

Goethe's Garden House Audio-Text

Introduction

Hallo and welcome to Goethe's Garden House.

The famous German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe moved into this house in 1776 - his first house in Weimar. For six years, he lived and worked here, at the edge of the idyllic Ilm Park before he moved to his large Frauenplan city house. Even then, Goethe kept his Garden House - and it remained a cherished place of retreat until his death in 1832. This tour takes you through house showing the five rooms where Goethe lived and the kitchen. You can also take a walk in the garden and hear some commentaries there too, if you like. The room numbers in the tour flyer are also the numbers for the audio guide commentaries. And now enjoy your tour - tracing the steps of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a man who was not only a government minister, and a researcher into the natural world but also, of course, a bestselling author.

Erdsälchen

This room is dominated by two views of Rome. These vistas of the Eternal City were a help to Goethe when, aged nearly 80, he was writing the second volume of his Italian Journey. He has his own expression for this room, calling it his 'Erdsälchen' - his little ground-floor parlour. As he noted in July 1829,

"In my Erdsälchen, I have hung up the old and new Rome in panoramic views (...) so that I can look at them".

In his later years, this house became first and foremost a place of retreat, where he could work undisturbed. Goethe had moved in fifty years earlier, shortly before he turned 27. At that time, his "little ground floor parlour" here was his dining room. Originally, he had three smaller tables in the room which could be joined to create a large dining table when guests were expected - and they often were. As Goethe's account books show, his Weimar court position also entailed numerous social duties as well. In his Erdsälchen, he not only regularly received fellow writers, friends, and acquaintances, but also members of the ducal family - very often Duke Carl August, who liked to drop by and visit his closest advisor.

The two chests of drawers for collecting minerals and the two small fold-out card tables - like nearly all the furniture in the Garden House - were originally owned by Goethe. However, he did bring some pieces of furniture here after 1782 when he was already living in his Frauenplan house. By the way, the Duke personally paid for the furniture as a gift - and also gave Goethe the Garden House as well. Without property, Goethe couldn't qualify as a citizen of Weimar and accept a government position. But Carl August, who had just turned 18 and taken over the reins of power, was determined to tie the famous writer of *The Sufferings of Young Werther* to his court. By attracting Goethe and other young, progressive minds to posts in his

government, the Duke wanted to initiate reforms and a new style of leadership. And it all worked out as he hoped – Goethe stayed in Weimar.

2nd level: Erdsälchen

The sculpture between the windows is the head of the Apollo Belvedere and the one to the right next to the door is the head of the priest Laocoön [lay-ak-ow-wan] from the famous Laocoön [lay-ak-ow-wan] group. These two plaster copies already belonged to Goethe when he was living in his parents' house in Frankfurt am Main. In the 18th century, such sculptures were common collector's items, sold by travelling Italian artists. At that time, the Apollo Belvedere and the Laocoön [lay-ak-ow-wan] group were already among the most famous sculptures of antiquity. They also had a lasting influence on Goethe's feeling for art. He had the chance to study them himself as early as 1769 when he visited the newly-opened Mannheim Hall of Antiquities.

By the way, you can find a complete copy of the Laocoön [lay-ak-ow-wan] group in the City Palace Museum. In the 18th century, this classical statue inspired many great thinkers to write on art history – from Lessing to Winckelmann and Herder and even Goethe himself. Goethe's later literary oeuvre, inscribed in cultural history as Weimar Classicism, is inspired, not least, by Goethe's long and intensive examination and analysis of Greco-Roman art. In January 1782, Goethe was given another plaster copy of the Apollo Belvedere's head. He wrote to his close and dear friend Charlotte von Stein:

"The Duke of Gotha has sent me a cast of the genuine bust of the Vatican Apollo and, in comparison, ours is a real farmer's boy."

From 1794, the cast, possibly taken from the original, was displayed in the stairwell of Goethe's Frauenplan house. When Goethe then saw the marble original in Rome, he enthused over it as a completely perfect work of art:

"One can have no idea of certain objects without having seen them and having seen them in marble; the Apollo Belvedere exceeds everything conceivable."

