

Nomination of
The GREAT
SPAS of Europe



for inclusion on the
World Heritage
List

Volume I: *Vichy, France*



“Hall des sources” or “Trink-hall”

6. *Vichy* (FRANCE)

Introduction

The great spa of *Vichy* is the most prestigious and well-known spa town in France. The springs and key spa facilities, essentially owned by the French state, are a model of the “ville d’eaux”, a cosmopolitan ‘Little Paris’ in the middle of France that greatly influenced spas elsewhere.

The town lies across the River Allier and possesses some of the richest spa architecture in France, and Europe. Its layout combines Parisian urban principles and the spa promenade inside the city, with pump rooms and covered galleries linked for walks as an essential tenet of the cure. Not only has it greatly contributed to the creation of the nineteenth century culture of *The Great Spas of Europe*, but it has served as a benchmark in France and abroad.

The springs were known to the Romans, but *Vichy’s* greatest development may be seen in the nineteenth century town which eclipsed an earlier town. Since the era of Napoleon I, *Vichy* has accorded great importance to the parks surrounding the springs and baths. Napoleon III encouraged the building of a new spa town laid out with promenades and parks to create a resort repeating the styles of nineteenth century Paris. Then, during the Second Empire, the town created a series of parks along the River Allier. From the spa to the theatre, and now to the cosmetics trademark, “reine des villes d’eaux”, *Vichy* has a global reputation. Bottled mineral water continues to be exported in large quantities worldwide.

The city is a capital district with over 25,000 residents, of which over 2,200 live within the nominated property.



- Boundary of the component spa town
- Urban fabric within the component spa town
- Urban fabric outside the proposed boundary of the component spa town



View south across the principal spa quarter to the River Allier

Location and setting

Vichy is located in the centre of the agglomeration *Vichy* Communauté in the Département de l'Allier Auvergne-Rhône-Alps Region, some 165km west of Lyon and 300km SSE of Paris. It is also belonging to Bourbonnais, the old duchy which gives the Bourbon Royal dynasty to France.

The spa town is situated at an elevation of 249m above sea level, on a flat plain beside the banks of the River Allier that flows northwards from its source in the Massif Central, via *Vichy*, to eventually join the River Loire west of the city of Nevers. *Vichy* is dominated by this river (a broad and wide meander, up to 200m, forms the western boundary of the nominated property for some 1.5km); and by the Montagne Bourbonnaise (20km to the east) and a picturesque range of hills (3km to the west). *Vichy* lies within a large basin where many springs outflow, largely exploited in *Vichy*, but also in other little towns such as Cusset, Hauterive and Saint-Yorre. The climate is oceanic, with more continental than mountain influences.

Principal features described

The description of the component part has been sub-divided into the following:

- Historic urban landscape of the 'Great Spa'
- Springs
- Urban ensemble of the spa town
- Therapeutic and recreational spa landscape
- Spa infrastructure
- Internationalism, scientific, artistic and literary values, events and cultural tradition

Historic urban landscape of the 'Great Spa'

The spatial plan of the nominated property can be divided into:

1. The spa district, geometric and formally laid out, sitting harmoniously with a bend of the River Allier and containing the principal springs and great thermal bath establishments, the drinking hall, promenades and parks, colonnades and pavilions, together with structures for leisure and pleasure (including the elegant casino and theatre).
2. The surrounding spa resort of hotels, villas and shops.
3. The series of parks along the River Allier, the principal promenades along both banks (and the Allier 'Lake' itself included as a recreational facility).

6.1 Springs

The mineral springs in the *Vichy* Basin belong to the family of sodic bicarbonated-carbo-gaseous waters, and are rich in trace elements (alkali-rich waters of the Na-HCO₃ type, with up to 15 minerals and 13 trace elements, including lithium

and fluorine). Some are hot, others cold (the average is 30°C): Antoine Spring is 73°C and Lafayette 14°C. In *Vichy* itself, Chomel gives 43°C (and contains the most silica of all the *Vichy* springs) and Célestins only 17°C (and is the least mineralised). Other springs that outflow in the flat landscape, include: Grande-Grille (39°C), Hôpital (34°C, sulphurous odour), Lucas (27°C), Antoine, Boussange, Dubois, Etoiles, Généreuse, Lardy, Parc, and Prunelle.

