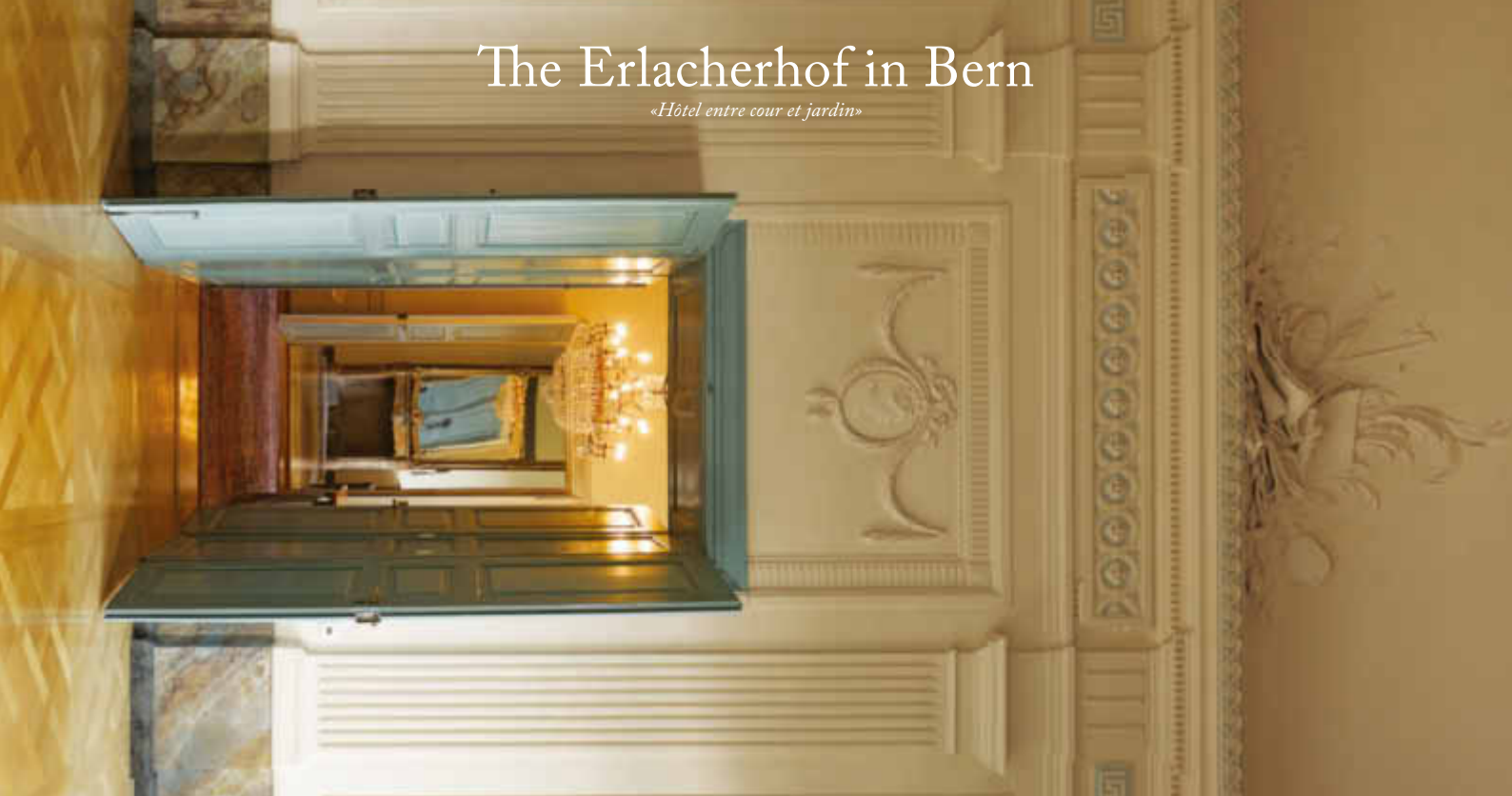


The Erlacherhof in Bern

«Hôtel entre cour et jardin»



The Cour d'Honneur

The Erlacherhof is unique in the streetscape of the Junkerngasse: the design foregoes building along the street side in favour of a distinctive courtyard opening directly onto the road. The imposing architecture of the façades overlooking the court and the consistent limitation of the wings to two storeys lend the building the appearance of a freestanding residence. An elegant wrought-iron gate leads into the cour d'honneur, the most impressive originally-private courtyard in Bern. The mansion is designed along a central axis, running from the courtyard, through the garden-salon, onto the south-facing terrace and down to the fountain. In earlier times, this axis then led through a series of stepped terraces, no longer

to be seen, right down to the Matte: in Bern, just as in the architecture of the French châteaux, the worth of a man was attested by the length of the axis on which his property stood.