Kitchen

When Goethe was living in the house, the kitchen undoubtedly looked very different – and was certainly not as empty. It was full of the hustle and bustle of food being prepared – often for a large number of guests! The saucepans bubbled away, and the air may well have been scented with the smell of hot chocolate, Goethe's favourite drink. When it was very cold outside, the head of the household would also sometimes sit here in the kitchen in the warm, since with only a few ovens, the Garden House was not that well heated in

winter. Goethe not only had a cook, but other staff too – most importantly Goethe's servant Philipp Seidel, who had also been with Goethe when he was living at home in Frankfurt. Philipp not only helped with all the day-to-day tasks in Weimar, but also assisted his master as a

copyist. Unfortunately, there are no records of the original household effects, so the display here shows some kitchen utensils, pitchers and plates from the period around 1800. The fireplace, stove and the sink on the right next to the window are all original. The red colour of the walls has been reconstructed from the old colour. As in all the other rooms, that colour was originally used in 1820 when Goethe had the Garden House renovated for the last time. Even 200 years ago, the atmosphere in the Garden House was set by the friendly shades of red, yellow and green on the walls. At that time, though, every room contained far more furniture than today. There were carpets on the floor, and numerous sketches, prints and paintings decorating the walls, making the house much cosier than it is now. The myth that Goethe led a spartan life here as a writer only became widespread in 1841, when the house was turned into a rather scantily furnished museum.

The tour continues upstairs, up the broad wooden staircase that Goethe had built when he first took over the house in 1776. On the ground floor, he had large paving tiles fitted of sandstone from Bad Berka, a town to the south of Weimar.

Terrace Room

The Altanzimmer – the terrace room – has two windows to the east and one to the south. This was Goethe's drawing room. It was called the 'terrace room' because, in 1777, Goethe had an annex built with a wooden platform and a terrace. The door to the terrace was set where the south-facing window is, opposite the staircase. In 1797, twenty years later, the annex had fallen into disrepair and was dismantled. Shortly after the terrace was built, Goethe wrote to his friend Charlotte von Stein:

"Tonight I slept on my terrace under a blue cloak, woke three times at 12, 2 and 4 and each time there were new wonders in the sky around me."

The young Goethe was a leading protagonist in the movement known as Sturm und Drang – Storm and Stress. A life in touch with nature in the heart of the countryside was very much part of that spirit. He enthused:

"Everything is so still. I can hear only my watch ticking, and the wind and the distant weir".

Before moving to Weimar, Goethe had spent most of life in larger cities. He grew up in the Frankfurt, a major commercial centre. At his father's insistence, he studied law in Leipzig and Strasburg. And how different his life here must have seemed – in the idyllic River Ilm valley, in his first own house! Goethe sketched his new terrace – and you can see the drawing on the wall to the left, next to the bust of Johann Caspar Lavater. The sketch shows the overgrown.

2nd level: Terrace Room

The silhouette on the right of the door to the stairs is of Charlotte von Stein. She was seven years older and already married – and she became Goethe's soulmate. Goethe described the relationship which developed between them as "the bliss by my side". More than any one else, Charlotte von Stein encouraged his development, urged him to moderation, knew how to calm him, and was his helper and advisor. She accompanied the process of his maturing from a youth to man. They first met in November 1775. Yet even before they met, they had exchanged silhouettes and so had an idea of how the other looked. The silhouette showed a person's profile as a black outline and, in the late 18th century, was very much en vogue. They were also popular in physiognomics – a widespread and supposedly scientific method of determining character from a person's facial features and skull shape.

Physiognomics was founded by the Swiss theologian and author Johann Caspar Lavater. He and Goethe were already good friends before Goethe moved to Weimar – and you can see Lavater's bust on the plinth in the corner. Goethe also worked with him on his standard work in 25 physiognomics. Later, though, Goethe distanced himself from Lavater's theory. On the left of the fire place, there are portrait reliefs of Goethe's parents – Johann Caspar and Katharina Elisabeth Goethe, immortalised in the famous lines:

"My build from Father I inherit, His neat and serious ways; Combined with Mother's cheerful spirit, Her love of telling stories."