The *Vichy* water basin is very large; about 289 springs have been listed. The springs are the property of the State, and are derived from sedimentary rocks in the Oligocene Limagne Graben (collapse basin) which penetrates from the north into the Massif Central. The catchments of these sources comprise an alternation of Tertiary sand, sandy marls and sandstone. Meteoric waters infiltrate into the 10km-deep volcanic basement where they acquire part of their mineralisation (including through partial mixing of sub-surface waters), their thermal properties, and enrich themselves slightly with the first carbon dioxide. Faults and associated fractures serve as ascent ways, passing through the sedimentary formations of the Limagne basin where the waters acquire their final mineralisation. The rise of the waters is facilitated greatly by expanding CO₂ (gas-lift principle) with which the waters become highly charged.

Mineral water has for the most part been allowed to be exploited since the nineteenth century for local medical treatment, drinking, showers and baths, or bottled recommended for regulation of the biliary flow and antispasmodic effect with regard to the intestine. It is the reason why *Vichy* became the most important cure for the colonizers: there was a special residency for missionaries. Water is delivered to each distribution point by several networks of pipes and to three balneotherapeutical facilities. There, water from Antoine and Boussange springs are mixed in a stainless-steel tank to provide a mixture intended for balneotherapeutical processes and the thermal pools. Healing procedures consist of drinking cures (e.g. Lucas and Grande-Grille), bathing, CO₂ bathing, showers, intestinal irrigations for the treatment of the rheumatic diseases, metabolic diseases (obesity, diabetes) and digestive apparatus.

Thermal mud – *Vichy* peloids – are applied in baths and wraps at a temperature between 42° and 45°C, being used in a thermotherapeutic way to relieve osteoarthritis pain. The peloids are matured mud or muddy dispersion with healing and/or cosmetic properties that are composed of a complex mixture of fine-grained natural materials of geological and/or biological origin obtained after maceration of kaolin with the mineral waters of the sources of the Dome and the Lys. Célestins spring water is a naturally sparkling mineral water that aids digestion and is bottled and exported to over 40 countries. Chomel spring is the source of *Vichy* mineral salts used to make Vichy-Etat digestive Pastilles. *Vichy* thermal mineral water is also the basis for many cosmetic and skin care products of the Vichy Laboratories which is the leading pharmacy skincare brand in European continental pharmacies.

The protected area of the *Vichy* Basin (protected since 1930) covers around 150 km². In addition, the marls and clays of the Oligocene formations provide local natural protection to mineral water structures.

6.2 Urban ensemble of the Spa Town

The present state of the urban structure of *Vichy* was born during the 1860s of the

Second Empire and illustrates classic Haussmannian principles of perspectives and alignments, the proportions of buildings and their treatment not as independent structures but as places in a unified urban landscape, and the design of green spaces within the town. The map of 1861 give the main roads, the “thermal avenues”, and the parks which exist today; they only have been emphasised during the twentieth century; some new quarters and peripheral spaces have been created, but without changing the global map inherited from the 1860s. The railway came to *Vichy* in 1862 and the station served as a pivot in the future extension of the town between the station and the river, with so-called thermal avenues radiating out from the station, in the east, towards the bathing quarter and the Allier, along which the Emperor also had a new park built, in the west. All the main spa buildings, baths, pumps rooms, casino, hotels and many villas, are concentrated in the west part of the triangle between the parks along the river and the Park of the Sources, the first park created under Napoléon I. This park forms a triangle, its aisles also radiating from the Thermal Baths and the Trink-hall in the north, to the casino and restaurant to the south. A large part of the hotels border this old park. Even the new building of the *Vichy-Thermal Spa-Les Célestins* (1993) is included in this perimeter. If the majority of the springs are conducted in the Trink-hall, some others, like Célestins and Lardy, stay in their own parks. Spaces, promenades, equipment and buildings, in line with the plan designed in 1856, form a network inserted in the series of parks.

