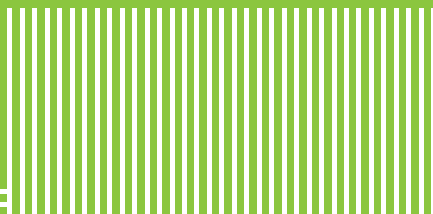


TOUR



THE DOMINICAN



VILLES
& PAYS
D'ART &
D'HISTOIRE
DIRE

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Cover :

Detail of the murals in the nave
representing Saint Dominic.

The Catholic chapel in the Dominican convent.

Photography, Benoit Facchi, 2015.

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1. The nave repurposed as stables.

Postcard, Michel Ruh.

2. The nave now hosts concerts.

Photography, Bartosch Salmanski, 2018.

3. Cabaret shows are held in the summer refectory.

Photography, Benoit Facchi.

4. Depiction of the Dominican convent.

Print, Deck, Musée Théodore Deck et des Pays du Florival.

5. Murals in the nave were used to support the friars' preach.

Photography, Benoît Facchi, 2019.



THE DOMINICAN CONVENT

OVER THE CENTURIES

NOW A CULTURAL CENTRE DEDICATED TO MUSIC AND A KEY MONUMENT OF THE GUEBWILLER COUNTRY OF ART AND HISTORY, THE CENTURIES-OLD CONVENT IS A TRUE TESTAMENT TO LOCAL HERITAGE.

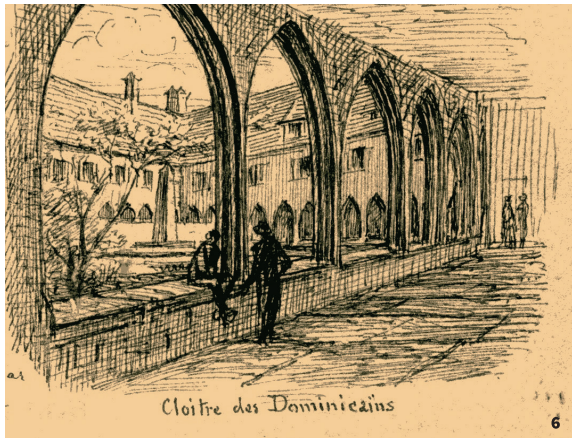
A DOMINICAN CONVENT

The Dominicans are a Catholic order of preaching friars who follow the precepts established in 1215 by Saint Dominic (circa 1170-1221). Since the core calling of these clergy was to preach, they usually settled in populated city centres. They also dedicated time to the study of the Scriptures and were present in medieval universities. The order grew rapidly after arriving in Alsace and settled in Colmar in the middle of the 13th century. In 1294, the Dominican Order set up a convent in Guebwiller under the patronage of the powerful Abbey of Murbach, which ruled over a large portion of the area. From 1298, a convent for nuns was established next to the Dominican convent for friars. After being in Guebwiller for a century, the Dominicans became less strict in their way of life, as was the case in many convents. In 1461, under the guidance of Jean Kreutzer, a native of Guebwiller and a preacher at Basel Cathedral, a reform was implemented which reaffirmed the lifestyle of poverty advocated by Saint Dominic. The number of friars increased, and the buildings were enlarged. The reform also succeeded at the Dominican convent for nuns, where the numbers rose to 30 in 1466. The Dominican convent was

ransacked several times through the chaos of the 16th and 17th centuries, during the Peasants' War (1525) and the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Reconstruction was slow and difficult for the clergy. A severe blow had been dealt to the status the friars had achieved over the previous centuries. The presence of the Dominicans in Guebwiller ended with the French Revolution. Church properties were sold as national assets and remaining clergy members were transferred to the Capuchin convent in Belfort.

AFTER THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The church was sold to a manufacturer from Colmar in 1792. In 1814, it was repurposed as stables and the convent buildings were converted into a military hospital. In 1826, the Ziegler-Greuter textile company purchased the Dominican church along with other religious buildings in Guebwiller. The church was used as a warehouse. The convent's musical career began in 1836 with its acquisition by Jean-Jacques Bourcart. At the time, the church choir was divided into an upper part to host events, and a lower part dedicated to rehearsals. In the 19th century, Guebwiller saw the emergence of artistic endeavours of all kinds



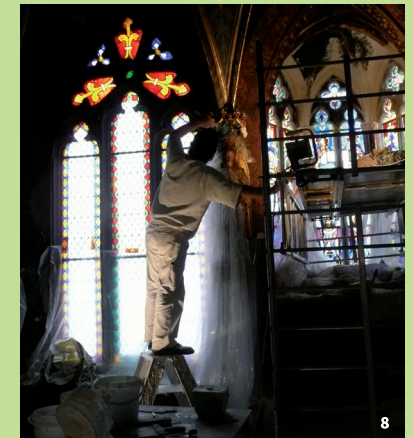
6. The cloister.