The sketch to the right is by Goethe – and shows his younger sister Cornelia, who he was very fond of. On the day she died in childbirth when she was 26, Goethe noted in his diary: "Dark and torn day". She was the last of his brothers and sisters. Although his parents had another four children, they all died in childhood. To the left of the pianoforte on the wall to the study, there's a silhouette of Charlotte Buff. She was the model for Lotte in Goethe's 1774 epistolary novel *The Suffering of Young Werther*, which rocketed him to fame across Europe. There's also a portrait of Goethe over the piano. This oil painting is a preliminary study for Georg Melchior Kraus' well-known work *Goethe with a Silhouette*. The final portrait belonged to Anna Amalia and today is in the Goethe National Museum. The Duchess had a copy of the work made and sent it to Goethe's mother in Frankfurt, who sorely missed her little "cuddly little darling".

Study

In his first years in Weimar, Goethe's study was not only the room where he wrote, but also his 'office' for his court business. Here, he pored over files, documents and regulations on, for example, military affairs, roads and mining. Here, too he wrote and usually standing up, as was common at the time. Since standing was rather strenuous for any length of time, he bought himself this very modern piece of furniture – the high, saddle-like trestle chair in front of the standing desk. As described in the contemporary *Journal of Luxury and Fashion*, this 'rider' or 'donkey', as it was called, was developed especially for people who

"had to write a lot and for a long time...(to ensure...that the abdomen does not suffer the damaging pressure from sitting".

In Weimar, the young Goethe, inexperienced in administrative matters, faced a series of challenges. Ignoring the comments of the sceptics, Duke Carl August, just 19 years old, had appointed Goethe directly to his Privy Council, the highest government body. But why did Goethe accept an appointment at the ducal court in the first place?

After all, he was born into a relatively wealthy family, and grew up in Frankfurt, an imperial free city proud of its civic status. He could easily have stayed in Frankfurt and worked as a lawyer. But that was just what he didn't want to do. He was attracted by the challenge! He wanted to see, as he put it, how "a role in the world would suit him". At the compact Weimar court, Goethe saw a chance to develop in different ways. He could literally take charge of things himself, playing a part in the political reforms which Carl August, as an enlightened, modern-minded regent, wanted to introduce in his duchy. And so the ambitious writer plunged into his work. In spring 1776, a few months after he arrived in Weimar, he wrote:

"I am now (...) ready for whatever may come, discovery, profit, conflict, shipwreck, ready even to blow myself up with my whole cargo."

2nd level

When Goethe moved in here, the park didn't exist. The landscape around his house was still untouched and rather wild. Near the Palace, there were some baroque gardens, such as the one called the Stern – the star. But baroque gardens, with their strict geometrical patterns, no longer reflected the new zeitgeist and the fascination with naturalness. People wanted to be in tune with nature – as Goethe said in retrospect, to "live, while away the hours and enjoy outside". Together with the Duke, he envisaged creating in Weimar an English-style landscaped garden, which was so modern at the time.

The baroque garden's symmetrical flowerbeds and precisely cut hedges were passé. The new landscaping design set groups of trees and bushes on sweeping meadowland as if they had been planted by nature itself. In July 1778, Carl August organised a special event to mark the name-day of his wife, Duchess Louise. As part of the arrangements, he had a little hermitage called the "Luisenkloster" – the Louise Convent – built near the Garden House. Goethe made a sketch of it, which you can see on the right near the window. Later, the hermitage was transformed into the "Bark House" – a hut covered in tree bark. If you look out of the window, you can see the hut in the distance. Picturesque, artificially created ruins in natural settings were part of the repertoire of landscaped gardens – as were classical-style monuments and buildings. For example, in Weimar, Carl August had the Roman House built, a garden house designed to resemble a classical temple. The building work was supervised by Goethe himself. The Roman House is not far away, up the river Ilm on the other side.

Library

Today, the library only contains one book-case, a copy from Goethe's library at his Frauenplan house. It is now hard to say how large his collection of books would have been when he lived here in the Garden House – certainly quite large! But Goethe also frequently borrowed books from the ducal library, nowadays famous as the Duchess Anna Amalia Library. For many years, looking after the library was one of Goethe's many responsibilities in Weimar. Goethe wrote various works in his early years in Weimar, and one is especially notable – his blank verse play *Iphigenie in Tauris*, based on a classical Greek play by Euripides. There are some pages from Goethe's play on display on the writing desk.

