

Audio Guide

ROMAN HOUSE



text/editorial: Linon Medien

Index

<i>TITLE</i>	<i>AUDIOGUIDE-NUMBER</i>
Introduction	250
Portico/West Front	251
2nd level: 251	75
North Side	252
Eastern Passageway	252
2nd level: 252	76
South Terrace	254
Dressing Room	255
Bedroom	256
2nd level: 256	77
Yellow Salon/Study	257
2nd Level: 257	78
Blue Salon	258
2nd level: 258	79
Vestibule	259

250: Introduction



Hallo and welcome to the Roman House!

This garden house, set so attractively in the landscaped park on the River Ilm, was built for Duke Carl August at the end of the 18th century. It became his favourite place to stay – a retreat surrounded by unspoilt countryside in easy reach of the palace. His rural retreat was not only perfect for recovering from his busy court life, but it was also ideal for concentrated work and even for official receptions – which, though small, were all the more exclusive for it.

Later on your tour, you will see the rooms used by Duke Carl August. To begin with, though, we'll take a look at the outside of the house.

With its architectural elements inspired by the Classical world and its impressive setting on the slope, this building recalls a Roman country house – which is, of course, why it's called the Roman House! Moreover, when Duke Carl August entrusted Johann Wolfgang von Goethe with supervising the building work, Goethe turned the house into a neo-classical 'show house'. Our journey into the history of the Roman House starts on the square opposite the entrance. The audio guide tour takes around 35 minutes. To hear the commentaries on the tour, just key in the numbers you find in the tour flyers.

251: Portico/West Front

The foundation stone was laid for the Roman House in 1792. Five years later, in 1797, Duke Herzog Carl August moved in. It had been his dream for some time to have a suitably royal garden house. In 1787, Goethe wrote to him from Naples:

I have often thought of your park. [...] I am bringing garden houses and fountains with me.

Some years before, Carl August had brought Goethe, already a famous writer, to his Weimar court as his minister and adviser. Now, Goethe was away on his Italian journey. There, in the land of classical antiquity, he also gathered his inspiration for the Duke's planned country house.

The temple-like entrance is based on Goethe's study of Roman villas. The summer house, conveniently located near the town, often integrates stylistic elements from classical temples – as in the 'portico' with its elegant columns supporting a covered atrium topped by a decorative triangular pediment. In this case, the pediment is decorated by classical motifs. The figure in the centre is a winged *genius*, a protective spirit. In his outstretched arms, he is holding out two wreaths in blessing: on the left, over Minerva, goddess of the arts and sciences, and on the right, over Ceres, the goddess of gardens and agriculture.

The elegant Ionic columns are also a characteristic element of classical temples. In the Ionic order of columns, a long shaft rises from a Base formed by two rings and ends in the characteristic spiral, scroll-shaped Capital.

This portico design is not only informed by Goethe's experiences in Italy, but also by the zeitgeist of his day, with its rediscovery of Greek and Roman antiquity. Gradually, the clear lines of neo-classicism replaced elaborate rococo decoration. And when you look at the side view of the Roman House, you'll notice how it follows a simple rectangular form – in keeping with its classical inspiration.

From here too, you can admire the house's magnificent position on the slope, copied from the Roman country villa. In this case, a more important factor in the new garden house's location may have been the way it created a link, visible from a distance, between the upper and lower Ilm parklands. Before the Roman House was built, the grounds looked rather different here – and to hear more, just key in 75. Our tour then continues on the left side of the house.

After Goethe returned from Italy, the ‘garden house’ became a top priority despite the limited funds, and the search for a suitable plot of land began. After consulting with Goethe, the Duke decided to expand his landscaped park to the south, and in 1789 bought the fields here. A later description of the park had nothing but praise for the location of the house:

The position of the Roman House has been selected to make the wisest use of all the locality’s conditions, to unify, as in a focal point, all the delights of the park and its surroundings.

