

VMFA

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS



French Palaces & Châteaux Private Collections

with Dr. Sylvain Cordier, Mellon Curator
and Head of the Department of European Art

May 8 – 20, 2026

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

TRAVEL through France with **Dr. Sylvain Cordier**, the Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art, on an exclusive VMFA journey from the **Loire Valley's** royal pleasure palaces to **Normandy's** ambitious private restorations.

GAIN entry to areas normally closed to the public at the **Château de Vincennes**, the archetypal fortress-palace that asserted the medieval monarchy's power.

RECEIVE a private tour of the **Château de Fontainebleau**, a sprawling residence continuously shaped by French sovereigns for 800 years, from the Renaissance "rebirth" under François I to its refurnishing as an imperial seat by Napoleon.

ENJOY a private visit to the **Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte**, whose magnificence was so audacious it precipitated the creation of Versailles, and sit down for an exclusive lunch here in the company of the owners (*pending availability*).

EXPLORE private **Parisian hôtels particuliers** on exclusive visits arranged through Dr. Sylvain Cordier's contacts, gaining a look into the world of urban grandeur and intellectual life that defined the city's aristocratic and bohemian circles.

EXPERIENCE a firsthand look at the ambitious restoration underway at the **Château de Dampierre**, a French Classical structure by Jules Hardouin-Mansart and one of France's largest private heritage projects.

JOIN an after-hours tour of the elegant **Château d'Azay-le-Rideau**, a jewel of the early French Renaissance built on an island in the Indre River, a setting Balzac described as "a faceted diamond."

TAKE a private tour of the **Château d'Amboise**, **Leonardo da Vinci's** final home, and pay your respects to the artistic legend at his on-site tomb.

WITNESS a living history lesson with an expert-led visit to **Guédelon**, a world-renowned project in experimental archaeology in which a 13th-century castle is being constructed from scratch using only historically accurate tools and materials.

TRAVELING WITH YOU



Dr. Sylvain Cordier joined VMFA in November 2019 as the Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art. Born and raised in France, Cordier received his doctorate in art history from Université Paris-Sorbonne in 2009. Sylvain came to VMFA from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, where he was Curator of Early Decorative Arts and the Napoleonic Collection. He worked as a curatorial assistant and assistant curator at the Musée Gustave Moreau, the Château de Versailles, and the Mobilier National in Paris. As a doctorant, he lectured at the Sorbonne University, teaching French painting in the 19th century and the history of decorative arts. He then joined The Metropolitan Museum of Art as a Jane and Morgan Whitney fellow in the Department of Drawings and Prints and the Getty Research Institute as a postdoctoral fellow.



Dear Friends,

France's *châteaux* in the Loire Valley and Normandy stand as powerful monuments to centuries of artistic ambition, royal power, and the aristocratic *art de vivre*. From medieval fortresses to Renaissance pleasure palaces and private family seats, these structures and the collections they house chart the course of European history and aesthetics.

From **May 8 to 20, 2026**, I invite you to join VMFA at the heart of this legacy in France, led by **Dr. Sylvain Cordier**, our Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art. Drawing on his extensive experience working with world-class private collections, Dr. Cordier will provide a true insider's view, opening doors to magnificent properties and rooms often inaccessible to the public. His professional relationships and curatorial perspective will illuminate the meticulous work involved in *château* preservation and the passions of the collectors and families who sustain these architectural treasures.

As we move from Paris to the Loire Valley and Normandy, you'll enjoy a remarkable level of access. We will begin with special-access tours of the **Château de Vincennes** and the UNESCO-listed **Château de Fontainebleau**, exploring areas normally closed to the general public. At the magnificent **Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte**—the prototype for the glorious Versailles—we will enjoy a private visit and lunch with the owners (*upon availability*). In Paris, Dr. Cordier's contacts will allow for exclusive visits to prime examples of the city's private mansions, or *hôtels particuliers*.

We'll share an inside look at the marvelous castle where **Leonardo da Vinci** spent the last years of his life, the **Château d'Amboise**, home to his resting place. We'll share firsthand looks at a variety of France's most storied *châteaux*, including one of France's largest private restoration projects at the **Château de Dampierre** and an after-hours tour of the quintessential Renaissance **Château d'Azay-le-Rideau**.