Iphigenie in Tauris is regarded as a key work in Weimar Classicism. It put forward a new ethical ideal of humanitarianism – deeply influenced by the classical world's striving for harmony and completeness. *Iphigenie* marked the end of the Sturm und Drang period, with its emphasis on emotion. The literature of the Sturm und Drang years, dubbed Goethe's genius period, owed a substantial debt to his play *Götz von Berlichingen* and, above all, to his novel *The Sufferings of Young Werther*.

Iphigenie in Tauris was premiered in summer 1779 at the Weimar amateur theatre, formed by Anna Amalia after the Palace theatre had burned down in 1774. Goethe was the stage manager at Anna Amalia's amateur theatre, and he held some readings and rehearsals here in his garden. When *Iphigenie* was shown, he even took over the leading male role himself, and was enthusiastically acclaimed for his performance. At that time, only *Iphigenie* herself was played by a professional actress. Her name was Corona Schröter, and for a while Goethe was infatuated with her – as was the Duke as well! The sketch to the right of the writing desk also suggests that the writer and the actress were quite close. Goethe has captured the face of Corona Schröter while she is taking a nap.

2nd level: Library

Throughout his life, Goethe loved sketching and drawing – and was quite a talented artist! We know just how talented he was from around 2600 of his works which have survived. At one time, he even considered a career as a painter. He took drawing lessons as a child – at that time, an accepted part of any solid, middle-class upbringing. But as an adult, Goethe continued to take drawing lessons – even while he was living in Weimar. Goethe particularly liked to draw his friends. Sometimes, the portraits are very precise – for example, the watercolour portrait on the right of the grey bookcase.

The portrait shows Christoph Martin Wieland wearing, as Goethe commented with selfdeprecating irony, his "Sunday face". But he also made quick and lively sketches capturing a private moment, such as the red chalk drawing on the right of the portfolio cabinet. This sketch portrays Carl Ludwig von Knebel, a passionate pipe smoker. Goethe called him his "Ur-friend in Weimar" and also immortalised him in one of his poems:

"He sucked eagerly at his beloved pipe / The smoke billowed up past his forehead".

The silhouette on the right of the door to the study shows the theologian Johann Gottfried Herder, the third person in this little group in Goethe's early days in Weimar. Goethe kept the prints and drawings from his extensive art collection in the portfolio cabinet. He had collected nearly 13,000 sheets, from Dürer and Rembrandt to works by contemporary artists. But he didn't only collect art works. You've certainly noticed the chests with many narrow drawers in the study, or downstairs in the ground floor parlour. Goethe was a keen natural scientist and these chests of drawers held his minerals and geological samples – a collection growing to 18,000 items over the course of his life.

Bedroom

Goethe slept on the folding travel bed - though not in this bedroom, but when he was on his journeys. With his own travel bed, he didn't need to spend the night on the uncomfortable wooden beds in the inns, with their fleas and bedbugs. During Goethe's lifetime, this bedroom had a normal, solidly constructed wooden bed. Goethe drew the two sketches over the bed shortly after he arrived in Weimar.

They give you an idea of just how wild the countryside was around the Garden House before, from 1778, the Ilm Park was gradually landscaped. The large sketch shows a winter's view with a raft bridge in the foreground and the Garden House in the left background. On the opposite wall, you can see three other sketches by Goethe. They are set over what was originally a wooden napkin press which Goethe unceremoniously turned into a multifunctional standing desk. This not only gave him space to write, but also a place to dry plants for his botanical collection. The sketches come from a series which Goethe called "my moonshine". From the Garden House, Goethe found the night sky especially intensive – and he sometimes went for a cool swim in the river by moonlight, a most unusual activity for that time – especially, when the young Goethe leapt naked into the waters!

The magic of the moonlight across the still Ilm valley also inspired Goethe to write his poem To the Moon, one of his most beautiful lyrical works from his early Weimar years. The poem, displayed on the standing desk, was found under his letters to Charlotte von Stein. By the way, when Goethe looked out of the window here, he had a view of her house.

