

ROMANTIC MUSEUM CAN PAPIOL



VISITOR'S GUIDE

THE PAPIOL'S HOUSE

The Papiols were a family of rich landowners coming from L'Arboç, a town located about 11 km from Vilanova i la Geltrú. In the mid-17th century they settled in Vilanova i la Geltrú, where they already owned few properties. The building that houses nowadays the Can Papiol Romantic Museum was built on an old family orchard between 1790 and 1801. Its location within the city was not random, since carrer Major (Main Street) was considered the oldest street in Vilanova and had previously been one of the roads connecting Tarragona and Barcelona.

The house was commissioned by **FRANCESC DE PAPIOL I PADRÓ (1750-1817)**, Lawyer, erudite, and landowner, he was a representative for Catalonia in Las Cortes de Cádiz (National Assembly) in 1812. Upon his death, with no immediate heirs, the residence went to his sisters' families: first to the Rubinats, and later to the Torrents. Finally, in 1959, the Barcelona Provincial Council acquired the building, which was turned into a museum in 1961.



Above the main door we can see the Papiols family crest, composed of the shields of the Padrós, the Martí, the Catàs, the Argullols and the Papiols and the Knight's Helmet, a noble title awarded to Francesc de Papiol's father.



THE HOUSE MAIN ENTRANCE

The house stands out for its majesty and for keeping the original decoration and furniture.

The entrance is a space big enough to accommodate two French-made stagecoach carriages from 1880. We can see, as well, a velocipede and a wicker buggy for babies from mid-XIX century.

From this main entrance it is possible to identify the rest of the house entries: the stately stairs leading to the main floor, the large door to the garden -former agrarian area- and, the little green door connecting to the domestic service areas.

THE LIBRARY

Located in the mezzanine, this room was conceived as a place of study and seclusion. It holds about 5.000 volumes, mostly written in Latin and French, dating from the 16th to the 19th century. Books about religion, philosophy, law, agriculture, grammar, literature, geography and history stand out among the various themes within the library and expose the diversity of interests shared by Francesc de Papiol and his relatives.

MURAL PAINTINGS

Wall decorations belong to what is known as "Pompeian style", a style that became really trendy at the end of the 18th century after the discovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Among the different represented topics, we find allegorical medallions of the four cardinal virtues (Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance) and of the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity); in the last room we observe paintings about nature and the four seasons.



Writing and reading were activities confined almost solely to the upper class. On the desk we find quills and inkwells; until the XVII century, the most commonly used quills were made from bird feathers, and the most valuable ones were those of goose tail and wings. The original lamps, distributed around the library, recall the original luminosity and contribute to a warm atmosphere. Notice they were electrified.



THE HALL

Visitors were meant to be impressed by the first look at the house. This hall stands out for its high ceilings and luxurious decoration, following the model of French palaces and 18th century lordly houses. Note everything was designed to remind visitors about the power of the family. Next to the door there is a portrait of Queen Isabel II of Spain (1830-1904). At the time, it was necessary to obtain royal consent to have a picture of a monarch at home.

All rooms from the main floor meet at this hall, which grants easier and more direct access to the different chambers. Observe that doors are concealed by wall decorations.

Among the original furniture preserved within this space, we draw attention to the escritorio or writing desk made of carved, golden and polychromatic wood with bone ornaments and floral motifs. Notice this bureau is a 19th century replica of an original from the 17th century. This type of furniture was widely used to keep letters and personal objects. Usually, they have secret and locking drawers. Notice it has a folding writing lid and two handles on the side to facilitate transportation.

THE WAITING ROOM AND THE OFFICE

These two areas were designated to receive and wait for visitors. At the back, on the left wall, there is a small opening into the adjacent room that holds an oil lamp. Beneath this, there used to be a bell pull connected to the servants' quarters. On the right wall, we focus on the so-called "disordered tables", a very particular type of piece that appears to be a collage, but in fact is a drawing with different superimposed elements. They used to be given as presents for friends and relatives.

In the office, upon the Fernandino style desk, there is a family account book from the 1830s. The paintings on the walls do not represent the Papiol's, but they are an example of the portrait style of that time. In these cases, there are the portrait of Carlota Fonsdeviela (c.1870), wife of the Catalan painter Joan Vicens, and the portraits of the architect Francisco de Paula del Villar y Lozano and his wife, Eloisa Carmona, painted by Claudio Lorenzale.





THE EMPIRE-STYLE CHAMBER

This chamber was the main room of the house, an intimate place for the closest family members. This combined space consists of two parts: the sitting room and the chamber or bedroom, with the bed and the access to the dressing room. Both rooms were separated by wooden stained-glass sliding doors.

Originated from Neoclassicism, the French-inspired style known as Empire style was very typical in well-off households in the beginning of the 19th century. It is characterized by its solid appearance and its classical simple and symmetrical geometric shapes.

In the chamber, next to the bed, there is a bed warmer or warming pan. This device consists of a handle and a pan-shaped metal container with holes. During cold weather, the warmer was filled with embers and placed between the sheets to warm up the bed. Both the bed warmer and the brazier were very used domestic items during the cold season. The first one in bedrooms and the second one in meeting rooms.

