the building . De l 'Orme records , for example , that she told him to take down some Ionic columns that struck her as too plain . She also insisted on large panels between the dormers to make room for inscriptions . Only a part of de l 'Orme 's scheme was ever built : the lower section of a central pavilion , containing an oval staircase , and a wing on either side . Though work on de l 'Orme 's design was abandoned in 1572 , two years after his death , it is nonetheless held in high regard . According to Thomson , " The surviving portions of the palace scattered between the Tuileries gardens , the courtyards of the Ecole des Beaux @-@ Arts [Paris] and the Château de la Punta in Corsica show that the columns , pilasters , dormers and tabernacles of the Tuileries were the outstanding masterpieces of non @-@ figurative French Renaissance architectural sculpture " .

De l 'Orme 's original plans have not survived . Jacques Androuet du Cerceau , however , has left us a set of plans for the Tuileries . One engraving shows a grandiose palace , with three courts and two oval halls . This design is atypical of de l 'Orme 's style and so is likely to have been du Cerceau 's own proposal or his son Baptiste 's . It recalls the houses with tall pavilions and multiple courtyards that du Cerceau often drew in the 1560s and 1570s . Architectural historian David Thomson suggests that the oval halls within du Cerceau 's courtyards were Catherine de ' Medici 's idea . She may have planned to use them for her famously lavish balls and entertainments . Du Cerceau 's drawings reveal that , before he published them in 1576 , Catherine decided to join the Louvre to the Tuileries by a gallery running west along the north bank of the Seine . Only the ground floor of the first section , the Petite Galerie , was completed in her lifetime . It was left to Henry IV , who ruled from 1589 to 1610 , to add the second floor and the Grande Galerie that finally linked the two palaces .

After de l 'Orme died in 1570 , Catherine abandoned his design for a freestanding house with courtyards . To his unfinished wing she added a pavilion that extended the building towards the river . This was built in a less experimental style by Jean Bullant . Bullant attached columns to his pavilion , as advocated in his 1564 book on the classical orders , to mark proportion . Some commentators have interpreted his different approach as a criticism of de l 'Orme 's departures from the style of Roman monuments .

Despite its unfinished state , Catherine often visited the palace . She held banquets and festivities there and loved to walk in the gardens . According to the French military leader Marshal Tavannes , it was in the Tuileries gardens that she planned the St. Bartholomew 's Day massacre , in which thousands of Huguenots were butchered in Paris . The gardens had been laid out before work on the palace halted . They included canals , fountains , and a grotto decorated with glazed animals by

the potter Bernard Palissy . In 1573 , Catherine hosted the famous entertainment at the Tuileries that is depicted on the Valois tapestries . This was a grand ball for the Polish envoys who had come to offer the crown of Poland to her son , the duke of Anjou , later Henry III of France . Henry IV later added to the Tuileries ; but Louis XVI was to dismantle sections of the palace . The communards set fire to the remainder in 1871 . Twelve years later , the ruins were demolished and then sold off .

= = Saint @-@ Maur = =

The palace of Saint @-@ Maur @-@ des @-@ Fossés , south east of Paris , was another of Catherine 's unfinished projects . She bought this building , on which Philibert de l'Orme had worked , from the heirs of Cardinal Jean du Bellay , after the latter 's death in 1560 . She then commissioned de l'Orme to finish the work he had begun there . Drawings by Jacques Androuet du Cerceau in the British Museum may shed light on Catherine 's intentions for Saint @-@ Maur . They show a plan to enlarge each wing by doubling the size of the pavilions next to the main block of the house . The house was to stay as one storey , with a flat roof and rusticated pilasters . That meant the extensions would not unbalance the masses of the building as seen from the side .