2nd level: Bedroom

In a letter to Charlotte von Stein dated 11 August 1777, Goethe wrote: "That I am always envisioning the phenomena of nature and my love for you, you will see from the enclosed." When he spoke of the 'enclosed', he most likely meant the poem in which he directly address the moon. The poem starts:

"Now with your dear light again

Wood and dale are filled;

In your shining mist the pain

of my soul is stilled.

Gazing as a friend would gaze,

Kindly, soothingly,

So your gentle eye surveys

My dark destiny.

(...)“

Many of Goethe's literary works written in the Garden House during his first years in Weimar remained fragments. With his numerous and various duties at the ducal court, he had little time left to write – precisely the situation that some of his friends had feared. In those days, writer and publisher Johann Heinrich Merck often said that Germany was calling out for the poet Goethe and not for a ducal advisor. Even Goethe himself felt increasingly constrained in Weimar – and in 1786, he literally slipped away, travelling incognito to Italy. He spent two years there. Freed from affairs of state, he completed his plays *Egmont* and *Torquato Tasso*, and a verse version of his prose play *Iphigenie*. And when Goethe departed on this much dreamt of journey in August 1786, he left without a single word to Charlotte von Stein! He wrote to her on 7 November from Rome:

"Don't be dismayed, my dear, that your beloved has gone to distant lands, he will be returned to you as a better and happier man.“

Understandably, no one was as angry with Goethe over his unannounced departure for Italy as his adored Charlotte von Stein. Their relationship broke off and never fully recovered again.

History of the house and garden (outside)

When Goethe became the owner of this property on 26 April 1776, the garden was rather "caterpillary“, as he called it. The house, a former vineyard cottage originally dating back to the 16 century, was in a desolate state. The newly-fledged owner could not simply move in at once. Nonetheless, he was in good spirits and happy about his new home in the countryside. As he wrote in a letter:

"I have a delightful garden overlooking the beautiful meadows in the River Ilm valley. There's a little old house in the middle of it, which I'm having repaired. Everything is blossoming, all the birds are singing“.

Goethe was directly involved in planning the renovations and supervised the build-ing work. The roof was leaking and the floors were damaged; the walls need a new coat of paint. He had fresh soil carted up to the house for the garden to transform the slope into an elaborate terrace. He set out the paths and had stairs built, and arranged for flowers, shrubs, and trees to be planted. Even today, you can still see the division of the garden into the three areas common at that time: shady sloping lawns, a sunny orchard and a kitchen garden on the lower section. Goethe had to pay nothing towards the house and grounds, nor for the extensive

refurbishment. The Duke covered all the costs for his new Weimar court employee, and soon trusted advisor. The house without repairs cost 600 Reichstaler!

2nd level: History of the house and garden

In June 1782, six years after moving into the Garden House, Goethe left to live in his new Frauenplan house in the city. He took much of his furniture with him. He just left enough here to make it possible to stay overnight - or to use the house for a love affair. In the summer of 1788, the Garden House became a 'love nest' for Goethe and Christiane Vulpius, later his wife. It was only when she was pregnant that he took her into his Frauenplan house. Since Goethe also rented his Garden House at times to friends and acquaintances, the interior furnishings constantly changed. But he never wanted to sell his little house in the country. Quite the contrary - over the years, he had it renovated several times. In 1830, for example, he added the beautiful white wooden gates at the garden

entrance. They were designed by the neo-classicist architect Clemens Wenzel Coudray. Goethe also had the pebble mosaics laid out which you can see, for example, at the entrance to the house. The mosaics were modelled on those in Pompeii. But in Goethe's later years, his Garden House remained first and foremost an important place where he could withdraw and find the peace he needed to work. On 20 February 1832, he visited the house for the last time; four weeks later, he died in his Frauenplan house. Nearly ten years later in 1841, Goethe's grandson opened the Garden House to the public. It soon became a popular memorial site. The visitors came from all across the world and included many of the great and famous - Hans Christian Andersen, Richard Wagner, Ivan Turgenev, Franz Kafka, Hector Berlioz, Samuel Beckett and Thomas Mann. They all wanted to come close to him in this house, so full of memories, which he once described as:

"Nothing here for pride or show, Roof is high and house is low; All those who paid their visits Found themselves in the best of spirits." „Stone of Good Fortune“

The long straight path that ends where you're standing divides the thickly planted slope and orchard from the kitchen garden below. Today, it's given over to lawns, and flowers are growing in the former vegetable beds. Originally, though, the kitchen garden produced asparagus and strawberries, lettuces, potatoes, beans and much more, adding to the variety of Goethe's meals.

