

CHÂTEAU DE BIRON

Guardian of the Périgord for a thousand years



Proud and imposing, the Château de Biron is in itself a lesson in history. It reflects the long and rich story of one lineage; that of the Gontaut-Birons, seigneurs and owners from the 11th to the 20th century.

This vast building which has evolved over time, brings together the Medieval Period, the Renaissance and the 18th century.

Prepare yourself for an amazing journey through time!





1: FROM THE RAMPARTS

The panoramic view from the ramparts reminds us of the castle's strategic position.

As a fortress it endured 5 sieges during the Hundred Years' War and was captured twice by the English. The "Tour Porte", (Gate Tower) and its stones reddened by fire (12C) bear witness to those troubled times. During this period, the only access between the lower and the higher courtyard was here, via a wooden ramp. We can no longer see the complete defensive system due to the transformation of the castle in the 16th century.

Below the tower, there are the remains of the communal or banal ovens (16C). The inhabitants of Biron used them to bake their bread, but had to pay a tax to do so: the "banalité".

YEAR ONE THOUSAND

The beginnings of a castle for the Count of Toulouse.

1076

First mention of the Biron seigneurie, when a donation was made to Saint-Sernin church in Toulouse.

1115

Alliance with the Gontaut family. The Seigneurs de Biron become Gontaut-Biron.

1124

Guillaume de Gontaut-Biron leaves for the crusades. Louis VI gives him the royal forest surrounding Biron.

Reign of Philip I
1060-1108

Reign of Louis VI The Fat
1108-1137



2: SAINT PETER'S TOWER

It was built for defence, but its purpose changed with the evolution of the château's history. In the 16th century, the domain manager had his office here, and it was then embellished with a richly painted decor. The style was strongly influenced by the Italian palaces Pons de Gontaut-Biron had discovered during his campaigns in Italy, under the reign of King Charles VIII.

The natural pigments used undoubtedly came from the local area.

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3: THE GRAND KITCHEN

This part of the castle, situated in the “aile des Maréchaux”, (Marshals’ Wing), was turned into a kitchen in the 18th century by Charles-Armand de Gontaut-Biron to cater for grand receptions.

It was equipped with stone dish warmers (heated by embers below), vast fireplaces for roasting and a water tank fashioned out of the rock. It is said to be one of the largest kitchens in France!

Salt chests were kept in the basement, used to conserve food.

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4: THE PERISTYLE AND THE LOST GARDENS

From the end of the 16th century, the area surrounding the château was turned into gardens. At the base of the castle mound there were orchards, pools, grottos and fountains, which have since disappeared.

In the 18th century an opening was created, giving the château a view onto its parkland. A wall and a gallery with twisted columns were replaced by a peristyle with six columns, in the style of the Trianon and the Medici Villa. The initial project included a staircase with 80 steps and 5 resting stations leading to the gardens. This never saw the light of day because of the instability of the ramparts.

1202-1212

Martin d'Algaïs becomes Seigneur de Biron by his marriage to Aina de Gontaut

1212

The castle is captured by Simon de Montfort.

1222

The castle is returned to Henri de Gontaut-Biron.

1346 AND 1444

The castle falls into the hands of the English.

Crusades against the Albigensians
1208-1244

Hundred Years' War
1337-1453



5: MAIN COURTYARD

It gives us both a reminder, by its grandeur, of the power of this family, and a lesson in architectural history.

At the end of the courtyard, you can see, underneath the wooden balcony, the Romanesque gateway belonging to the medieval castle. On the left: there is the 14th century seigneurial living quarters, occupied by the family up to 1938; next to it, the Renaissance living quarters with large mullion windows; and to the right the Neoclassical wing, an example of the architecture typical of the 17th century, recognisable by its large openings and its balconies.

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6: THE MARSHAL'S WING, THE STATE ROOM

The first changes to the castle were begun by Armand de Gontaut-Biron and his son Charles at the end of the 16th century, in order to receive the four Périgordian Baronies (Biron, Bourdeilles, Beynac and Mareuil).

The present building is the result of a second phase of works, finished in the 1730's, and undertaken by Charles-Armand de Gontaut-Biron (Duke and Peer of France), so that he could organise grand receptions. However, this building and its apartments were not redecorated. They were completely restored between 2012 and 2014. Today they are used for art exhibitions, shows, etc; giving Biron an important place in the region's cultural landscape.

