A Brief Architectural Tour of Champagne Houses from Reims to Epernay

Industrial buildings have gradually become research topics for French scholars since the 1970s, thanks to the opening of architectural history towards vernacular architecture. Yet such studies remain challenging because of the number of buildings and typologies involved as well as the complexities of analyzing the works aesthetically. A good example of these difficulties is the architecture of Champagne houses, which enjoys growing interest thanks to research recently undertaken for the French national inventory of monuments and the work supporting the Champagne region's candidacy as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

These houses distinguish themselves from traditional factories for several reasons. First, their unique programs combine a place for production and storage of wines, spaces for receiving clients, and residences of the merchants, all required to take place in an urban setting because of the division of labor between traders and growers specific to the Champagne industry. Second, their eclecticism seems to mask the industrial function of the buildings, in a manner even more pronounced than the neo-Gothic language of northern French textile factories. Contrary to most other factories, their monumentality reflects the luxury of the product itself. They must serve both production and representation. The latter function can only be understood as the result of the pioneering interest of the Champagne merchants in advertising, or at least in the utilization of images to serve their industry. The commissions were entrusted to architects, unlike many kinds of industrial architecture and doubtless in response to these particular needs. Thus, the golden age of Champagne house architecture corresponds to the second half of the nineteenth century, the period marked not only by the growth of trade in sparkling wine, but also by the development of the tools of advertising.

REIMS

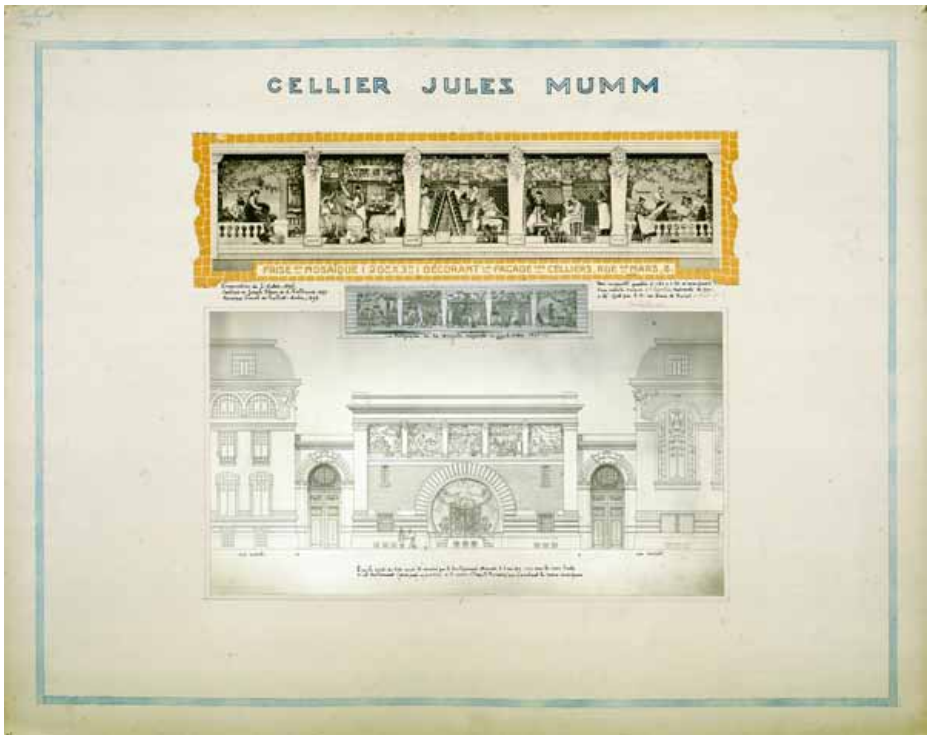
From the end of the eighteenth century, the urban development of Reims became inextricably linked with the new industry of Champagne wine, the production of which was perfected during the second half of the seventeenth century and gradually came to supplant the textile industry that had determined the wealth of the city since the Middle Ages. This domination of the city by sparkling wine became consolidated with the leading roles in local government played by great Champagne merchants such as Edouard Werlé (Veuve Clicquot), mayor of Reims from 1852 to 1868, or Jean Taittinger, mayor from 1956 to 1977. The reconstruction of the seventeenth-century city hall after its destruction in the First World War allowed