He had hollyhocks planted on either side of this path which he called "Hollyhocks Avenue". He was very fond of their bright, luxurious blossoms. Hollyhocks Avenue ends at the Stone of Good Fortune - which Goethe called *agathé tyche* from the Ancient Greek. He had this sandstone monument set up in April 1777, nearly a year after he first moved into the house. The monument comprises a plain unadorned cube of stone with a stone sphere on top. Goethe designed the stone sculpture with Adam Friedrich Oeser, his former drawing teacher from his days at the University in Leipzig.

At that time, this simple stone monument was exceptionally unusually, even rather modern – it has no embellishments, and no ornamentation, just sheer geometrical forms. And in fact, the Stone of Good Fortune is one of the very first non-figural monuments in Germany! Many scholars have puzzled over the meaning of Goethe's *agathé tyche*. It might well have symbolised the good fortune he felt fate had granted him by leading him here – to Weimar. He had a respected position at court, and found his tasks challenging and rewarding. And he lived in this idyllic spot – in his Garden House, his first own home, where he could live life as he wanted.

Seat with panel and inscription for Charlotte von Stein (outside)

This secluded spot on the slope above the Garden House was the favourite place of Charlotte von Stein, Goethe's closest confidant in Weimar. In 1782, Goethe dedicated an epigram to her and had it engraved in the wall over the seat. It starts with famous words "Here in silence reflected the lover upon his beloved".

The nature of the love affair between Goethe and Charlotte von Stein has been the subject of much speculation – but whatever their relationship was, she probably had more influence on his development than any other woman. When Goethe came to Weimar in 1775, Charlotte von Stein was 33 and seven years older than him. She was a lady-in-waiting to Duchess Anna Amalia, married to the ducal equerry, and the mother of seven children. Even before she met Goethe personally, she had heard about this young writer whose *Sufferings of Young Werther* had taken the literary world by storm. An acquaintance said to her:

"A woman of the world who has often seen him told me that Goethe is the most attractive, the liveliest, most natural, most fiery, most tempestuous, the gentlest, the most seductive and for a woman's heart the most dangerous man she has ever seen in her life."

So Charlotte von Stein was certainly forewarned – and to begin with, she doesn't seem to have been especially interested in him. "I feel that Goethe and I will never be friends", she wrote in March 1776. But she could not withstand the charm of this passionate poet. She became his best friend and advisor. For ten years, Goethe worshipped his unattainable soulmate.

Over these years, he wrote her around 1650 letters and "notelets", as he called the short notes he wrote to her. Messengers were frequently sent to and fro several times a day between the Garden House and Charlotte's apartment in Seifengasse. Goethe only broke the spell that bound them in 1786, trying to gain distance through his trip to Italy. When he returned two years later, her feelings for him had cooled considerably. Charlotte von Stein could never forgive Goethe for leaving secretly for Italy without a word to her – and also couldn't forgive him for the joys of love which he found with Christiane Vulpius. They only became friendly again much later in their lives.

2nd level Inscription for Charlotte von Stein

HERE IN SILENCE REFLECTED THE LOVER UPON HIS BELOVED SERENELY HE SPOKE TO ME:
BE MY WITNESS, YOU STONE. BUT DO NOT THINK YOURSELF BETTER, YOU HAVE MANY
FELLOWS. EVERY ROCK IN THE FIELDS WHICH NOURISH ME, O HAPPY CREATURE, EVERY
TREE IN THE WOODS THAT I EMBRACE ON MY WANDERINGS I CALL TO SOLEMNLY AND
JOYFULLY: REMAIN A MEMORIAL OF MY JOY. I GRANT A VOICE TO YOU ALONE. AS AMONG A
CROWD THE MUSES SELECT ONE AND KINDLY KISS HIS LIPS.