The Sheraton-style chairs and settee in the sitting room are made of ahogany wood. We also find various Asian pieces in the middle of the table and two sister Louis XVI-style chest of drawers.



The majestic Empire-style bed, made of black wood, holds golden bronze pediments, a wide yellow damask canopy and white curtains.

Beds used to be tall to isolate individuals from cold and the insalubrity of floors. In terms of length, the mattress is rather short following the bed model of the time, when it was typical to sleep in half-sitting position with cushions and pillows on the back.



THE MUSIC ROOM

This and the ballroom are the most representative rooms regarding the household's social life. The music room was ideal to celebrate little concerts and social gatherings.

During those type of meetings, the role of women was crucial. In contexts such as Can Papiol (Papiol's Home), women were closely tied to domestic affairs. For example, during childhood and teenage-hood, they received music and poetry lessons, a training they will later display at social reunions. Once they were married, one of their roles within society was to plan and organize, with the assistance of servants, these type of intimate celebrations. During the 19th century, serving hot chocolate during afternoon gatherings became a quite popular trend. Note that at the beginning of that century cocoa was an expensive drink and, therefore, a symbol of distinction and power.



The most outstanding pieces in this room are: the Bohemian glass lamp (end of 17th c.); the Louis XVI-style table clock and candleholders (end-18th c.); and the wooden Aragonese desk made of boxwood (end of 16th c. - beginning of 17th c.).

The chairs gather around a brazier or warming pan. These objects were common in social life areas and were used to warm up rooms during cold months. Spittoons, like the one under the desk, were also typical, since spitting was not considered rude or disgusting as long as it was done in these receptacles.



THE BALLROOM

The most important and luxurious room of the house had to display the family's good taste and fortune. The ballroom was used to host receptions, parties, proposals and, specially, one of the most remarkable social activities of the time: balls. These events required months of preparation and planning, since their success depended on the guests' degree of satisfaction during and by the end of the party. Relevant families and public figures of the time were invited and more service staff had to be hired for the occasion. The rules of protocol and etiquette, manners, and dance steps were learnt from childhood. Balls could last up to eight hours, for this reason food and refreshments were constantly served during them.

The ballroom is dominated by black wood and red fabric chairs, following the Isabelline style characterized by cabriole legs, oval backs and different decorative floral motifs.



One of the most outstanding pieces in the main floor is this Viennese grand piano made of mahogany in the beginning of 19th century.

GRISAILLE

Most walls in the main floor are painted in grisaille, a painting technique that only uses shades of grey so as to imitate relief sculptures in wall and ceiling decorations. The Papiol family was deeply religious and most paintings in this floor are inspired by stories from the Old Testament. Only the Empire-style chamber have works with scenes of the New Testament. The ballroom has King David's life as a theme and it's the only room in the house with painted decorative ceilings.

The candles in Bohemian glass lamps we find around this level were used to light up these chambers. Mirrors, called "cornucopias" and Rococo in style, were used to reflect the light of candles and provide more light.



THE PLAYROOM

This area was reserved for the masters of the house and their guests. It was dominated by the French billiard table made in Barcelona in the factory José Giralt (mid-19th century). It is a table to play “xapó”, a tabletop game whose aim is to make cannons and caramboles. Scores were recorded in the wooden abacus hanging from the wall, which could keep the scores of up to sixteen players.

Men who didn't participate in balls, either because of their age or because they didn't like to dance, might end up spending the evening playing billiard, cards, dice or chess. These were games of the moment in which women were not expected to participate. Those who did were looked down upon.



THE SUCHET CHAMBER

This combined space, reserved for family guests, follows the same sitting room-chamber structure as the Empire-style area. Both spaces are separated by a sliding door made of wood and stained glass. In this case, though, the door is Louis XVI-inspired, a style characterized by geometric line ornaments, light shapes and traditional Classical borders.

The Spanish War of Independence (1808-1814) is a historical event very present in Vilanova I la Geltrú. Between 1808 and 1809, the well-off households in town had to accommodate some Napoleonic generals. It is said that the French marshal Louis Gabriel Suchet (1770-1826) stayed in these rooms, hence they have always been known by his name.



THE SICKROOM

It was also typical for affluent families to have spaces reserved for the treatment of diseases and other medical needs. This area shares the same sitting room-bedroom layout as previous rooms and stands out for its location: next to the gallery, which facilitated air circulation and better cleansing of space, and, the most important, contiguous to the family's personal chapel.

In the room we find a rare bathtub made from a single mahogany trunk coming from America. This item brings up 19th-century hygiene practices and allows us to speak about the successive epidemics of the time, caused by the lack of hygiene standards.

The room's original paintings are not preserved. The ones we see were executed by Josep Lluís Florit at the beginning of the 20th century and represent 18th-century landscapes and monuments of Vilanova i la Geltrú.

THE CHAPEL

As was typical among well-off families, the Papiols had a chapel. Notice that, at that time, it was necessary to obtain a papal concession to have such space at home.