Ernest Kalas and Lucien Bègue, façade of the Jules Mumm cellar on the rue de Mars, Reims, 1898. Photograph: EAHN

the addition of numerous decorative details which make this alliance of politics and the Champagne industry visible: the railings of the main stairway (Raymond Subes, 1928) carry heavy bunches of grapes, just as do the caryatids (Carlo Sarrabezolles, 1927) in the ballroom; these, in turn, frame frescoes with the evocative title *The Celebration of Wine Through the Ages of Reims* (Henri Rapin, 1927). Finally, the sculpted allegory *The Vine* (René de Saint-Marceaux, 1880) has been located in the center of the city hall courtyard since 1905.

Facing the city hall, one finds one of the most elegant buildings for Champagne, the cellar built by Ernest Kalas on order of Alexandre Henriot, associated with the house Jules Mumm. A lover of art, Henriot was an active member of the Société des amis des arts de Reims and, notably, collected posters. He also played an important role in the Champagne industry, directing the new Champagne trade syndicate created in 1882. Merging his two passions, he had commissioned Kalas to create large decorative panels representing the different stages in Champagne production for the Paris World Fair of 1889. It is no surprise that he selected this architect and decorator from Reims, who was sensitive to questions regarding the alliance between art and industry, and whose reputation in the Champagne industry rested on that of his master Alphonse Gosset and his associate Amand Bègue, who both enjoyed a loyal clientele of merchants. A few years later, Henriot commissioned Kalas to revive the concept of these decorative panels for the new premises of the Mumm Champagne house where they were recreated in five mosaic panels on the facade. This Mumm cellar, completed in 1898, was commented on by the most progressive art periodicals of the era, happy to see the art of mosaics applied to a subject from the contemporary world, and to see the principles of the Art Nouveau movement applied to a building addressing workers.

The Art Nouveau aspect of this project derived mainly from the influence of Viollet-le-Duc, who advocated decoration based on respect for structure and the exterior expression of the interior organization of a building; thus, the almost blind façade and the enormous portal clearly evoke the function of the building, a cellar which requires little light for the optimal conservation of wines. Yet, except for the horseshoe arch of the entrance, the building does not follow the typical curves of French Art Nouveau: the composition of the facade is symmetrical (the architect originally intended two entries but only one was executed) and its design completely geometric, probably due to the influence of German Jugendstil, known to Kalas. After belonging to various Champagne houses, this building was recently purchased by the city to use for cultural events.



Ernest Kalas, board with a preparatory drawing and photographs relating to the Jules Mumm cellar, c. 1918 (Reims, Bibliothèque Municipale, Fonds Kalas, carton 2, planche 8). Photograph: Alice Thomine-Berrada / Reims, Bibliothèque Municipale

Detail of mosaics, facade of the Jules Mumm cellar. This panel shows the work of riddling, disgorging and dosage (designs by the painter Joseph Blanc under the direction of Ernest Kalas, executed by the Guilbert-Martin mosaic studio). Photograph: EAHN

In terms of urban impact, the most important construction in the Champagne region was undoubtedly the vast ensemble built by the Pommery house beginning in the late 1860s in a suburb east of the city, Saint-Nicaise. The dominant position of this area overlooking Reims had already attracted Champagne Ruinart (the oldest Champagne house in Reims) in the late eighteenth century. At the death of her husband in 1857, Alexandrine Pommery had taken over the reins of an enterprise for which she would assure the success. She began by acquiring five hectares of land, which had had difficulties finding a buyer because of the tunnels drilled, since Roman times, for quarrying chalk and lime and therefore called *crayères*. Alexandrine Pommery had the idea to use the *crayères* for her network of caves, since their constant low temperature was ideal for storing wine and their large quarrying holes ensured ventilation and light.