De l'Orme died in 1570 ; in 1575 an unknown architect took over at Saint @-@ Maur . The new man proposed to heighten the pavilions on the garden side and top them with pitched roofs . He also planned two more arches over de l'Orme 's terrace , which joined the pavilions on the garden side . In historian R. J. Knecht 's view , the scheme would have given this part of the house , a " colossal , even grotesque " pediment . The work was only partly carried out , and the house was never fit for Catherine to live in .

= = Hôtel de la Reine = =

After de l'Orme 's death , Jean Bullant replaced him as Catherine 's chief architect . In 1572 , Catherine commissioned Bullant to build a new home for her within the Paris city walls . She had outgrown her apartments at the Louvre and needed more room for her swelling household . To make space for the new scheme and its gardens , she had an entire area of Paris demolished .

The new palace was known in Catherine 's time as the Hôtel de la Reine and later as the Hôtel de Soissons . Engravings made by Israël Silvestre in about 1650 and a plan from about 1700 show that the Hôtel de la Reine possessed a central wing , a courtyard , and gardens . The walled gardens of the hôtel included an aviary , a lake with a water jet , and long avenues of trees . Catherine also installed an orangery that could be dismantled in winter . The actual construction work was carried out after Bullant 's death in 1582 . The building was demolished in the 1760s . All that remains of the Hôtel de la Reine today is a single Doric column , known as the Colonne de l'Horoscope or Medici column , which stood in the courtyard . It can be seen next to the domed Bourse de commerce . Catherine 's biographer Leonie Frieda has called it " a poignant reminder of the fleeting nature of power " .

= = Chenonceau = =

In 1576 , Catherine decided to enlarge her château of Chenonceau , near Blois . On Henry II 's death , she had demanded this property from Henry 's mistress Diane de Poitiers . She had not forgotten that Henry had given this crown property to Diane instead of to her . In return , she gave Diane the less prized Chaumont . When Diane arrived at Chaumont , she found signs of the occult , such as pentangles drawn on the floor . She quickly withdrew to her château of Anet and never set foot in Chaumont again .

Diane had carried out major works at Chenonceau , such as de l'Orme 's bridge over the Cher River . Now Catherine set out to efface or outdo her former rival 's work . She lavished vast sums on the house and built two galleries on the extension over the bridge . The architect was almost certainly Bullant . The decorations show the fantasy of his late style .

Catherine loved gardens and often conducted business in them . At Chenonceau , she added

waterfalls , menageries , and aviaries , laid out three parks , and planted mulberry trees for silkworms . Jacques Androuet du Cerceau made drawings of a grandiose scheme for Chenonceau . A trapezoidal lower court leads to a forecourt of semicircular atria joined to two halls that flank the original house . These drawings may not be a reliable record of Bullant 's plans . Du Cerceau " sometimes inserted in his book designs embodying ideas which he himself would have liked to see carried out rather than those of the actual designer of the building in question " .

Jacques Androuet du Cerceau was a favourite architect of Catherine 's . Like Bullant , he became a more fantastical designer with time . Nothing he built himself , however , has survived . He is known instead for his engravings of the leading architectural schemes of the day , including Saint @-@ Maur , the Tuileries , and Chenonceau . In 1576 and 1579 , he produced the two @-@ volume *Les Plus Excellents Bastiments de France* , a beautiful publication dedicated to Catherine . His work is an invaluable record of buildings that were never finished or were later substantially altered .

= = End of the dynasty = =

Catherine spent ruinous sums of money on buildings at a time of plague , famine , and economic hardship in France . As the country slipped deeper into anarchy , her plans grew ever more ambitious . Yet the Valois monarchy was crippled by debt and its moral authority was in steep decline . The popular view condemned Catherine 's building schemes as obscenely extravagant . This was especially true in Paris , where the parlement was often asked to contribute to her costs .

Ronsard captured the mood in a poem :

Ronsard was in many ways proved correct . The death of Catherine 's beloved son Henry III in 1589 , a few months after her own , brought the Valois dynasty to an end . Precious little of Catherine 's grand building work has survived .