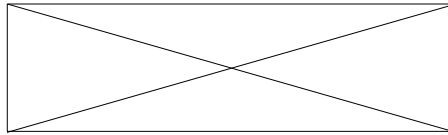


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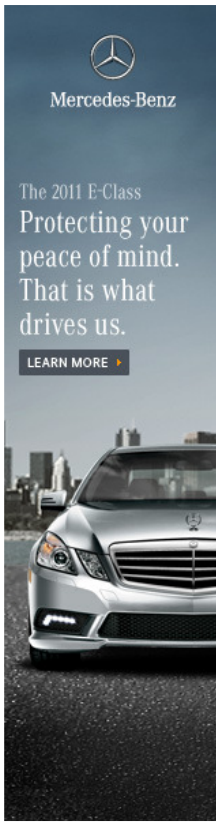


Sir John Soane originally opened his collection to the public for the benefit of his architecture students at the Royal Academy, in London, and bequeathed it to the state upon his death, in 1837.

SMALL IN SCALE BUT NOT IN IMPACT, EUROPE'S HOUSE MUSEUMS OFFER CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF AN ARTISTIC KIND

In the stately national and municipal museums of the world—the Louvres, the Mets, the Prados—it can be easy to believe that the paintings in ornate frames and objects in shiny vitrines, arranged by invisible hands, have always been there, with one generation's masterpieces nourishing the next. These museums are grand, yes, but they can be cold and sterile.

But a private collection, particularly one that remains installed where the owner conceived it, is different. There is a special pleasure to sitting in a room and channeling the people who orchestrated the display before you. You imagine their first encounter with the work, what convinced them to open their pocketbook, their relationship with the artist. You ask why they chose this work in particular, why they hung it here, what its association with its neighbor may be. Are the works related by subject matter? Style? Maybe they were only purchased on the same trip, or recalled a favorite destination?



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The Musée Jacquemart-André, located in a mansion on the boulevard Haussmann in Paris, contains a prized personal collection of Italian Renaissance art, including works by Botticelli and Bellini.

And while a few American collectors (including Peter Brandt in Connecticut, Gap founder Donald Fisher in San Francisco, and Eli Broad in Los Angeles) have built pristine, museum-like spaces to display their holdings in recent years, access to truly private collections—the works and objects an aficionado interacts with daily in his or her home—is hard to come by without a personal invitation.

Europe in particular has a strong tradition of guarding such spaces as museums, preserving the owner's vision as faithfully as possible, and providing a more intimate alternative to echoing public galleries. Visit one for entrée not only to a carefully pruned collection but also to a rarified slice of life.

Musée Jacquemart-André | Paris In their heyday, fashionable French couple Edouard André and Nélie Jacquemart threw lavish parties in their new mansion on the swank boulevard Haussmann, completed in 1875, with opulent reception rooms generously apportioned to accommodate a thousand guests.

Only their closest friends, however, were invited to tour the Italian Museum they had installed on the second floor. The couple filled it with beloved works from the Italian Renaissance—a period to which Jacquemart, a prominent portraitist, introduced her art-loving husband, a banking heir, after their nuptials—kicking off a tradition of annual art-buying trips to Italy. Nélie favored the Florentine painters, and one room of the house displays works by Botticelli, Perugino, and Ghiberti; Edouard preferred the Venetians, especially Mantegna and Bellini. (That their Italian collection was large enough to spread across several rooms and a sculpture rotunda should give an idea of its breadth and depth.)

Today anyone can view not only their prized Italian treasures but also the rest of the extensive collection, which dips into Dutch masters including Frans Hals and Jacob van Ruysdael, as well as many of the same names (Chardin, David, Fragonard, Vigée-Lebrun) etched on the wall plaques of the more famous Paris museums.

Although many visitors to the city fail to make their way to this jewel of a collection, located just off the Champs-Élysées, those who seek out the residence, which was turned over to the French government per André's wishes after his death, will be rewarded with a glimpse into not only the couple's taste in art but also their way of life in nineteenth-century Paris: the grand ballrooms, the Louis XV-style bedrooms, and their most prized and private possessions, including Jacquemart's portrait of André, executed nearly a decade before they married. As a result, the museum feels "warm and cozy, like an authentic old hotel," says spokesperson Adeline Budelot.