She appealed to a young architect from Reims, Alphonse Gosset, trained in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, who had developed her chalet at Chigny, a small country house near Reims, in 1864; Gosset had achieved fame as the winner of the 1866 design competition for the Grand Théâtre de Reims. The widow also admired the magnificent industrial buildings he had designed in 1868 for the Paté woolen mill in the Ardennes at Neuflize, near her mother's home. Echoing the monumentality of this project, she also encouraged the architect to adopt a style that would pay tribute to the British customers behind her success. Based on documents provided by friends of Madame Pommery, the owners of the Scottish castles Inveraray and Mellerstain, Gosset adopted a neo-Tudor style mixing brick courses and grey stone revetment with a turret, a steeply pitched roof, polychrome towers, and tall, narrow windows. Symbolically, the manufacturing buildings are located along the road that was built at the same time to connect Chalons to Reims, and was used by the English to travel south. These buildings, built between 1869 (the first drilling in the network of *crayères*) and 1905, began with the large cellar, called "Carnot cellar," followed by the Joan of Arc cellar, then the cooperage, and finally the "Residence," developed in the early twentieth century for the administration.

But the ensemble conceived by Madame Pommery was far from limited to these industrial facilities. In the 1880s, eager to develop the five hectares she had acquired across the road, she asked the famous landscape architect Edouard André to design a park for her daughter. Twenty years later (1909) the daughter, who was now the Marquise de Polignac, had a residence built there by the Parisian architect Charles Dauphin in a neo-Louis XVI style employed to make her alliance with the aristocracy tangible. A few years earlier (1906), the director of the Pommery firm, Henry Vasnier, had asked another Parisian architect, Louis Sorel, to build a villa farther down on this property. An avid collector, Vasnier particularly enjoyed

Alphonse Gosset, buildings of Champagne Pommery, Reims, 1869-1907. From left to right: the Jeanne d'Arc cellar, the residence, the Carnot cellar.
Photograph: EAHN

Buildings of Champagne Pommery, Reims, view from the road leading from Chalons to Reims, in *La Construction Moderne*, 16 February 1907, pl. 49.
Photograph: Alice Thomine-Berrada

the art of Emile Gallé. It is therefore not surprising that he selected an architect close to the Art Nouveau movement. Sorel had in fact exhibited together with the architect Charles Plumet and the interior designer Tony Selmersheim in 1901, the core of the group "L'Art dans tout," ("Art in Everything") which aimed to adapt the decorative arts to the industrial context of the modern world. Sorel employed two artists from "L'Art dans tout" in this project, Selmersheim and the designer Felix Aubert. The villa is in the style of early Guimard, marked by the lessons of Viollet-le-Duc's rationalism: the Art Nouveau spirit comes from the exposed use of materials (wood, brick, stone, concrete covered with ceramic) and the play of volumes reflecting the building's asymmetrical interior organization (reminiscent of traditional English cottages that Vasnier knew well from his education at Eton). In spatial terms, the magnificent central hall organized around Selmersheim's monumental wooden staircase reflects the interest of Art Nouveau architects in fluid spaces. Significantly placed at opposite ends of a large slope, the two houses stand as symbols of the two opposing myths that are behind the success of Champagne: the association of Champagne with an aristocratic tradition (made concrete for the Pommerys in the alliance with the Polignacs); and the profoundly modern character of sparkling wine which owed its success to a series of technological innovations. The first house is now a luxury hotel restaurant and the second, after having escaped destruction, has been beautifully restored by the Vranken family, the Pommery brand owners.

Madame Pommery's grandson, Melchior de Polignac, created the last element of the ensemble in 1910: a large sports park (22 hectares) dedicated to the company's workers. This social project—rooted in the Marquis' intellectual engagement in the pre-1914 sporting movement promoting the regenerative power of sport—was entrusted to the local landscape architect Edward Redont, who worked here with Louis Sorel and Ernest Kalas. In 1913 these architects added an athletic college, the first facility of its kind in France, which was intended to ensure victory for France in the next Olympics. It was completely destroyed in the First World War, which also affected much of the park's infrastructure. The mostly restored park is now owned by the city. Redont's plans reveal that the project was also intended to expand its philanthropic dimension with a workers' housing estate. This idea was prescient, because after the First World War land near the Pommery property was developed as one of the first French garden cities, Chemin Vert ("Green Path"). Now beautifully preserved, Chemin Vert was designed by Jean Marcel Auburtin, a friend of Redond, on the initiative of George Charbonneau, one of the great philanthropists of the Champagne industry.