Drawing, Charles Bourcart, 19th century.
Musée Théodore Deck et des Pays du Florival.

7. Clara Schumann. Portrait 1835. She performed in 1862-63 in the upper choir of the former Dominicans Convent.

8. Restoration of the Gothic Revival Catholic chapel in 2008.

9. In the 20th century, the choir was occupied by the Florival Museum. In the upper part, the reproductions of the murals made in 1941 by Hermann Velte, using an overlay process.



due to the installation of rich industrial companies in the area: musical ventures as well as literature and poetry, painting, architecture, and others were thriving. At the time, the Guebwiller area became a major cultural center. In those days, the nave was used as a market hall while the convent buildings were converted into a hospice, and in the late 19th century, a municipal hospital. During the 20th century, the church was renovated and restored to host cultural events and concerts, allowing the church's renowned acoustics to shine. A local museum opened in 1948 in the choir and remained there until 1984.

A CULTURAL CENTRE DEDICATED TO MUSIC

Benefitting from its exceptional architectural features, the convent served many purposes throughout the centuries, thus avoiding demolition, unlike many other religious buildings. In 1990, the department of Haut-Rhin bought it for the symbolic sum of one euro. The wonderful acoustics of the church led to the building being used as a cultural centre dedicated to music. The project began after an excavation was carried out in the choir and cloister, and after extensive

restoration of the buildings and murals. Since the 2000s, the building has been hosting concerts and artists in residency, as well as Centre for digital arts. Registered as a Historical Monument in 1920, the former Dominican Convent was named a Heritage Site for Culture in 2013 by the Ministry of Culture and Communication, together with a network of 40 heritage sites associated with innovative cultural and artistic projects. Furthermore, it hosts an Center for digital arts focusing on new technologies, including projection mapping. The past meets the future in this remarkable place to create innovative concert experiences." Les Dominicains" is a place to be reckoned with it's a heritage site, a cultural centre, and a concert hall, all wrapped into one.



FROM ONE PLACE TO THE NEXT



A LANDMARK MONUMENT OF THE GUEBWILLER COUNTRY OF ART AND HISTORY*, THE DOMINICAN CONVENT HAS A RICH HISTORY AND CENTURIES-OLD ARCHITECTURE

*OFFICIAL LABEL DELIVERED BY THE MINISTER OF CULTURE.

THE CHURCH BUILDING

This 14th-century church is a prime example of the sanctuaries built by mendicant congregations. It was built in the classical Dominican style visible across all of Western Europe. It features a hall nave, comprising of three aisles separated from the choir by a rood screen with five vaulted arches. The vaulting in the choir is ribbed, whereas the nave features a timber-framed ceiling. In the 1990s, excavations were carried out to retrace the spatial organisation of the building. The choir was refurbished with an altar and pews. Located in the centre of town, next to the market square, the church was not reserved exclusively for the friars. Although the main nave was not used for parish church services, it stayed open all the time so that the congregation could listen in on sermons. Hence it does not have a bell tower for the call to prayer. Instead, the building is equipped with an ornamental bell turret. In addition, the nave was not furnished with pews to fit as many churchgoers as possible. In the 18th century, a Silbermann organ was purpose-built for

the church, but it was sold in the aftermath of the French Revolution as a national asset. It is currently kept in the Protestant church of Wasselonne.