Yet before the Roman House could enjoy such eulogies of praise, the treeless fields had to be transformed into the spacious, southern landscape which Goethe envisioned after his Italian journey. The spreading Ilm meadows were created; clusters of trees and shrubs, and even small areas of woodland, were laid out. As was the fashion in those days, the plants included many exotic varieties. North American trees and shrubs and the popular ‘Italian pines’ were planted, especially in the vicinity of the house.

The pyramid-shaped Italian pines were an ideal substitute for cypresses, which were actually preferred, but were too sensitive to the cold. This

‘southern arcadia’ – which, now, 200 years on, we can no longer see in its perfect state – was largely landscaped when building work began. This broad path, the ‘Breite Weg’, was also there too. And its name echoed its function, since it provided a convenient coach route to the royal garden house from the palace to the north – to the left. The round marshland plant basin and the flower beds opposite the house, much admired when they were created, were added some years later. These may not have been in tune with the original ideal of the landscape, but they did reflect, all the more, a general burgeoning interest in beautiful and rare plants – an interest which Duke Carl August passionately shared.

252: North Side



From the front, the Roman House appears to be a single storey building. Here; on the north side, we see there is an additional basement floor to balance out the effect of the steep slope. The rough brickwork offers an attractive contrast to the bright, smooth rendered finish on the main storey, which contained the Duke's rooms.

Goethe did not only bring numerous sketches and ideas back from Italy, but also an architect – Johann August Arens, originally from Hamburg. Goethe and Arens turned Carl August's garden house into an outstanding example of classicist architecture which has lost none of its fascination today. The Duke gave them a free hand – though only as far as this did not impede the practical use of the house.

The exterior staircase led Carl August directly into his garden, and he could then reach the middle and lower paths by other sets of steps. The upper and lower paths had long been part of a circular route through the park. For nearly twenty years, the landscape of the park had been a project close to the Duke's heart.

He once described his love of nature as:

There is nothing which gives you more delight than seeing the sun set, and the stars come out, to see and feel the air becoming cool, and all of this only for its own sake, so little for the sake of people, and still they enjoy it and so intensely that they believe it was made for them.

His plans transformed the two French baroque gardens near the palace, with their precise geometric design, into a spreading English-style landscaped park, seemingly only touched by the hand of nature. This is the view facing you when you stand with your back to the house. If you explore this area later, you can discover an attractively varied mix of memorial stones and little architectural features decoratively set along the path to the palace.

The park was already home to the Bark House, a very simple garden house that required considerable improvisation – a precursor, as it were, of the far more prestigious Roman House. The construction of the Roman House and the expansion of the park to the south ushered in a new phase of garden design, informed by an overall landscaping concept – replacing individual garden scenes with a single unit comprising spreading sections of parks, choice vistas and a building genuinely designed to be lived in.

253: Eastern Passageway



As the author of a description of the park enthused in 1797:

The eye sweeps across here taking in a multitude of vistas and with a glance [...] captures the entirety of the joyous Ilm valley.

In fact, the east side does offer a wonderful view – and even more so from Carl August’s rooms on the main floor above us. You can just see Goethe’s Garden House to the left, on the other side of the River Ilm – and the house is also open for viewing. Originally, you could see the church tower in the Oberweimar district, but today it is hidden by the trees. In turn, of course,

the elegant Roman House was also easily visible from the valley. – The central path of the three routes leading to the ducal garden house runs directly through this open hall-like space in the basement floor. Have you noticed the matching pairs of columns in the central arch?

These are Doric columns - and they look far more massive than the slim Ionic columns we saw at the entrance portico. The Doric order of columns stood directly on the ground without a base, and ends in a smooth, unornamented capital. In this case, the Doric columns are only ornamental and, as you see, aren’t actually supporting the arch.

The frieze running along under the roof is called a triglyph frieze after the channelled stone tablets between the images. This style of frieze also belongs to the Doric style, but it is usually on the outside of the building. The individual Doric elements, the oldest style of classical Greek architecture, were apparently removed from their traditional context and re-combined – a feature which explains why the Roman House seems so very modern. When Goethe was in Italy and saw the unfamiliar and majestic Doric temples with his own eyes, he realised the design could not simply be copied, but had to be evolved! He turned

On 11 August 1798, Johann Heinrich Meyer wrote to Goethe.

I am very happy at the prospect of visiting you tomorrow, and I come with a light heart, since my work on the Roman House is at an end.

A year after Duke Carl August moved into his county residence, the frescoes in the eastern passage were also finished. Goethe had met Meyer in Rome, and brought him to Weimar soon afterwards. Meyer, an artist and excellent art connoisseur, became an advisor and close friend of Goethe's. Goethe entrusted him with the design of the walls and ceilings.

The images are taken from Greek and Roman mythology. In a figurative sense, they honour Duke Carl August as a generous friend and patron of the arts. Apollo, god of music and poetry, is depicted at the centre of the main wall, dancing with the nine muses. In classical mythology, the muses were the goddesses who inspired the different arts, from tragedy to choral song or the music of the flute.

On the left, Pomona, the goddess of fruitful abundance, is holding out an attractive bowl of fruit, and on the right, Hebe, the goddess of youth, is pouring out nectar. On the opposite wall, there are two legendary singers of antiquity. On the left, the figure of Arion; legend had it that he was saved from a watery grave by a dolphin attracted by his beautiful voice. On the right is Orpheus. Thanks to a voice able to charm all living beings – and even stones –, Orpheus was permitted to lead his wife Eurydice back from the underworld to the land of the living. Meyer added a range of attributes belonging to these gods and figures to the green fields on the triglyph frieze over the mural. At the centre of the ceiling mural, you can see the winged horse Pegasus, a symbol of poetry.

Meyer did not create these images himself. He was a talented copyist who borrowed from the works of other artists. Today, we can only see something closely resembling his original. Due to the work's exposure to the weather, it has often had to be repaired and even completely renewed – as it was last during comprehensive restoration work on the entire Roman House from 1999 to 2001.

254: South Terrace

We have now walked around the entire ducal garden house and are on its sunny southern side. The two courtyards provide a harmonious transition from the building to the surrounding park. If you are still at the base of the house, return now to the upper courtyard. As you make your way back up, have a look at the wall as you go past. Can you see three niches which look rather like bricked-up windows? They are supposed to create the impression that the walls and stairs are the remains of rooms and passageways of a much older building from antiquity, and the Roman House was built on its ruins. This idea is also evident in the open hall down below. With its Doric columns, the design of the hall resonates with an earlier age, suggesting a time prior to the main floor with its Ionic order of columns. Goethe noted in his diary on January 1796:

Walking. Idea for the side courtyards of the Roman House.

Goethe may well have been referring to just this idea of a ruin, which was then implemented only a few months later.

If you look at the wall of the building itself, you'll notice a kind of supersized window on the left. This was actually a disguised door for the servants to enter the house. In this way, they came straight into the lower floor, which housed the kitchen, service rooms and servants' quarters. Today, the rooms are used for a very interesting exhibition on the history of the Ilm Park. Later, you'll have the chance to view a large model which gives a fascinating overview of the entire landscaped grounds and the position of the Roman House. For now, though, you should return to the top and enter the house. Our tour continues inside. When you go inside, turn right from the entrance hall into a small room. That's where our tour of the ducal chambers begins.

255: Dressing Room

We start our tour of the house in the Duke's private rooms. This was once his dressing room. The ducal reception and living rooms were all on this floor.

Have you noticed the plans on the wall? They are the draft plans for the house by the Hamburg architect Johann August Arens, whose design followed Goethe's recommendations. The floor plan in the centre gives you an overview of the rooms.

The smaller private rooms are located on the south side of the building – at the top on the plan. The room we are now in is the third from the left. The two rooms next to it were later turned into one to make a bedroom. Along the north side, the generous study is followed by the stately reception room or salon, which culminates in a broad entrance hall. The service rooms and servants quarters were on the lower and upper floors. The house is not overly large, but it was carefully designed to provide the space for everything necessary – and you can see the contented owner on the left.

This is a reproduction of a painting with a life-size portrait of Duke Carl August of Saxe-Weimar and Eisenach designed for display. The original is in the rococo room at the Duchess Anna Amalia Library. The Roman House is visible in the background view of the park. Apparently, this was not only a popular retreat for the Carl August, but also a part of his ducal self-image.

Fortunately, while the Duke was still alive, a detailed inventory was made of the house interiors. So although his magnificent furniture and furnishings have not survived, we can still imagine just how it must have looked when he lived here. At that time, this dressing room also contained a massive, folding mahogany dresser with a space for washing. Two ‘pots de chambre’, both gilded were stored in the base of the dresser – luxurious chamber pots for two. The Duke put his personal items on two oak tables – for example, his pipe and, as the inventory from 1792 tells us, a ‘porcelain bowl as a receptacle for tobacco ashes’.

256: Bedroom

A room could hardly be better positioned – with two windows facing south, allowing the sunlight to flood the room. And wherever you look – beautiful countryside!

Just take a moment to enjoy the stunning view from the east window – and let your eyes slowly take in the Ilm valley with its tree-lined meadows and the winding course of the river. We are now directly above the open hall with the murals and the fountain basin you saw earlier on.

This room was perfectly suited as the ducal bedroom and private chamber. In those days, the furniture and silk curtains in the room were green and the walls completely covered by pictures in water-colours. The inventory of 1797 noted:

The lower section of the walls is adorned with attractive drawings (landscapes) in black and brown ink and wash by acknowledged masters; the upper section, though, is decorated with half-length figures painted in the same style.

Nowadays, the sketches on display here are the draft designs by Christian Friedrich Schuricht for the ceilings and walls of the next two rooms. Schuricht, who was born in Dresden and was the Saxony court architect, took over the interior designs when Johann August Arens, the architect of the house, was no longer available due to commitments in Hamburg.

Have you noticed the practical built-in cupboards on either side of the east window?

The window niche was also an ideal place for a comfortable, three-seater divan, which could be extended to make a bed. At first glance, it may seem a little involved, but with the necessary servants, it was no work at all. The advantage was that Carl August could not only use the room as his bedroom, but also as his private living room. And who did he spend his time with here? It was not Duchess Luise – his wife – who was free to come and go here as she pleased, but the celebrated actress Karoline Jagemann.

And to find out more about Carl August's relationship to Karoline, just key in 77.

When Duke Carl August of Saxe-Weimar and Eisenach married Princess Luise of Hesse-Darmstadt in 1775 it was not a love match. Instead, as was commonly the case in those days, such unions were a political alliance to strengthen the ruling dynasty. In quite matter-of-fact terms, the marriage, which was apparently not overly happy, fulfilled its function 17 years later when the second son was born and the succession to the throne adequately secured. Aside from his relationship to his wife, Carl August also had a number of mistresses over the years – which was just as commonly the case, and was tolerated by all of courtly society.

In 1802, though, the Duke started a firm relationship with Karoline Jagemann. Their relationship was to last a lifetime. Karoline was a talented actress, and for some years had been captivating audiences at the Weimar court theatre. Even as the Duke's 'concubine' and mother of their three children, she did not give up her acting career.

In the summer, Karoline lived with the children in a house on the other side of the River Ilm – conveniently close by.

On the Duke's 52nd birthday, Charlotte von Stein came past the Roman House in the evening, and saw him "sitting with Mademoiselle Jagemann under the columns". As she wrote to Charlotte von Schiller:

On the way in, I met servants bearing a festive evening meal, and that's how our sovereign lord enjoyed himself with his lady love, while at court one celebrated his birthday by the sweat of one's brow, since it was terribly hot in the rooms where one had to manage without the beautifully starry sky.

Duke Carl August could hardly have given a clearer expression to the importance which Karoline and his house in the park had for him.

257: Yellow Salon/Study

We have now reached the official reception rooms. This was the Yellow Salon, the Duke's study. In a letter to Johann Heinrich Meyer, his art loving friend, Goethe noted critically.