Charles Dauphin, Château des Crayères, Reims, 1909, main facade. Photograph: Alice Thomine-Berrada

Louis Sorel, Villa for Henry Vasnier (today known as "villa Demoiselle"), Reims, 1906-1908. Photograph: Alice Thomine-Berrada

On the road leading to Epernay, the small villages of the vintners situated in the hills around Reims still feature buildings financed by Champagne merchants; these relativize the view of the industry's investments as strictly urban. In Sillery, Verzenay, or Hautvillers, the wineries take up the colors of the house of Pommery. Some wine workers' houses, for example at Sillery (Pommery) or Mailly (Moët et Chandon), demonstrate that the contributions by Champagne merchants to the field of social housing were indeed more important than one might think.

EPERNAY

In Epernay—a small town with little commerce or industry—even more than in Reims, the trade in Champagne came to have a strong urban impact. Beyond the civic and philanthropic engagement of the Champagne industrial leaders in the city's development, of which the Auban-Moët hospital (Casimir Tollet, 1887-1893) is the best example, its industrial architecture measures up both quantitatively and qualitatively, as illustrated by the famous Avenue de Champagne. A royal road established in 1743-1744 leading from Paris to Strasbourg, and with chalky terrain ideal for boring caves, this avenue quickly became lined with the new merchants of Champagne wine. From 1750, Moët installed its industrial facilities here and the founder's son, Jean-Remy Moët, built his *hôtel particulier* here in 1793. The trend to associate industrial infrastructure with the owner's residence was thus established, and this then determined the development of the avenue in the nineteenth century.

An example of these prestigious buildings combining production with dwelling, the château Perrier was built beginning in 1851 by Charles Perrier, heir of the firm his father founded in 1811. Doubtless conceived to rival the château built by the Veuve Clicquot in Boursault a few years earlier, the building designed by the young local architect Eugène Cordier takes up the classic composition of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century châteaux. The monumentality of the ensemble (completed in 1854), and its theatrical and eclectic character announced typical features of Second Empire architecture. Even though it echoes models of the era of Louis XIII, the building's pronounced bichromy, accentuated by its strong volumes, confers an entirely unprecedented decorative aspect upon the ensemble which Eugène Cordier would later develop during the second part of his career dedicated to Parisian schools. The architectural lyricism of Cordier's château anticipates the Pommery establishments. Now owned by the city, this extraordinary building is awaiting a restoration which is slow to come. Its spectacular appearance is reinforced by its urban position on a promontory overlooking the newly constructed railway (opened in 1849): French or foreign travelers—all potential customers—

Parc Pommery, Collège d'Athlètes, Reims, wrestling on frozen pool, around 1912-1914. Photograph: Casas-Rodríguez Collection / Creative Commons

Advertising for Champagne Mercier, showing the château de Pékin above (c. 1859, acquired by Eugène Mercier in 1873) and the Mercier buildings below (built by the architect Désiré Cugnot and the entrepreneur Charles Marcy from 1871 to 1880). The Mercier caves open directly along the railroad tracks, a solution adopted again a decade later by Union Champenoise. Photograph: EAHN

could see this monumental building from far away. Fifty years later, the buildings of the Union Champenoise (begun 1889) adopted the same triumphal position along the tracks and advertised on their facades the names of cities to which the firm exported. As in Kalas's building in Reims, decoration and advertising had merged. Designed in 1904, the tower recalls railway station architecture, especially the tower of the Gare de Lyon designed by Marius Toudoire (to whom the project is attributed for this reason). Thus evoking travel, this reference helped to associate Champagne with a cosmopolitan world, the same world as the Parisian social circles of Florens de Castellane and his cousin, the famous dandy Boni de Castellane, whose prestigious brand name the Union Champenoise took over in 1909.

In Reims as in Epernay, architecture and architects of the Champagne houses were to serve the image of a product whose success rested since its inception on the wonder of luxury. Working in a region historically traversed by commercial and cultural exchanges to promote a rare and innovative product, the champagne trade more than any other industry relied on images and the imaginary world they conjured up to position Champagne as a refined product reserved for an elite. The architecture of Champagne houses was for them an essential tool for creating the myths associated with sparkling wine: lyrical, theatrical polychrome architecture to evoke festivities; historicist architecture to recall the beverage's aristocratic connotations (with its early royal consumers like Louis XIV); architecture with multiple geographic references to express Champagne's cosmopolitan character (with the English long its most ardent consumers); and innovative architecture to underscore the modernity of this wine, invented from scratch in the late seventeenth century.