From the series of plans for the new, late-Baroque building: Courtyard façade of the residence and section of the courtyard wings

The Erlacherhof: View from the arcades into the cour d'honneur



The garden terrace, re-constructed in 1979

The Garden Terrace

A two-sided set of steps, the width of the central part of the south-facing façade, gives access to the garden terrace, which juts out high over the banks of the Aare. The garden, newly laid out in 1979 on the basis of old pictures, further develops the symmetry established by the main axis. The parterre beds, bordered by box, are flanked by two rows of round-headed maples; the oval basin of the fountain completes the scene.



The south façade with the garden terrace in front; on the right is the tower of the Bubenbergtor

The Council Chamber

The room opens through three French windows onto the garden. The walls are clad with simple rectangular panelling in various shades of green; the parquet flooring has been re-constructed. The Louis XV mirrors between the windows come from the Funk atelier; the portraits above are of Albrecht von Wattenwil and Wilhelmine von Erlach. Originally, the room was heated by open fires in two corners; these were replaced in 1885 by tiled stoves, which are decorated with figures and scenes from the history of Bern. Next to the entrance hangs a portrait of the man who commissioned the mansion, Hieronymus von Erlach. The furnishings further include a Baroque secrétaire, c.1740, an outstanding pendule, c.1745,

from the workshop of Matthäus Funk, and a c.1820 chandelier. The weekly sessions of the Executive Council of the city (Gemeinderat) are held in this chamber.

The Council Chamber, on the ground floor, with a view onto the garden terrace.



The Antechamber

The antechamber lies to the left of the vestibule (where two large paintings of views over the city by Johannes Dünz (1645–1746), from the reserves of the Historisches Museum Bern, are displayed). The walls of the chamber are still covered with the original panelling, which has retained its elegant painted decoration on the entrance-side. The Louis XV fireplace in Grindelwald marble was made by the Funk workshop, as was probably the mirror above. The parquet floor has been re-constructed in the traditional Bernese pattern of diamond-shaped panels set into diagonal boards. The beautifully-made curved doors to the adjacent rooms are also of note. The Parisian pendule is mid-18th century; the bench seat along the window wall was formerly in the Town Hall.



The entrance-side of the antechamber

The semicircular end of the antechamber, with the Parisian pendule



View from the upstairs hallway onto the stairwell with freestanding columns

The Staircase

The graceful, horseshoe-shaped sandstone stairway, encircled by an exquisite railing of delicately-worked gilt foliage, rises to the entrance hallway of the ballroom in a grand sweep. A semi-circular series of columns supports the ceiling. This is decorated with a bright, airy painting, in which a group of putti play with abandoned weapons of war and re-enact mythological scenes of the Return of Mars to Venus – symbolising the withdrawal from military service of the patron of the painting. The work has been attributed to the Schaffhausen painter and stuccoplasterer Johann Ulrich Schnetzler (1704–1763), although this is not assured.



The vestibule and staircase from the ground floor

The Ballroom

The stone hallway, with a narrow balcony that constitutes a kind of observation gallery onto the courtyard, opens into the principal room in the house, the ballroom. Of particular note here is the stucco of the ceiling coves: it is the work of Johann August Nahl the Elder (1710–1781) and portrays allegories of Art and Science. The flat stucco pilasters forming the wall divisions are more recent, from the end of the 18th century, and are already informed by the more severe spirit of early classicism. At this time, the main entrance to the room was displaced from the central axis to the corners, and a fireplace built in its place. The ceiling painting by Emanuel Handmann (1718–1781) shows Apollo and the nine muses with Pegasus and the Hippocrene fountain.



Section of the ballroom.

The ceiling painting in the ballroom, depicting Apollo and the nine muses



The Erlacherhof in Bern

Junkerngasse 47, 3011 Bern

The Erlacherhof, built between 1745 and 1757, is the most outstanding private Baroque in the old town of Bern. The late-Baroque plan is based on the concept of an «Hôtel entre cour et jardin» – a town mansion situated between a court and a garden; the architect Albrecht Stürler refrained from building onto the street side in order to create the splendid cour d'honneur. The mansion was commissioned by Hieronymus von Erlach, governing sheriff of Bern for many years and a colourful figure in the city: who but he would have dared make such an audacious break with the fundamental building plan of the Zähringen town! The von Erlachs sold the mansion towards the end of the 18th century. Following the invasion of Bern by Napoleon's troops, the building served as headquarters for the French General Guillaume

Brune; it was next used as a schoolhouse for the Matte district, and then later became the seat of the French Embassy. From 1848 to 1857, the Erlacherhof housed the Federal Administration and served as the first Federal Parliament building. In 1857, the local government offices were reinstalled in the mansion, which has since undergone several conversions. Today, the building houses the offices of the mayor of the city of Bern, the central directorate and the chancellery; the weekly sessions of the Executive Council of the city are held here.



Stadt Bern

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