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7: TERRACE WITH PANORAMIC VIEWS

The terrace was built by the Dordogne Department during the 2010's to protect the oldest buildings from water damage; The Tour Porte (Gate Tower), the Tour de l'Horloge (Clock Tower) and the Donjon (Keep). The central Tour de l'Horloge, where the archives were kept, was hit by lightning in 1538 and damaged by fire. The 19th century crenellations were inspired by Viollet-le-Duc. From the terrace there is a magnificent view of the Bastide de Monflanquin and the surrounding countryside.

In certain climatic conditions you can get a glimpse of the Pyrenees in the distance.

1463

Grandes Compagnies (bands of mercenaries) partially destroy the castle: end of the fortress.

Reign of Louis XI
1461-1483

1495-1530

Pons de Gontaut-Biron builds the chapel and rebuilds the castle. Start of the Renaissance in Périgord.

Reign of Charles VIII
1483-1498

1538

The Clock Tower is hit by lightning, and the archives completely destroyed by fire.

Reign of François I
1515-1547

1570

Armand de Gontaut-Biron negotiates the Peace of St-Germain-en-Laye, between Catholics and Protestants

Reign of Charles IX
1560-1574

18TH CENTURY ROOMS

8: EXHIBITIONS

In the 18th century, this vast salon was used for receptions. In 2012, it underwent major restoration, as did the rest of the building. All the parquet floors, the ceilings and woodwork were remade to match. Today, this room is used for temporary exhibitions.

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The Reception Rooms

9: THE DINING ROOM

This type of room was very fashionable in the 18th century.

More intimate and reserved for small gatherings, this room was designed and converted by Charles-Armand de Gontaut-Biron to be used for concerts and private dinners. It was refurbished in 2024 with collections from the Mobilier National, which supplies furniture for State buildings, a service the Duke de Biron would also have used. The chandelier, specially restored for the castle comes from the Palais du Luxembourg; the tableware is de Gien, and dates from the end of the 18th century.

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10: THE SMALL SALON

This small parlour recreates an ambiance of intimate evenings with its books and games table. The woodwork is in walnut and the Versailles and Marisy parquets are made up of different woods: oak, chestnut, cherry and walnut.

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LE LOGIS DE PONS XVI^e CENTURY

We are now in the Renaissance

During this period, the lifestyle was still largely nomadic. The family only lived in the castle for short periods. Their custom was to take part of their furniture with them as they moved from place to place. The different rooms were equipped according to the needs of the moment (bedrooms, banquet hall ...)

January 1572

Queen Jeanne d'Albret stays at Biron.

1598

The title of Barony of Biron raised to become Duchy and Peerage.

July 31 1602

Execution of Charles de Gontaut-Biron for treason. Biron falls into disgrace.

1723

In recognition of their fidelity during the Fronde (series of civil wars in France), the Barony was reinstated to Duchy and Peerage

1737

Charles-Armand de Gontaut-Biron creates the Neoclassical wing

Reign of Charles XI
1560-1574

Reign of Henry IV
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11: THE MARQUIS' BEDROOM

This room was a guest bedroom up to the 16th century. Today, you can see many of the elements used in films to show what the apartment of the last Marquis de Biron looked like in the 20th century. He was a famous Parisian antique dealer and art collector. He sold the castle in 1938.

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12: ROOF TIMBERS

Here you find yourself under roof timbers which date back to the 16th century, and which have been restored over time. In the past, you would have had to go through a hatch in the guest bedroom to get here. It was never intended as a living space, but was simply an attic.

The main timbers are in oak, the pegs in acacia and the battens in poplar.

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13: THE WARS OF RELIGION

Polygonal Tower (14-16C)

The artwork by Jimmy Richer which surrounds you, is a temporary work illustrating the military feats of the family.

One of the most notable events occurred when Armand de Gontaut-Biron, future Marshal of France, was appointed as one of the negotiators in the St-Germain-en-Laye Peace Treaty between Catholics and Protestants (1570). However, this did not prevent the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in August 1572.

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14: THE QUEEN'S BEDROOM

On January 19, 1572, Jeanne d'Albret arrived at the castle to join the Prince of Orange and the Prince of Condé with a cortege of 6 coaches and 500 horses! She came to negotiate the terms of her son's marriage, Henry of Navarre, the future Henry IV.

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15: THE ARMS ROOM Polygonal Tower (14-16C)

With its small canons this room reminds us of the castle's defensive role during the Medieval Period, and the Wars of Religion. You can also see several other military objects, such as the coat of mail which weighs more than 10kg!

Marshal Armand de Gontaut-Biron's armour is on display at Les Invalides in Paris.

1781

Armand-Louis, Duke of Biron and of Lunzun, returns victorious from the battle of Yorktown to announce victory to Louis XVI

1598

Execution of Armand-Louis de Gontaut-Biron. The castle towers of Biron are raised to the ground, the arms stores plundered, and the chapel vandalised.