CHURCH MURALS

The austere architecture of the churches of the mendicant orders is embellished with exceptional paintings dated from the 14th, 15th, and 18th centuries. They ornate the walls and the rood screen. In 1711, the murals were covered with whitewash, only to be rediscovered in 1860 by Alsatian archaeologist Alexandre-Joseph Straub. More paintings were revealed in 1941. Restoration works took place in 1941, 1990 and 2010. During the first restoration, paintings were sacrificed when they covered up older ones, in keeping with the trends of the times, placing most value on ancient vestiges, other than their ornamental aspect, murals were used as illustrations to support the Dominicans' preaching. The scenes depicted are thus representative of the doctrine and symbols of the order. The spandrels on the columns are ornate with effigies of apostles. Paintings featuring martyrs, the Crucifixion and miracles added to the pictorial ensemble. Saints associated with the order of the Dominicans are also represented, such as Saint Dominic and Saint Catherine. Saints associated with local history are also depicted: Murbach Abbey founder Saint Pirminand and

10. The nave of the Dominicans.

Photography, Quentin Gachon.

11. 14th-century murals under the roodscreen between the choir and the nave. Depiction of a crucifixion in the lower section.

Photography, Bartosch Salmanski, 2014.



Saint Christopher, who was particularly worshipped in Guebwiller. Seeing him in the morning meant having a good day.

THE CONVENT BUILDINGS

The architecture of the convent buildings is simple, in keeping with the principles of the mendicant orders. Conceived as a place for living, working, and meditating, these buildings upheld the humble lifestyle promoted by the Dominican friars. These buildings are divided up into four wings around a central cloister. The Dominicans alternated between days of study, reflection, and preaching, in order to ensure they prepared the needed arguments to fight against heresy in public discussions. The cloister played a central role in meditation. The convent buildings were first built in the 14th century. As early as 1420, the construction of additional buildings started, but was quickly halted due to lack of funding. In 1468, the premises were deemed to be too small, so more works were carried out to upgrade the convent buildings in their definitive shape, preserved to this day. The north wing was home to a school for novices, as well as the winter and summer refectories. In the former winter refectory, a washbasin decorated with five grotesque masks in low relief is still visible. The friars' cells were located on the upper floor. The east wing was occupied by the

chapter house, where the friars would hold meetings, and by the sacristy. An annex was built to the north of the convent in 1732.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE 19th AND 20th CENTURIES

At the time when the convent was repurposed as a hospital, two separate chapels were created. One Gothic-style chapel with ribbed vaulting was located in the former sacristy. The second one was designed in the Gothic Revival style in the 19th century. The chapel retains this original décor, inspired by the late Middle Ages, to this day. At the same period, the choir was transformed into a concert hall. The nave, as well as the west wing, started being used to host concerts later, in the late 20th century and the Chapter House became a centre for the digital arts.

TOURING THE DOMINICAN

NAVE



SUMMER REFECTORY



Audio commentary available on the mobile app *Les voies du Patrimoine* downloadable for free from the Apple store and Google Play Store.

UPPER CHOIR



GARDEN



CATHOLIC CHAPEL



CLOISTER



1. Photography, Quentin Gachon.
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5. Photography, Quentin Gachon.
6. Photography, Michel Kurst.

“ CULTIVATE THE MIND AND THE HEART THROUGH MUSIC, CREATE UNITY AND FRATERNITY BETWEEN OUR FELLOW CITIZENS, ENCOURAGE A LOVE OF MUSIC AND PERPETUATE THIS NOBLE ART IN OUR REGION, BY LETTING ITS BEAUTY FLOW FREELY. “

Jean-Jacques Bourcart, *from a speech on october 5, 1830.*

Les Dominicains de Haute-Alsace, Heritage Site For Culture

The former Dominican convent in Guebwiller is owned by the European Collectivity of Alsace. It is an accredited Heritage Site for Culture, together with an international network of about forty heritage sites associated with innovative cultural and artistic projects. It is home to a centre for the digital arts focusing on new technologies, including projection mapping. The past meets the future to reinvent the concert experience in an incredible historical setting.

The Guebwiller Region belongs to the national network of Cities and Regions of Art and History.

The French Ministry of Culture and Communication, Architecture and Heritage Division, grants the label “Cities and Regions of Art and History” to local communities which bring their heritage to life. This certification guarantees the competence of expert guides and heritage promoters and the quality of their work in bringing local heritage to the fore. From ancient vestiges

to 20th-century architecture, local initiatives highlight heritage in all its diversity. The network of 190 cities and local communities provide their expertise to visitors across the whole of France.

The Heritage Events Department

coordinates all the initiatives of the Guebwiller Country of Art and History. Events are held all year long for locals in the Guebwiller area and for schoolchildren. The department welcomes suggestions for new projects.

For more information:

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