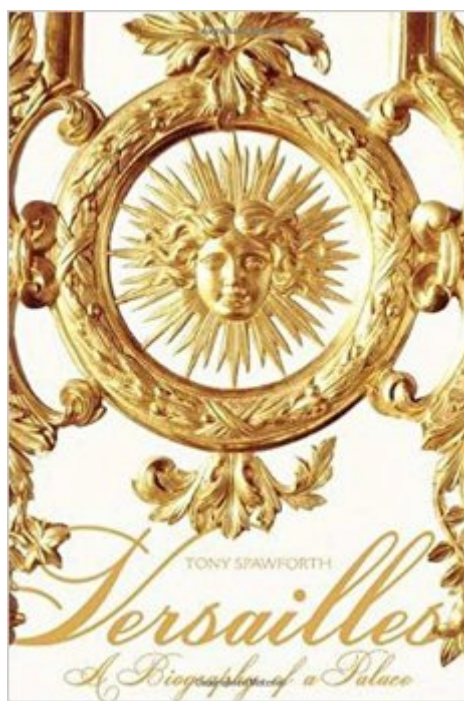


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Versailles: A Biography Of A Palace



Synopsis

The behind-the-scenes story of the world's most famous palace, painting a picture of the way its residents truly lived and examining the palace's legacy, from French history through today. The story of Versailles is one of historical drama, under the last three kings of France's old regime, mixed with the high camp and glamour of the European courts, all in an iconic home for the French arts. The palace itself has been radically altered since 1789, and the court was long ago swept away. Versailles sets out to rediscover what is now a vanished world: a great center of power, seat of royal government, and, for thousands, a home both grand and squalid, bound by social codes almost incomprehensible to us today. Using eyewitness testimony as well as the latest historical research, Spawforth offers the first full account of Versailles in English in over thirty years. Blowing away the myths of Versailles, he analyses afresh the politics behind the Sun King's construction of the palace and shows how Versailles worked as the seat of a royal court. He probes the conventional picture of a perpetual house party of courtiers and gives full weight to the darker side: not just the mounting discomfort of the aging buildings but also the intrigue and status anxiety of its aristocrats. The book brings out clearly the fateful consequences for the French monarchy of its relocation to Versailles and also examines the changing place of Versailles in France's national identity since 1789. Many books have told the stories of the royals and artists living in Versailles, but this is the first to turn its focus on the palace itself---from architecture and politics to scandal and restoration.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

These days, more often than not, I tend to explore from the confines of my chair. While I dream of seeing the extravagant and faraway, I also want to understand what I am looking at as well, and for that, I turn to books on history and art. When I saw an alert pop up for this volume by Tony Spawforth, I knew it was one that I had to read. Versailles: A Biography of a Palace takes the unique tactic of looking at an architectural marvel as an entity in and of itself, and treats it as a living, breathing creature. From the earliest days of Versailles as a tiny village near a royal hunting lodge to the present day, Spawforth chronicles the chaotic history, from the grand dreams and vision of Louis XIV to the days of the French revolution and finally, the precarious rebirth and restoration efforts of today. He uses contemporary journals, diaries, letters, paintings, and the palace and buildings itself to allow the reader to walk in the gilded corridors and breathtaking state rooms to the not-so-appealing attics and hidden places where so much intrigue and living took place. Spawforth begins with Louis XIII, and like all Bourbon kings of France, a great lover of hunting. The small village of Versailles, about twelve miles to the west of Paris, and convenient to the then royal palace of St. Germain-en-Laye, was perfect for the king to slip away and enjoy the chase with his courtiers and cronies. But it was Louis XIV, his son, who took a swampy backwater and turned it into the centre for European culture and spectacle for more than a century.

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