



château du

# Haut-Koenigsbourg

Bien plus qu'un monument



## History

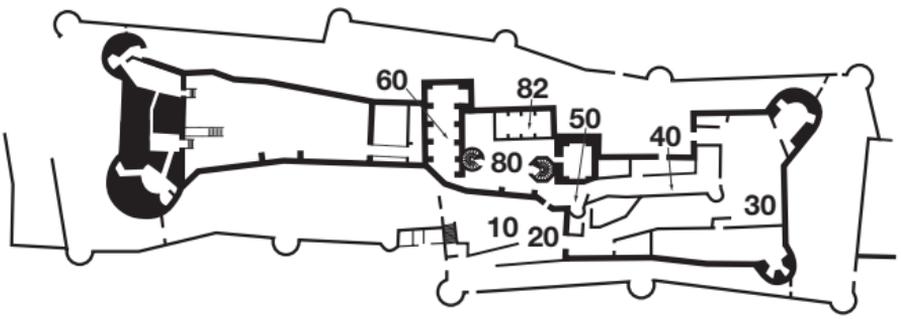
### From the Hohenstaufens to today

**Frederick von Hohenstaufen**, known as «One-Eye», Duke of Souabe, had probably noted the strategic importance of the **Stophanberch mountain** (height: 755 m, stretching from west to east, at right-angles to the plain), since the castle is mentioned for the first time in the 12th century. This rocky spur stands at the junction of what were once important trading routes: the wheat and wine road (from North to South) and the Salt and Silver road (from West to East). Having become a **Hapsburg** possession, the castle was given as a fief to the **Tiersteins** in 1479. They rebuilt it and provided it with a defensive system suitable for artillery. During the Thirty Years War, Captain Philippe de Liechtenau resisted the attacks of the Swedes for more than a month, but in the end the castle was looted and then burned. It was then abandoned for more than two and a half centuries.

In 1865, together with the neighbouring forest, it came into the possession of the town of **Sélestat** which gave these remarkably well preserved ruins to the German Emperor **William II of Hohenzollern** (the «Kaiser») in 1899 (Alsace had been under German rule since 1871).

**William II** entrusted the restoration of Haut-Koenigsbourg to the architect **Bodo Ebhardt** from 1900 to 1908. The finishing touches and acquisition of the collections continued until 1918.

Under the **Treaty of Versailles** (1919), France became the owner of the assets of the German



Each point is **numbered** in the same way as the plan and the audioguide.

## | Follow the guide

crown and obtained Haut-Koenigsbourg.

After passing through the **entrance gate -10-** with the Tierstein coat of arms, there is a thin section of the outer wall to the right (15th - 20th century) and the south main buildings on their rocky spur to the left (12th - 20th century).

After the **portcullis -20-**, you enter the **lower courtyard -30-**, with, to the right, stables and all the buildings that made the castle self-sufficient. In the middle, is a copy of a 15th century fountain which still stands at Eguisheim.

The only access to the main building is through the tower, then via a **staircase -40-** protected by loopholes.

This layout forced assailants to advance beneath the loopholes along the slope. The gate and the drawbridge over the moat are the last obstacles before the main building.

### The Courtyard

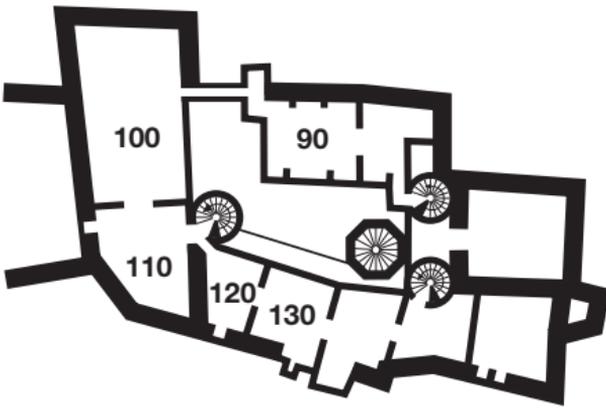
The **well -50-**, 62 metres deep, was fortified so that it would not be cut off from the living quarters by an artillery attack.

The gallery leads to the **storeroom -60-** whose length gives an indication of the width of the rocky spur on which the castle is built. In the **inner courtyard -80-** timber galleries on the south side have been reconstructed on the existing stone consoles. The **kitchens -82-** in the north building, with a sink and two fireplaces were also preserved during the restoration work.

The polygonal staircase leads to the keep and to the north and south spiral staircases which serve the private rooms.

### Second floor

On the second floor of the **north building -90-**,



wainscoting provides better insulation.

Window-seats are built into the window recesses to take advantage of the light.

The stove is made from two cast iron plates recovered during the excavations.

In the **west building -100-** on the ceiling of the Kaiser room, an imperial eagle<sup>1</sup> and coats of arms indicate the political character of this room. The frescoes are by Léo Schnug. At the back of this room, also called the Banqueting Room, is a gallery which gives an indication of the original height of the rooms.

The furniture in the **Lorraine bedchamber -110-** comes from that province and was a gift from the people of Lorraine to the Emperor.

The spiral staircase in the **south building -130-** leads to the gallery of the chapel. Beside it are the most luxurious apartments in the castle, south facing, and provided with latrines. These interconnecting rooms can be entered by passing from one to another or one by one from the outside gallery.

The yellow ceramic stove is made of tiles copied from stove tiles found during the excavations.

## First floor

A spiral staircase leads to the floor below where there are the same rooms as on the floor above.

You then come to the **chapel -120-** with its gallery and an opening on the side which provides space for additional worshippers.