A special highlight will be an expert-led visit to **Guédelon**, a world-renowned project in experimental archaeology where a 13th-century castle is being built from scratch using only historically accurate tools and materials. **An optional postlude in London**—featuring an exclusive evening at the famed Chelsea Flower Show—is available from **May 20 to 22, 2026**.



To reserve your place, please contact Arrangements Abroad at 212-514-8921 or trips@arrangementsabroad.com. I hope you will travel with us for this extraordinary opportunity to experience France's palatial heritage through the eyes of a master curator.

With warm regards,

Adele "Hutch" Livingston
VMFA Coordinator of Member Travel

Activity Level:
Intermediate



Pace Level:
Vivace



Visit Arrangements Abroad's website for more information about Activity and Pace Levels at www.arrangementsabroad.com/faqs.

French Palaces & Châteaux Private Collections

May 8 – 20, 2026



Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Maincy

FRIDAY, MAY 8: DEPARTURE

Depart for Paris on an overnight flight.

SATURDAY, MAY 9: PARIS

R

Upon arrival, you will be privately transferred to the hotel. Our program begins with a **guided walk through the 1st arrondissement**, the historic heart of Paris. This evening, the group convenes for a private welcome reception.

SUNDAY, MAY 10: PARIS / VINCENNES / FONTAINEBLEAU

B,L,D

Today is dedicated to two definitive statements of French royal power. The morning begins with a special-access tour of King Charles V's 14th-century **Château de Vincennes**, one of Europe's most significant preserved medieval castles, with entry to areas normally closed to the public.

After lunch at a local restaurant, we will have a private, behind-the-scenes tour of the **Château de Fontainebleau**. The visit focuses on spaces closed to the general public, offering a focused look at a palace continuously shaped by French sovereigns for 800 years. The group will gather for dinner this evening.

MONDAY, MAY 11: PARIS / MAINCY / BOISSY-SAINT-LÉGER

B,L

Experience the *château* that provoked the creation of Versailles. Our private visit to the **Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte** explores the seminal 17th-century work of the artistic team of Le Vau, Le Nôtre, and Le Brun, built for Nicolas Fouquet, Louis XIV's finance minister. A highlight of our day is a private lunch at the *château* hosted by the owners (*pending availability*).

We then tour the **Château de Grosbois**, the former imperial residence of Marshal Berthier, Napoleon's chief of staff, which was later repurposed to become a world-class equestrian training center. The evening in Paris is at leisure.

TUESDAY, MAY 12: PARIS

B,L

Through special arrangement, we are granted private access to a prime example of the **Parisian *hôtel particulier***. This exclusive visit to a privately owned urban mansion will introduce us to a world of aristocratic and bourgeois life not accessible to the public.

After lunch at a restaurant such as Le Coupe-Chou (*pending confirmation*), the remainder of the day is at leisure for independent exploration.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13: PARIS / PIERREFONDS / CHANTILLY

B,L,D

We journey north of Paris to explore the **Château de Pierrefonds**, a 19th-century re-creation of a medieval castle conceived by architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc for Emperor Napoleon III. Our private tour will focus on its inventive neo-medieval interiors, whose decorative schemes are considered precursors to Art Nouveau.

After lunch, we proceed to the **Château de Chantilly** to experience the legacy of one of the 19th century's greatest art collectors, Henri d'Orléans, Duc d'Aumale. His bequest stipulated that the layout of his artworks never be changed.

The visit includes a **performance of equestrian arts** at Chantilly's 18th-century Great Stables. The group reconvenes for dinner upon returning to Paris.

THURSDAY, MAY 14: PARIS / DAMPIERRE-EN-YVELINES / CERNAY-LA-VILLE / CHOISEL / GUAINVILLE (NORMANDY)

B,L

We will devote the day to discovering privately owned *châteaux*. We begin with a guided tour of the **Château de Dampierre** for a firsthand look at one of the largest private restoration projects in France.



Château de Chantilly's Great Stables (interior), photo © Christophe Tanière



Château du Champ de Bataille, Sainte-Opportune-du-Bosc

Lunch is at the **Abbaye des Vaux de Cernay**, a 12th-century Cistercian monastery later converted into a Rothschild estate and now a luxury hotel. In the afternoon, we will visit the **Château de Breteuil**, managed by the same family for 300 years.

Our day concludes with a transfer to Domaine de Primard, our countryside home for the next two nights, with dinner at leisure at the hotel.

FRIDAY, MAY 15: GUAINVILLE / SAINTE-OPPORTUNE-DU-BOSC / MESNIL-EN-OUCHÉ B,L,D

We will travel to Normandy for a private visit to the **Château du Champ de Bataille**, the singular vision of renowned interior designer Jacques Garcia, who acquired the estate in 1992. We'll admire his world-class collection of art and furniture and the vast garden landscape, one of Europe's largest private parks.

After lunch, we will visit the nearby **Château de Beaumesnil**, a red-white-and-blue jewel of Louis XIII architecture known as the "Norman Versailles," surrounded by moats and a reflecting pool. Dinner will be at a select restaurant en route back to our hotel.

SATURDAY, MAY 16: GUAINVILLE / LE LUDE / BLOIS B,L

We depart for the **Loire Valley**, a region synonymous with French royalty and their grand architectural ambitions. Following lunch, we have a special-access tour of the **Château du Lude**. Distinguished by its continuous, 260-year history of inhabitation by the same family, Le Lude is a rare example of a great *château* as an ancestral seat.

We then travel to our hotel, Le Fleur de Loire in Blois, with the remainder of the day at leisure.

SUNDAY, MAY 17: BLOIS / AMBOISE / RIGNY-USSÉ / AZAY-LE-RIDEAU B,L

Go behind the scenes inside Leonardo da Vinci's final home during a private guided tour of the **Château d'Amboise**. At the invitation of King François I, Leonardo spent his last years at this royal residence, and we will have an inside look at his tomb in the Saint-Hubert Chapel.

After lunch, we will enjoy a private visit to the **Château d'Ussé**, famous as the inspiration for Charles Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty*. The day culminates with an exclusive, after-hours tour of the 16th-century **Château d'Azay-le-Rideau**, a quintessential early French Renaissance *château* with its footbridge, towers, and turrets. Dinner is at leisure back in Blois.

MONDAY, MAY 18: BLOIS / SULLY-SUR-LOIRE / LA FERTÉ-SAINT-AUBIN / CHEVERNY B,L,D

Today's visits trace the evolution of the *château* as an architectural form. We begin with a guided tour of the **Château de Sully-sur-Loire**, a true 14th-century medieval fortress that provides a valuable point of comparison for the defensive style that preceded the Loire's more ornamental palaces.

An inside look at the privately owned **Château de la Ferté Saint-Aubin** will follow. Here, we will see a different model of heritage management, focusing on its well-preserved 17th-century kitchens.

We will continue our exploration at the **Château de Cheverny**, a masterpiece of French Classicism that has remained in the same family for over six centuries. The journey concludes this evening with a festive farewell dinner.

TUESDAY, MAY 19: BLOIS / TREIGNY / LA CHAPELLE-EN-SERVAL B,L,D

We depart the Loire Valley for our journey to the region just outside Paris. En route, we meet an expert for a guided visit to **Guédelon**, where a 13th-century castle is being constructed from scratch using only historically accurate tools and materials. Pending confirmation, we may enjoy lunch at this distinctive site.

We then continue to the Paris region, where we will gather for a final dinner at our hotel outside the city.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20: LA CHAPELLE-EN-SERVAL / PARIS / RETURN B

Depart the hotel today for the flight home.

Continue reading for details on the optional London postlude, May 20–22, 2026.

DISCLAIMER: *The itinerary is subject to change at the discretion of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and Arrangements Abroad. For complete details, please carefully read the terms and conditions at www.arrangementsabroad.com/terms.*



Guédelon

PROGRAM RATE

\$14,999 per person, double rate

\$18,999 single rate

RATES INCLUDES

- 11 nights hotel accommodations as per itinerary
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, R=Reception, T=Tea, D=Dinner). Bottled water, soft drinks, juices, and coffee/tea with all meals; house wine and beer at all included lunches and dinners.
- Enrichment program of lectures and talks
- Airport transfers for participants on arrival and departure days
- Escorted sightseeing, transportation, and entrance fees for all included visits
- Taxes, service, and portage charges; gratuities to local guides and drivers

NOT INCLUDED IN RATES International airfare; passport/visa fees; meals not specified; alcoholic beverages other than what is noted in inclusions; personal items and expenses; airport transfers other than for participants on arrival and departure days; excess baggage; trip insurance; any other items not specifically mentioned as included

OPTIONAL POSTLUDE IN LONDON MAY 20 – 22, 2026

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20: PARIS / LONDON B,T

We travel from Paris to **London** via the high-speed Eurostar. Upon arrival, we will check into our hotel before being welcomed to the city with a classic English afternoon tea.

This evening, we will attend an exclusive viewing of the world-renowned **RHS Chelsea Flower Show**. Enjoy the magnificent gardens and innovative horticultural displays in a less-crowded, festive atmosphere. Dinner is at leisure.

THURSDAY, MAY 21: LONDON B,D

We will return to the Chelsea Flower Show for the morning to explore its vast array of exhibits at a leisurely pace. In the afternoon, we will have a private tour of the **Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a global center for botanical science and conservation. The group will convene this evening for a farewell dinner to celebrate our journey.

FRIDAY, MAY 22: LONDON / RETURN B

Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

POSTLUDE RATE

\$3,999 per person, double rate

\$4,499 single rate

POSTLUDE RATE INCLUDES: Two nights at Four Seasons Hotel London at Park Lane (or similar) with meals and excursions as noted. See main program for exclusions.



Domaine de Primard, Guainville

MAIN PROGRAM ACCOMMODATIONS

HÔTEL BEL AMI, PARIS

Tucked into the literary quarter of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Hôtel Bel Ami places you steps from legendary cafés and art galleries. Inside, sleek lines and polished materials strike a balance between Left Bank heritage and modern restraint.

DOMAINE DE PRIMARD, GUAINVILLE (NORMANDY)

A former residence of Catherine Deneuve, Domaine de Primard unfolds across a riverside estate shaded by centuries-old trees. Dinner draws on produce grown on-site, and the spa, set inside a repurposed barn, opens onto gardens designed for contemplative walks.

FLEUR DE LOIRE, BLOIS

A project led by chef Christophe Hay, Fleur de Loire overlooks the river and offers an atmosphere of refinement anchored in the region's culinary and architectural traditions.

INTERCONTINENTAL CHANTILLY CHÂTEAU MONT ROYAL, LA CHAPELLE-EN-SERVAL (or similar)

Set amid forested parkland outside Paris, the Château Mont Royal evokes 18th-century grandeur with parquet floors, high ceilings, and period detailing throughout.



Intercontinental Chantilly Château Mont Royal, La Chapelle-en-Serval



Château de la Ferté Saint-Aubin

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
FRENCH PALACES & CHÂTEAUX: PRIVATE COLLECTIONS ▪ MAY 8 – 20, 2026
RESERVATION FORM

To reserve a place, please call Arrangements Abroad at phone: 212-514-8921 or 800-221-1944; email: trips@arrangementsabroad.com; or complete and return this form with your deposit of \$2,000 per person (of which \$1,000 is non-refundable for administrative fees) payable to *Arrangements Abroad*. Mail to: Arrangements Abroad, 260 West 39th Street, 17th Floor, New York, NY 10018-4424.

Name(s) in full as on passport(s). Please print.

Address

City

State

Zip

Telephone (mobile)

(home)

Fax

E-mail

ACCOMMODATIONS

Hotel room preference ☐ One bed ☐ Two beds ☐ Single

I wish to share a room with _____

OPTIONAL POSTLUDE

☐ I/We wish to join the optional London postlude

Hotel Room Preference ☐ One bed ☐ Two beds ☐ Single

FORM OF PAYMENT

☐ Enclosed is my check (payable to *Arrangements Abroad*) ☐ Debit card ☐ Credit card

Name on credit card

Credit card number

3- or 4-digit security code

Expiration date

I/We confirm that I/we have carefully read and agree to the Terms & Conditions of this Program (see www.arrangementsabroad.com/terms to review or call for a copy). I/We agree to full payment 120 days prior to departure. Each participant must sign below.

Signature (required)

Date

Signature (required)

Date



VMFA
VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
200 N. Arthur Ashe Boulevard
Richmond, VA 23220

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BURLINGTON, VT
PERMIT #601

Front cover: Château de Chantilly, Chantilly.
Back cover: Portrait of Napoleon, Château de Fontainebleau, Fontainebleau (top)
and Château de Breteuil, Choisel (bottom).
© 2025 Arrangements Abroad Inc. All Rights Reserved.

CST 2059789-40

B_260508LND CDG_VMF

French Palaces & Châteaux

Private Collections
May 8 – 20, 2026