6.2.1 Building ensembles connected to ‘curative’ waters

6.2.1.1 Pavilion of the Source des Célestins (1908)

The laying out of the spring in the Parc des Célestins (the park was completed around 1900) was picturesque, with an artificial cave and the rock from which the spring outflows. There was a provision for lawn tennis, and Woog built a beautiful pavilion of Louis XVI style which contrasts the rock in its natural state with the pavilion’s refined classical composition, with arcades offering views of the gardens.



6.2.1.2 Pump room of the Source Lardy (1864/1900)

Created in 1864 by private owner Mrs. Lardy, there were baths associated with a busy pump room. In 1902, the spring and buildings were integrated in the State property and a new pump room was erected by the architect A. Percilly. In 1937, the architect Charles Letrosne rebuilt the baths for the State. Now the building houses a university centre, but the 1900 pump room is well-preserved, as is the park that joins that of Célestins.



6.2.1.3 “Hall des sources” or “Trink-hall”

In the core of the spa quarter, the Springs Hall replaced the old baths and includes the pump rooms of the famous springs Grande Grille and Chomel. A network of covered galleries connected the Hall with the Casino, the hotels on the park, and the area of the Source de l’Hôpital. It was also for spa guests walking and running medical prescriptions, even in bad weather.



6.2.1.4 Covered galleries in the Park of the Sources (Parc des Sources, 1902)

The metal-covered walks galleries (by ironworker Emile Robert) crossing the Parc des Sources from the Trink-Hall are decorated with plant motifs of Art Nouveau inspiration, in harmony with the style of the new casino. They have become, in a way, an iconic image of the spa town. They are associated with pavilions and continue to the Square de l'Hôpital.

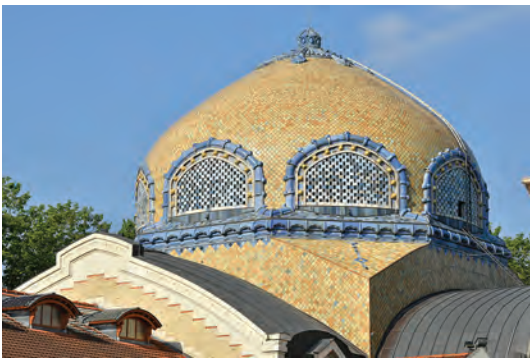


6.2.1.5 1st Class Establishment (1899-1903)

The present building belongs to the program of the 1898 convention. Designed by Le Coeur, and for the decoration with the help of Lucien Woog, the new baths are the largest in France (170 x 165m). The central part which housed the mecanotherapy was replaced by an hotel in 1974. There was also a fencing hall, a sport recommended by doctors.



6.2.1.6 The dome of 1st Class Establishment



Le Coeur and Woog chose an orientalist motif to indicate the presence of the great baths, a high dome imitated those mosques of Iran both in design and in the use of yellow and blue glazed tiles. These ceramics are due to the famous ceramist Alexandre Bigot, who also gave panels façades with mermaids and sea-horses.

6.2.1.7 Le Bain/The Bath (1904)

In the great hall, under the dome, two galleries leading to the upper bathrooms are decorated with murals paintings of the Symbolist artist Alphonse Osbert: on the west wing, he represented *The Source* (1903) and east, *The Bath* (1904).



6.2.1.8 Cabine de luxe (1903)



One of the luxury cabins is adorned with Art Nouveau ceramic tiles decorated with iris and wisteria, by H. Boulanger and Co, Choisy-le-Roi.

6.2.1.9 2nd Class Establishment (1858)

Now a gallery (Galerie Napoléon III), today there survives only a part of this 2nd Class and 3rd Class baths. In the convention of 1853, the French State asked the Compagnie fermière to build baths for modest, and even for the poor, people according to the tradition of assistance to all spa towns; a hospital was also nearby. English architect Charles Badger designed the building.