The chapel, neoclassical in style, it is decorated with scenes of the Virgin Mary's life and shelters various reliquaries. The most outstanding one is the one dominating the altar, which contains the bone remains of Saint Constance, a paleochristian martyr. This relic arrived in Vilanova i la Geltrú by sea from Civitavecchia harbour (close to Rome), and was given to Manuel de Torrents in 1846.

The first Papiols who arrived in Vilanova i la Geltrú –Joan de Papiol and Maria Raventós– were the patrons and protectors of the city Capuchin convent, which disappeared in mid-19th century. According to historical sources, there is a subterranean tunnel – almost ruined, now– connecting the family house with that monastery.





THE LONG GALLERY

Originally, the long gallery was open, hence the sloping floors to facilitate the draining of rainwater. Upon Frances de Papiol's death, the house had some alternations made and the gallery was enclosed and roofed, increasing the indoor living space of the floor. On the walls we can see different types of weapons, which tell us more about the conflicts and riots that took place in Catalonia throughout the 19th century. For instance, the Carline wars and the liberal revolution of 1868.

The murals in this space are the only non-religious paintings in the house that could be recovered.

Among the objects in the long gallery, we find some noteworthy items such as the flower bouquet made from sea shells -a type of handicraft usually made by women during their free time- and a music box coming from America.

THE DINING ROOM

The dining room was also a space for family celebrations and other kind of parties held around a table, a Mediterranean tradition that remains until this day. To hold a lunch or dinner in a house like this entailed a thorough and long preparation on behalf of the lady of the house and the domestic staff.

Originally, the dining room had much more natural light. However, after the enclosing of the gallery, the space lost luminosity and the magnificent 30-arm hanging gas lamp had to be installed to make up for the lack.



The most exceptional piece in this room is the 17th century baroque cupboard with 18th century polychromatic decorations. It is one of the oldest pieces of furniture in the house. As a curiosity, we bring attention to its pictorial decorations, which portray a banquet and mask dances. This is one of the few remaining baroque pieces of furniture that preserves polychromy and does not represent religious scenes. At the top part of the cupboard we find the Torrents family name, the owners of the house at the end of the 19th century.



THE KITCHEN

It is the only space on the main floor dedicated to service. It's located next to the dining room and near the main access door of the house. Next to the dining room we find the kitchen, the only space for servants in the main floor. The room had direct access to the pantry, the bread oven and the main entrance of the house.

Kitchen design indicates a change in social status: lower ceilings and austere decorations. The hand-made white tiles with the yellow and blue flower in the middle fill all the room walls. The fireplace was the first cooking place in the kitchen. Later, it was replaced by a coal stove, much more efficient and cost-effective. On the shelves and cupboards we find original coffee and chocolate pots, mortars, weighing scales, teapots and coffee grinders, among other things. One of the most precious pieces in here is the dinnerware set made in the Royal Factory of Sargadelos (Galicia) in mid-19th

SERVANTS' QUARTERS

Down the stairs from the kitchen we reach the bread oven and the pantry, which communicate with the ground floor through the small door that was seen at the beginning, in the hall. The big value of these spaces is the very fact of their conservation, since they allow us to know the life of the workers of the house: the elaboration of bread at home, the sink, the conservation of food...

Near the room with the bread oven is one of the service bedrooms, where we discover the austerity of their lives. Going down the stairs, we have access to the servants' kitchen, the well courtyard, a small latrine and the horses stable.



THE BARN

Along with the pantry, the barn was the other large space used to store food. On the left wall, we can see the silos, whose wooden lids allowed to keep, preserve and protect cereals and grains from weather conditions.

The big weighing scale, the weights next to it and the blackboard to do calculations in the middle of the room remind us that the Papiols were landowners who managed part of their business from home. Typically, family lands were rented to farmers with a sharecropping contract named “parceria” (in Catalan). This agreement allowed tenants to work the land in return for a fee and a share of the crops produced in the landowners’ property.



In the barn we can also see some mechanical advances of the time: a machine to crush almonds, one to grind corn and one to winnow cereals.

THE CELLAR

In the 19th century, Vilanova i la Geltrú was one of the most important cities in Catalonia in terms of commercial and naval activity thanks to trade with America. The most relevant exports were wine and moonshine, which significantly increased wine farming in the region until the decade of 1880. Then, the French phylloxera stroke Catalonia and all autochthonous vines disappeared, forcing landowners and farmers to change crops.

The cellar, dominated by the Catalan vaulted ceiling, excels for its large wine tuns made of chestnut wood.



Attached to the cellar, there is a small stable for ploughing animals, whose original access is currently closed. We can also see diverse working tools.

THE GARDEN

In the 20th century, the garden was redesigned and laid out in Romantic style. Originally, this space was an orchard and working area, connected to the stables, the cellar and the barn.

The current garden is dominated by a sculptural ensemble formed of a Heracles sculpture, four columns and two Classical reliefs: one representing Aenes running away from Troy and, the other, the god Dionysus.

These pieces were displayed in the garden when the house became a museum in 1961. Under the porch, we can see different types of velocipedes and celeríferes – primitive versions of modern bicycles – and some coaches from the time, such as the cariole and the English cart.



Thank you very much for your visit!



Amb el suport de:

