



PARIS, FRANCE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, HÔTEL ROTHSCHILD

No stronger tie between the U.S. and France exists than the U.S. Ambassador's residence at No. 41 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, built by an American, Micaela Almonester Pontalba, who was born in New Orleans in 1795. An arranged marriage for a merger of fortunes brought her to France at sixteen years of age. Separated in 1831, but loving Paris, she bought on this site in 1836 one of the most famous d'Aguesseau houses in the city. After a visit to New Orleans, the newly-divorced baroness returned to Paris in 1838, demolished the house, and commissioned the architect Visconti to design a new one for the site. In 1845 she returned to New Orleans, where she built two monumental blocks of houses surrounding the church her father, Don Andres Almonester y Roxas, had funded on the now famous Jackson Square. Her monogram "AP," designed by her youngest son Gaston, is still prominent on the wrought iron balustrades of the city's most celebrated landmarks.

Baroness Pontalba returned to Paris and built the residence between 1852 and 1855. In her quest for grandeur she bought the state-ly home of the Havré family and installed its treasures in her new home. Among the most famous of these were the chinoiserie panels in one room that became the talk of Paris. The nineteenth century facade is defined by the famous local buff limestone, a slate mansard roof with dormers, and *ceïl de bœuf lunettes*. Her former husband, who had suffered a physical and mental breakdown, was waiting for her when she returned from New Orleans and asked her to take over and manage his affairs, which she did until her death in 1874. According to the Baroness' wishes, the residence passed to her sons to provide pensions for her grandchildren.

In 1876 the Pontalba sons sold the residence to Edmond de Rothschild, one of the brothers managing the famous Rothschild family banking empire. With architect Félix Langlais, the facade was remodeled, roofline raised, and wings extended. The basic original floor plan was maintained and remains today as the entry hall, along with three salons that were adjusted in size but still overlook an expansive garden, one of the largest in Paris. In the main salon, now known as the Samuel Bernard Salon, Rothschild installed intricately carved paneling from the Left Bank home of Jacques-Samuel Bernard.

In 1934 Maurice de Rothschild inherited the residence from his father Edmond, who had sent many of its valuable items to his son James, owner of the palatial Waddesdon Manor in England. World War II disrupted the elder Rothschild's ambitious renovation projects for the residence. The family fled Paris as the Nazis moved in, and Hermann Göring used the mansion for his Luftwaffe officers' club. The residence was never again to be a strictly private home. After the war, the Allies rented it for three years, and in 1948 the United States purchased No. 41 for the U.S Information Services, USIS. The residence became one of the buildings occupied by individuals working on the Marshall Plan as Averell Harriman began this important endeavor. Prior to this purchase many of the valuable panels in the rooms and other architectural elements had been removed by Maurice Rothschild.

Restoration undertaken from 1966 to 1970 reclaimed the Hôtel Rothschild's originality and grand residential purpose. Maurice's son Edmond returned the staircase railing and chandelier; some of the removed panels were acquired at auctions and re-installed. Ten of the most valuable chinoiserie panels were found and re-installed in 2000, and the Samuel Bernard Salon finishes were restored in 2006. Historic restoration and curatorial management continue today.