6.2.2 Buildings for leisure and pleasure

Vichy had many leisure places, the principal casino-theatre (1865/1903) managed by the Compagnie fermière, and others private such as the Eden-Théâtre, the Petit Casino (1926, now Centre Valéry-Larbaud). Many attractions were installed in the parks, according to the Parisian model, and around the pump rooms at the centre of cure rituals.

6.2.2.1 The Casino (1863-65)

By an 1863 concession to the Compagnie Fermière, a casino was completed in 1865 opposite the baths at the end of the park. Designed by Charles Badger in Eclectic style, it received sculptures by Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse, an allegory of the Source and caryatids. The casino included a theatre, a ballroom and lounge for reading, games and conversation. Its veranda overlooks the park. Opera was added in 1903 and the glass marquee was added in 1905. It was renovated in 1995 and is now the Palais des Congrès with new rooms converted in the basement, including the 1,200m² Sévigné space which extends beneath the terrace.



6.2.2.2 The New Theatre and Opéra (1898-1903)



Even with numerous theatres and concert halls in *Vichy*, the Casino became insufficient in the 1880s, and the 1898 Convention provided the opportunity to enlarge. The old part as a casino with games and salons remained, whilst a magnificent new theatre, designed by Le Coeur and Woog, was added. It is the best-preserved Art Nouveau theatre in France. It retains all the ornaments and paintings together with masks of celebrities. Moreover, the theatre became the symbol of *Vichy*,

featuring in its advertisements. A Musée de l'Opéra keeps archives, 8,000 scores, 1,500 plays, posters and programmes, around 10,000 photos, and many theatre models and costumes.

6.2.2.3 Galleries with boutiques (1902)

In the south extension of the Parc des Sources, in the area of the Source de l'Hôpital (the Hospital was demolished in 1893 to create new leisure spaces), the area was refurbished with covered galleries that serve shops, according to a semi-circular plan whose centre is occupied by the bandstand.



6.2.2.4 Bandstand (1902)



Music was ever-present in the life of the spa visitor, and it was played regularly in the various bandstand in the parks. *Vichy* has preserved many examples displaying high-quality ironwork. On the railing of this one, by L. Woog and E. Robert, located in the centre of the commercial galleries of the square de l'Hôpital, are forged the notes of popular songs, *Au clair de la lune* and *J'ai du bon tabac...*

6.2.3 Accommodation

The spa accommodation is concentrated around the Parc des Sources and near the station. There were only 18 hotels in 1849, there were 128 in 1900 and 203 in 1939, including a dozen palaces. Since the Second Empire, housing estates have also developed near the baths, such as rue Alquié, and villas were built around 1900, most of them for renting; in 1914, 686 villas were available for rent. These villas impart with the large hotels a particular character to the spa towns.

6.2.3.1 Rue Alquié

This street is a good example of the first villas to be built along the park. The Emperor built six chalets for himself and his entourage and, on Rue Alquié not so far along, the English-style houses which housed the Imperial guard (1864). It imparts a picturesque touch to the streets.



6.2.3.2 Ambassadeurs hotel (1866 and 1900), Thermal Palace (1908), Hotel International (1902), Hôtel du Parc (1860s, many additions)



From 1900, big hotels were built and sometimes some older hotels were enlarged into palaces which multiplied the lounges, dining rooms and terraces: Ambassadeurs Hotel (1866/1900); Thermal Palace (nowadays Aletti) designed by architect René Moreau (1908); Hôtel International (Paul Martin, then A. Percilly, 1902), and Hôtel du Parc which has been transformed many times since its creation during the 1860s.

6.2.3.3 Rue Hubert-Colombier (Antoine Percilly, 1895)

This is a street that exemplifies the late-nineteenth century increase in the eclectic trends in architecture. All the picturesque styles are adopted (as in seaside resorts): neo-gothic, neo-Flemish, neo-Normand. The Rue Hubert-Colombier resulted from the project for a private road, built in 1895 at the initiative of banker Hubert Colombier.



6.2.3.4 Castel Flamand (Ernest Mizard, 1898)



This villa inspired by Venetian Gothic palaces has a façade with balconies, arches windows and even lions, as a building on the Canal Grande. It was occupied by a art dealer that used the ground floor as a gallery.