1807

The Gontaut de Saint-Blancard family buys the ancient duchy of Biron

1907

Sale of sculptures in the chapel to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Reign of Louis XVI
1774-1792

Reign of Terror
1793-1794

The Empire
1804-1815

Third Republic
1870-1940



16: LA AULA (THE HALL)

The sumptuous gothic chimney illustrates the great wealth of the family at the end of the 15th century. This banquet hall was also used as a courtroom and a bedroom. The furniture can be taken apart and is modular to suit different needs. Today, the hall is used as an activity room where you can discover the art of dining in the 16th century.

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17: THE PILLAR ROOM AND THE CELLARS

Beneath your feet are the cellars. These rooms are awaiting restoration to make them safe, and are not yet open to the public.

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18: THE SMALL KITCHEN

This part of the castle has been heavily impacted by earth movements. In the kitchen, dating from the 14th century, you can still see the painted decor on its ribbed vaulting. The oven, integrated into the fireplace, was used up until the 20th century. The kitchen has also been used in several films. On the first floor there are rooms which still have their painted decor. All these areas are awaiting restoration.

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19: THE LOWER COURTYARD

Situated within the castle walls, the lower courtyard was used by the servants. In its period as a fortress, some of the defence towers were also used to lodge the knights who protected the castle. During wartime, it was used as a refuge for local inhabitants and their animals, in exchange for which they had to work days without pay for the Baron.

1928

Classified a Historic Monument

1938

The castle is sold by the Marquess of Biron to private owners, the Copper Royer family.

1974

A terrible hailstorm hit Biron, destroying all into its passage. The castle was destined to fall into ruins.

1978

The castle is bought by the Dordogne Department, at the instigation of the mayor of Biron, Monsieur Poussou.



20: THE CHAPEL, THE PIETÀ AND THE ENTOMBMENT

The chapel was built between 1495 and 1505 after authorisation was granted to Pons de Gontaut-Biron by Pope Alexander VI, while he was fighting in Italy. The building work was overseen by his brother, Armand, Bishop of Sarlat.

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Its design was based on that of Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, built on two levels: a lower chapel, the parish church of Saint-Michel, and a higher chapel, the collegiate Notre-Dame-de-Pitié, reserved for use by the seigneurs. Here an exceptional relic was kept: a fragment from the Holy Cross and a thorn from Christ's crown.

Built at a pivotal period, its architecture is still influenced by the gothic style, but the tombs and its sculptures show it was built at the start of the Renaissance.

The Pietà and the Entombment are copies made in 2024 and 2025, by the same artists who created Lascaux (Atelier des Fac-Similés du Périgord).

The original sculptures from Biron are among the prized exhibits in the Medieval Gallery of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The tombs which were vandalised during the Revolution, were restored in 2024 and opened. The coffins discovered inside are at present the subject of an anthropological study.

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21: THE REVENUE TOWER

1980-2015

Restoration works

1980-2025

Biron becomes a
Departmental Centre of
Contemporary Art.

2023-2024

Copies made of the
chapel sculptures and
restoration of the tombs.

2024-2025

The interiors of the castle
are furnished with pieces
from Mobilier National
(manages furniture for
State buildings) and
donations from private
collections.

This building goes back to the feudal period. It is thought that the main gate to the fortress was situated here.

In the 16th century, a staircase was added for access to the rooms.

In the 18th century: it was used by the tax collector, hence its name “Tour de la Recette”.

The first-floor apartment was used in the series “Fortune de France” (2023). The castle has been used for several films, including: *Captain Blood* (1960), *Revenge of the Musketeers* (1994), *Brotherhood of the Wolf* (2021), *Jacquou le Croquant* (2007), etc ...

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22: OFFICE FOR THE TREASURY'S TAX COLLECTOR

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This room is not yet open to the public because of its fragile contents.

Its vaults are completely covered in mural paintings dating from the 16th century. They are particularly sensitive to light and changes in the weather. These remarkable decorations were created in 1519, in honour of the marriage of Jean I de Gontaut-Biron with Renée-Anne de Bonneval.

The room was used for the receipt of taxes, stored in the wall cupboards. There was a grand staircase for access by the inhabitants of the village, which has now disappeared.

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2023-2024

Copies made of the chapel sculptures and restoration of the tombs.

2024-2025

The interiors of the castle are furnished with pieces from Mobilier National (manages furniture for State buildings) and donations from private collections.

*At the end of your visit, rendezvous
at the book shop, in the old stables.*

*There you will find several works
about the castle's history.*

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