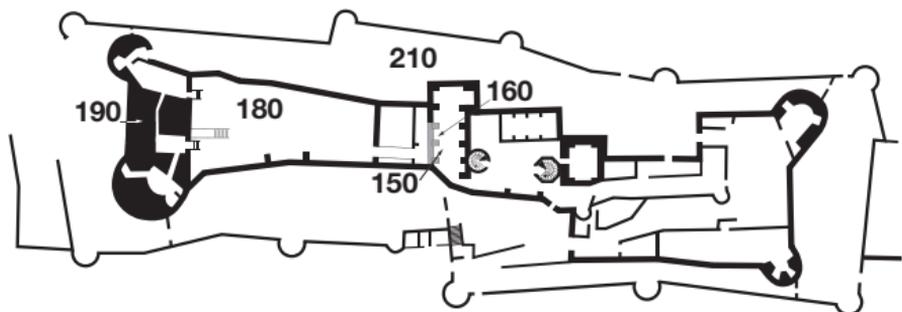
After the chapel you come to the **hunting trophy room -150-**.

In the **arms room -160-** are displayed various halberds, swords, crossbows and pieces of armour, and a copy of an imposing green varnished ceramic stove with a built-in heated seat.

A drawbridge straddles the moat separating the west building from the **garden -180 -**.

Doorways and window openings indicate the sites of

<sup>1</sup> **An eagle** - In heraldry, a figure representing an eagle.



earlier buildings in the 16th century garden.

## The Grand Bastion

Assailants could advance their cannon along the ridge from the west. To cover this weak point, the **grand bastion -190-** was constructed as a shield and to defend the main building.

After the staircase, a drawbridge leads to an artillery platform.

From the monumental south tower is a magnificent view towards Vosges and the plain.

From the **north tower** of the grand bastion, two other castles can be seen: Ortenberg and Frankenbourg, on neighbouring peaks. There is also a view of the valleys along which convoys of merchants passed. This makes the castle's strategic importance abundantly clear. The platform has copies of cannon showing the evolution of artillery from the 15th to 17th century. Descending through the blockhouses<sup>2</sup> you emerge into the **north lists -210-** via a modern staircase. The outer wall and covered circular walkway border the lists on the left, and the rock supporting the walls of the inner garden on the right. From here, you can see three latrines and the drain from the kitchen. A buttress has been built to support the main building and the keep which had a tendency to crack. Here can be seen the square keep, two «piques» (about 10 or 12 m) of whose height were demolished in the 16th century and restored by the architect early in the 20th. Returning to the lower courtyard, the forge on your right was installed in 1905 to meet the needs of the restoration work.

<sup>2</sup> **Blockhouse** - An enclosed structure usually roofed used to house one or more cannon.



# | Architecture

## A symbol of Germanic power

The impression of power emanating from Haut-Koenigsbourg is created as much by its size, for it covers an area of 1.5 hectares, as by the **massive pink sandstone terraces**.

Its construction took place during three distinct eras. From the 12th to the first half of the 15th century several occupants shared the castle.

From 1479 it was **rebuilt to adapt to the needs of artillery** with the outer wall level with the break in the slope preventing enemy cannon from taking position, an artillery platform and thick-walled defensive towers. The main buildings were also refurbished, with rectangular and oriel windows<sup>3</sup>, etc.

In the early 20th century the 15th century castle was restored after having been abandoned for more than two and a half centuries.

The relatively well preserved condition of the ruins led to its being listed as a historic building in 1862.

The architect Bodo Ebhardt, an enthusiastic expert on the Middle Ages and fortifications, led the restoration of Haut-Koenigsbourg scientifically and methodically. In 1900 the height of those walls still standing often reached the level of the machicolations, and the roofs were still partially preserved. Thus Bodo Ebhardt was able to reconstruct the 15th and 16th century proportions. Only some of the upper parts and the roofs had to be imagined by the architect.

This reconstruction of the original gave rise to numerous controversies, over, for example, the number of covered walkways around the building and on the keep.

Nevertheless, the present Haut-Koenigsbourg is typical of the architecture of the castles of the 15th and 16th centuries in the south of the Rhine basin.

<sup>3</sup> **Oriels** - Small perpendicular windows either side of the main window.

# |Restauration

The present castle of Haut-Koenigsbourg is the product of meticulous restoration carried out at the beginning of the 20th century by the architect **Bodo Ebhardt** under the instructions of **Emperor William II of Hohenzollern** (the «Kaiser») with the aim of making the castle not an imperial residence but a museum of the Middle Ages. William II also wanted to make it the symbol of the restored empire and German past in Alsace.

Bodo Ebhardt carried out the restoration work based on a detailed survey of the ruins, a series of photographs and on very advanced archaeological, historic and architectural observations, while respecting the Romanesque traces still visible. He researched it at length, visiting numerous castles in Europe. From all this information Bodo Ebhardt submitted his restoration plan to Emperor William II for a decision. The Emperor visited the site each year to see how work was progressing. In the banqueting room he had the restoration of the first floor removed to provide a much more spacious room. However, a few criticisms could be made of the architect's work - the slope of the roofs, the widespread use of tiles for the roofs and the reconstruction of windmill and not an arm-driven mill.

The furnishings, together with the weapons, were acquired at the beginning of the century in order to **illustrate life and changing weaponry** from the late Middle Ages to the Thirty Years War (1618-1648).

The occasional copies (including two coffers and a stove) were presented to the castle because they made it possible to show how some outstanding works would have looked.

For further information :

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L. Baridon et N. Pintors - CNMHS/CNRS éditions 1998

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