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Eugène Cordier, Château Perrier, Epernay, 1854, view of garden facade on an historic postcard. Photograph: EAHN

Eugène Cordier, Château Perrier, Epernay, 1854, main facade. Photograph: EAHN

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SELECTED LINKS FOR THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CHAMPAGNE INDUSTRY

Associations and Authorities

http://www.maisons-champagne.com
http://www.maisons-champagne.com/traduction/english/index.php (English)
Website of the union of Champagne houses including numerous details of the houses' cultural engagement and patronage. In French or English.

http://www.patrimoineindustriel-apic.com
Website of the association for industrial heritage of Champagne Ardenne. In French.

http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/inventai/patrimoine/
Portal for the database Mérimé, giving access to the work of the official French General Inventory of Historic Monuments. In French.

http://www.paysagesduchampagne.fr/
Website of the association supporting the candidacy of the Champagne cultural landscape as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In French.

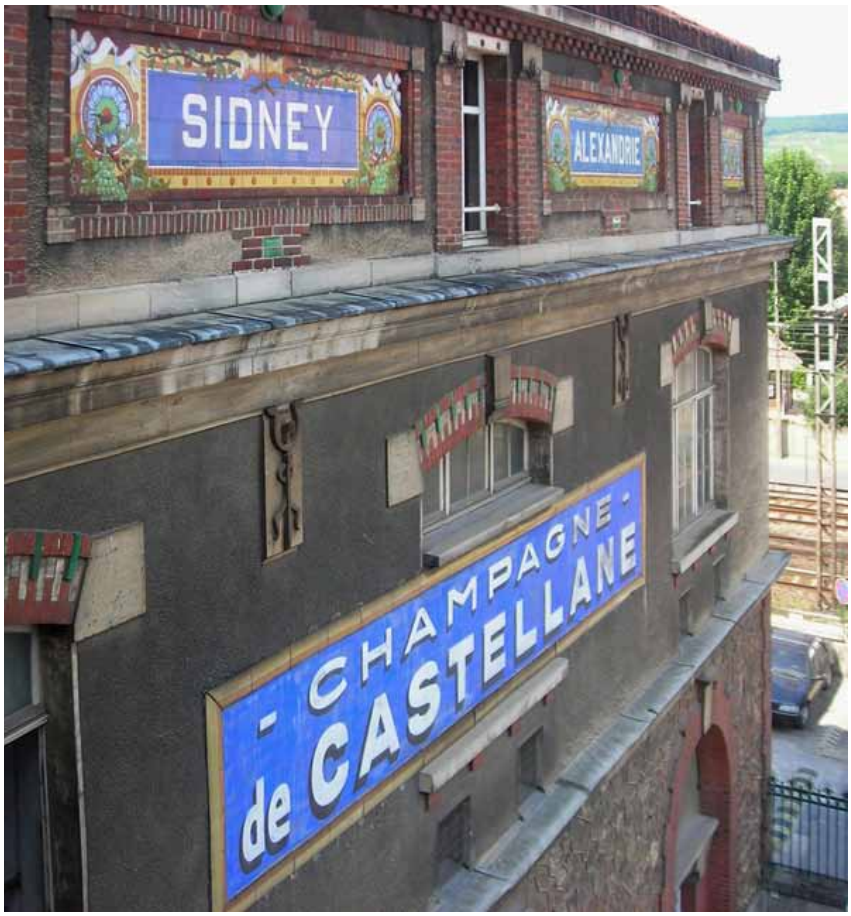
Tourist Offices

http://www.reims-tourisme.com/
http://www.reims-tourism.com/ (English)
Website of the Reims tourist office. In French or English.

http://www.ot-epernay.fr/
http://www.ot-epernay.fr/spip.php?page=sommaire&lang=en
Website of the Epernay tourist office. In French, English, or Dutch.

http://www.tourisme-en-champagne.com/accueil/
Website of the tourist office of the Marne *département* describing the Champagne tourist route.
In French, English, German or Dutch.

The Union Champenoise building complex, Epernay, 1890, façade towards rue de Verdun. Photograph: EAHN



Part of the Union Champenoise complex (which became Champagne de Castellane in 1909): detail of the façade (1890) facing the railroad lines, decorated with numerous polychrome ceramic panels listing cities to which the firm's Champagne was exported. Photograph: EAHN