6.2.3.5 Villa Vénitienne (Henri Decoret, 1897)

This type of villa was built for location, and is an excellent example of the eclectic taste of architects and owners.



6.2.3.6 Hotel Astoria, an urban design element

Hotel Astoria was built by architect René Moreau in 1910, and replaced a former low-ranking hotel. It is a representative urban design element of “Little Paris”, whereby *Vichy* offers perspectives, street corners with round-houses and a network of tree-lined walks; with hotels often arranged to form blocks of aligned buildings up to five or six floors.



6.2.3.7 Passage Giboin (1887)



As in Paris and other large cities, *Vichy* presents several “passages” between the city centre and the park. The Passage Giboin (name of the owner of the place) was created in place of an old garden between two hotels; it is transformed as a public passage with glass canopy, foreshadowing the park galleries. These passages often contain luxury boutiques.

6.2.4 Religious buildings and facilities

On the spiritual level *Vichy* possesses many churches, including one provided by the Emperor Napoleon III, and a new one whose name is connected with the cure, Notre-Dame des Malades (1931). Receiving cosmopolitan and people of different religions, *Vichy* has a neo-gothic Reformed temple (1874/1914) and a synagogue (for a long time the synagogue was in a hotel, but in 1933 it opened in a discreet Art Deco building).

6.2.4.1 Saint-Louis Church (1862-65)

This church, offered by Emperor Napoleon III when he came to have spa treatments in 1861, was built by Jean Le Faure, the architect of most of the works ordered by the Emperor. It is located at the end of one of the “avenue thermale”, just near the southern part of the Parc des Sources.



6.3 Therapeutic and recreational spa landscape

Vichy has some hills and woodland in its relatively near surroundings, but it opted to develop a real green network inside the spa town. The first urban decision, in 1812, resulted in the park between the springs (sources Mesdames, Grande Grille) in the north where the baths were also built, and the “Bains de l’Hospital” in the south. This promenade is the nucleus of the spa town, because the old medieval city stayed isolated. The second decision, in 1861, modelled the spa town and gave the new parks along the River Allier, made possible by the construction of the dykes. Some springs which have their own parks, like Célestins and Lardy, have been integrated into this green ribbon. The architecture which recalls this period is picturesque and includes chalets, villas and guardians’ pavilions.

6.3.1 From “Parc des Sources” to parks along the river

The main therapeutic landscape in *Vichy* is comprised of a network of parks along the River Allier. It is dominated by the park created by Napoléon III, but also includes parks of different springs.

6.3.2 The First Park (1812)

The axis of the First Park, decided by Napoléon’s decree, determines the layout of the spa district, from north to south, from initial waters to the old town. It was the nucleus of the future city, and connects the hall of the springs to the Casino. Originally it linked the first baths and pump rooms (1787) to



the baths of the Hospital. The regular lines of trees are the same as in 1812, in contrast with the Second Empire parks that were conceived as English gardens.

6.3.3 Parc d'Allier (1860-64)

This park was created at the request of the Emperor, and was designed on the model of the Bois de Boulogne, in the landscape aesthetics, with pond and recreational areas. It was created largely through the containment of the River Allier by a new dyke in 1858, which allowed sufficient land reclamation (23 hectares) to make a series of parks along the river.



6.3.4 Parc des Célestins



The development of parks along the River Allier incorporates part of the former gardens of the Celestine monastery, which house the most famous spring, Les Célestins. In the 1850s, the State purchased lands to create a larger park, joining a private place, Park of the spring and baths Lardy. The park remained closed with an autonomous management for the waters, which were bottled on site.

6.4 Spa Infrastructure

6.4.1 Caretaker's lodge in the park (1864)

This motif of picturesque Bois de Boulogne architecture transplanted to *Vichy*, is by the engineer Radoult de Lafosse; this building looks like some lodges designed in 1855 by Gabriel Davioud, architect of the Parisian Service of Promenades, under the direction of Haussmann and Alphand. It underlines the weight of the Parisian model and of contemporary garden theories.



6.5 Internationalism, scientific, artistic and literary values, events and cultural tradition

Vichy attracted numerous sovereigns and princes from the courts of Europe, as well as Egypt, Persia, Iraq, and many men of state. The visit of Grand Duke Alexei of Russia in 1891 caused a great deal of enthusiasm, which preceded the signing of the Franco-

Russian alliance. *Vichy* was also the seat of the French State (État français) between 1940 and 1944.

All the French writers visited *Vichy*, from Chateaubriand to Sartre via Lamartine, Dumas, the Goncourt brothers, Flaubert, Verlaine, and so on. Likewise, artists from Delacroix to Cézanne, intellectuals such as Pasteur, actors, ladies of the demimonde. Writers also came from abroad, such as Tolstoy, Tourgueniev and Walter Scott. Musicians, dancers and thespians deserve a special mention, for there were a plethora of them: De Falla, Diaghilev, Massenet, Poulenc, and Tchaikovsky. *Vichy* reached its peak in 1935 with the Congrès international des Compositeurs (International Congress of Composers), presided over by Richard Strauss. In order to profit from the fame of the singers and actresses who performed in the casino's theatre, the decorators came up with the idea of reproducing their faces as masks: recognizable are Mounet-Sully, Sarah Bernhardt, Benoît-Constant Coquelin, Cléo de Mérode and others.

Sports are an important factor of internationality in *Vichy*. Developing sports for the aristocracy and creating clubs is typical of *Vichy's* international social scene, and featured equestrian sports, tennis, golf, as well as canoeing and rowing on the River Allier. Another social sport, which was enjoyed by women, was pigeon shooting that was practiced from the 1880s onwards.

In terms of fame, the *Vichy* name was picked up in the Caucasus and Catalonia, with the *Vichy* Catalan establishment, for example; likewise, as antonomasia, spa towns were referred to as Vichys - such as for the Malagasy spa, Antsirabe, near Antananarivo, with the spring *Ranovisy*.

6.5.1 Chalet de l'Empereur and Chalet Eugénie, façades on the park (1864)

Napoleon III wanted picturesque housing in *Vichy*; his first chalet had balconies overlooking the street but he was disturbed by the public. He requested another, overlooking the park. In all, five chalets were built, including this one for the Empress, by Jean Le Faure. Four are preserved and retain their picturesque mouldings.



6.5.2 Villa Strauss

Isaac Strauss was a famous violinist, director and composer of waltzes and polkas (no relation to Johan Strauss, born in Strasbourg). In 1844, he left Aix-les-Bains, became Director of the *Vichy* Spa Orchestra and built this villa near the casino. Under the Second Empire, he was Director of the balls of the Opéra in Paris and in the Tuileries. The Emperor lodged in this villa overlooking the park on his first visit in 1861.



6.6 Continuing spa tradition

After the difficult period of the Second World War, the success of *Vichy* resumed, the station remained very busy in the years 1950-60. The decline in attendance then created some difficulties and re-conversions of buildings, but the thermal vocation was maintained and a new thermal stimulus was put in place in 1987, the Callou baths were rebuilt and especially a large luxury establishment, Les Célestins, was opened. They made it possible to create, parallel to the traditional medical cure - because in France Social Welfare continues to support spa medicine - an activity centred on well-being. In addition, the *Vichy* brand is developed, under the auspices of L'Oréal, ranges of beauty products and in particular skin care, linked with the special waters of *Vichy*.

Leisure activity also developed in the field of sports with the creation of a pool on the River Allier for rowing and equipment of international level. For the casino-theatre, it still ensures a brilliant opera season, offers a congress palace and a Festival d'été, Summer Festival, is now held which revives the old reputation of the city for music. In the same way, outdoor music is maintained on the bandstands in the parks. An Opera museum attests to the importance of this activity and the international character of the city explains the presence of a Museum of arts of Africa and Asia.

Thus the major activities that define a spa town, medical care and leisure (sports and music), are still very much alive in *Vichy*.



Célestins Spa Hôtel. *Vichy*