The house is very beautiful, I would say, for a detached building where the people themselves cannot always attain the greatest propriety and neatness, too beautiful to feel as much at ease as you do at home.

Goethe's criticism may not have been primarily directed to practical things. Instead, in his view, the interiors too should be based on strictly classical principles, resulting in far simpler designs. In the end, Goethe may have warmed to the 'stucco lustro' which we can still see today – the glossy plaster resembling marble. But to begin with, the walls were decorated with expensive, lemon yellow silks which, a few years later, were taken to the rebuilt palace, where they were needed more.

Duke Carl August probably regarded the silk wall hangings, which went back to the fashion of the rococo period, as more in keeping with his status. His study was not only there for him to sit at his mahogany desk and work on his official documents. This was also a room where he could receive his government officials for confidential discussions, or hold small meetings. And for that, the Duke required more than just the six chairs covered in yellow silk listed in the inventory – he also need an interior with the requisite royal ostentation.

For the Duke, such requirements were more important than the aesthetic stringency Goethe so favoured.

Of course, as the Duke's Privy Councillor, Goethe was often here too: Goethe's diary entry for 22 June 1804 reads:

Early at the Serenissimo's in the Roman House, library things in order.

No doubt, the Duke also liked the many decorative and colourful garlands of flowers around the room!

Would you like to know more about the wall decorations? Then just key in 78.

The interior designs were not solely created by Christian Friedrich Schuricht, the Saxony court architect, but were also partly the work of Goethe's friend Johann Heinrich Meyer. You may remember him from the open hall outside, since he designed the classically inspired murals. In his original design for this room, he planned to have classical subjects painted in the sections on the wall, framed by the entwined plants and leaves similar to those we can see here today. If you look closer at the borders of interlinked branches, you'll notice not only lots of different types of flowers, but also an occasional bird or butterfly set between them. There are different animals at the base of the each design.

These decorative borders were inspired by the works of Raphael, the famous Italian Renaissance painter. In the early 16th century, he had decorated the Vatican loggia – semi-open corridors inside the papal palace – with a richly ornamental design of plants and animals.

Comparisons have shown that in some cases, the Weimar painters have copied Raphael's design with amazing accuracy. Just a few years before, a book was published containing 46 coloured etchings of Raphael's paintings in the loggia – and they were obviously excellent models to follow! But the Weimar artists took the liberty of supplementing the designs with local animals and plants, such as the marten on the right by the door to the next room.

The semi-relief above the door can be traced to a model from the ancient world – the famous Borghese Dancers. The classical relief, which was also well-known from prints and etchings, once belonged to the art collection in the Villa Borghese in Rome, and is today in the Louvre in Paris.

This shows the central three figures of a total of five dancers.

258: Blue Salon

The Blue Salon, with its magnificently gilded stucco, was the official reception room. After sundown, eight candles were lit in an exquisite chandelier of Bohemian crystal under the richly decorated dome. The light from the candles softly gleamed on the light blue silk wallpaper. In April 1798, Goethe noted in his diary:

Evening in the Roman House with French and English company.

The Roman House was certainly not just a retreat. It was also a 'royal resident in miniature'. Here, Duke Carl August mixed seclusion and selected company. The windows and the door, which leads into the garden, all face north. It's certainly no coincidence that the two official reception rooms look out to the nearby palace. This room originally also had two copper stoves – so it seems as if Carl August initially planned to stay here in winter too, though that turned out to be unrealistic.

You can no doubt guess what Goethe thought of this room – everything much too pompous, and too little Roman influence!

Nonetheless, this reception room has clear neo-classical features – especially after the 'stucco lustre' mock-marble plaster work was added in 1805. The semi-reliefs at ceiling level transport us back into the classical world of the gods. Goethe's art loving friend, Johann Heinrich Meyer, had the idea of adding medallions with cherub-like figures called putti. The putti – or putto, in the singular – bear the attributes of the different gods. Meyer's design was realised by Friedrich Wilhelm Doell, court architect of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg. On the left above the large portrait, the putto with the winged helmet and magic staff symbolises Hermes, the messenger of the gods. To the right, you can see a flying putto carrying an oversized lyre – which belongs to Apollo, the god of the arts.

But who is the lady in the portrait given such a central place in this important room?

To find out, just key in 79.

The woman in the portrait is Duchess Anna Amalia, Carl August's mother. She is shown set against the background of the Coliseum in Rome – which is where this portrait was painted. Surrounded by books, a sketch and a sheet of music, Anna Amalia is presented as an art lover, and placed opposite a bust of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom and the arts.

After her husband's early death, Anna Amalia ruled as regent until 1775, when she passed over the reins of government to her 18-year-old son Carl August. From then on, she dedicated herself wholeheartedly to the many different artistic interests. Her 'court of the muses', where the leading figures in Weimar Classicism – Wieland, Goethe, Herder and Schiller – played a key role, became famous far beyond Weimar's borders. Inspired by Goethe's Italian journey, she set out for Italy herself in 1788, when she was nearly 50 years old, to "see and enjoy this country, so rich in natural beauty and art, with my own eyes".

From Rome, she wrote about this portrait as it was being painted:

My portrait, or rather the tableau, which Angelika is painting of me, is full of the most beautiful poetry which anyone could have written to me, and I find myself very flattered by it.

Angelika was the successful Swiss-Austrian painter Angelika Kauffmann, who had been living in Rome for some years. She and the Duchess very soon became good friends. Kauffmann has softened Anna Amalia's features in comparison to other portraits we know of her, and depicts her in a majestic yet relaxed pose. You might be able to decipher the name of the author of the book on her lap – it is by Johann Gottfried Herder. The book leaning against the bust is by Goethe. In this way, the painting – which is, in this case, a copy – links Weimar culture to ancient Rome. It has found an ideal location in the southern neo-classical setting of the Roman House.

259: Vestibule

This impressive entrance hall or vestibule stretches across the entire width of the Roman House. Since there were only a few rooms available here, the vestibule doubled as the dining room. We know from the inventory that it contained: “An extendable table [...] for 12 to 15 people”. In 1799, the Prussian royal couple also dined at this large oak table, as part of a small, exclusive gathering. The exquisitely designed candelabra in the four wall niches and on the dining table provided a suitably festive light. Although we may be surprised today at the dining room’s location, it was luxuriously furnished. The coffered ceiling decorated with stucco rosettes culminated in decorative mussel shell niches, lending the room a festive air.

There are five decorative semi-reliefs at the top of the walls – works by the Weimar court sculptor Martin Gottlieb Klauer. Four of them depict facing pairs of mythical phinxes, the fabulous hybrid creatures with a lion's body and a woman's head. The fifth semi-relief – above the mirror – is decorated with symbols for hunting and agriculture: a hunting dagger, used to kill deer and boar, and a spade. The space where the mirror is today was originally given over to a painting called the ‘Genius of Fame’, which depicted a naked, winged boy hovering in the air.

Johann Heinrich Meyer produced the work especially for the Roman House, basing it on a painting by Annibale Carracci. Meyer's work was destroyed in the terrible fire in the Anna Amalia Library in 2004, but today you can find a copy of the copy in the library’s Rococo Room.

In the vestibule, the Duke’s private and official chambers met. Even after Carl August’s death in 1828, a tribute was paid to the special significance of his rural retreat for him. Before his body was publically laid out in state in the court church, his coffin was brought here. Two chamberlains and two rooms of the bedchamber kept a night-time vigil, as prescribed in “the regulations on service to the body of the highest personage in the Roman House”.

Carl August’s successors hardly used the house, though his grandson, Great Duke Carl Alexander, opened the rooms for interested visitors. In 1919, the year the German monarchs were forced to abdicate, the Grand Ducal family was allowed to keep the furnishings, and the state of Thuringia took possession of the house itself – an architectural heritage site with beautiful neo-classical rooms.