Aside from the Italian Museum, don't miss the luminous painting of the Piazza San Marco by Canaletto and the brooding contributions by Northern Renaissance masters Van Dyck and Rembrandt in the picture gallery. Save time for a leisurely repast in the mansion's magnificent dining room, crowned by a trompe l'oeil Tiepolo fresco and considered by some the most beautiful tearoom in Paris.

Musée Jacquemart-André
158 Boulevard Haussmann
75008 Paris
www.musee-jacquemart-andre.com/en/jacquemart/

Sir John Soane's Museum | London Worlds away from both the sprawling grandeur of fin de siècle Paris and the white cube-style exhibition spaces of today, Sir John Soane's Museum is more like a Dickensian curiosity shop. A gentleman architect in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century London, Soane designed his Bloomsbury house as both a home and a custom showcase for his collections, which he never stopped growing and rearranging, eventually demolishing and rebuilding three adjoining Regency town houses to contain them.

Soane's idiosyncratic tastes remain on full display today. The museum's heralded standouts are three Canaletto paintings, particularly View of the Riva degli Schiavoni, Venice (1736), a light-suffused portrayal of the titular river in late afternoon that has been described as one of the finest in existence; and from the wickedly humorous eighteenth-century British artist William Hogarth, two of his three surviving comic strip-style "modern moral subjects" series. Also impressive is the alabaster sarcophagus of the Egyptian pharaoh Seti I, from 1370 BC, and a second-century Roman statue of the celebrated Diana of Ephesus.

But Soane's treasures quite literally pack Britain's smallest national museum to the rafters. Greek and Roman statuary, urns, funerary vases, and architectural elements line a cheerful dome area from floor to ceiling. There are thousands of architectural drawings and prints, and dozens of models; Egyptian scarabs, a wood mummy case (one of the first unwrapped in England), and mummified cats; the largest collection of Chinese tiles anywhere; a terra-cotta figure of the Dutch master Van Dyck and a medallion portrait of the baroque composer Handel; and a collection of stained glass from the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries, much of it salvaged from monasteries destroyed during the French Revolution.

Soane used his collections as a laboratory for developing his architectural themes, and he first made public his trove of art and architectural objects for the benefit of his students at the Royal Academy. Upon his death, the home was transferred to the nation, which pledged to preserve it "as nearly as circumstances will admit."

Sir John Soane's Museum
13 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London, WC2A 3BP
www.soane.org

Museo Sorolla | Madrid

Even rarer than the opportunity to view a private collection is the chance to have a peek at an artist's personal tastes. Joaquín Sorolla may not be widely known in the United States, but a retrospective of his work at the Prado in 2009 quickly reached blockbuster status, tallying the museum's highest visitor numbers in a decade, besting those earned by big-shot predecessors Velázquez, El Greco, and Goya.

Working around the turn of the twentieth century, Sorolla earned accolades for paintings of people and landscapes that brought saturated color to the soft focus employed by other European Impressionists. According to David Ruiz, an art historian and the director of Madrid Original, a company that leads customized tours of the city's main museums, Sorolla believed that "the innate creativity of the Spanish people, honest hard work, and love for family would suffice to conquer a better future." It's an optimistic, humble outlook that is apparent in both his art and his former home and studio, now a museum owned by the state.



Sir John Soane's Museum is packed full of Soane's idiosyncratic collections, which feature items ranging from stained glass to Egyptian scarabs. Although both the Prado and the Reina Sofía hold works by the artist, the nearby Museo Sorolla has the lion's share of his output, displaying some three hundred paintings and thousands of drawings in two connected buildings, his house and his workshop, the latter replete with a showroom, office, and studio. The workshop is still stocked with brushes and palettes, and the atmosphere "evokes the orderly nature of a highly self-disciplined worker," according to Ruiz.

The works on view, mostly donated by the artist's widow after his death, in 1923, bridge the quiet, gauzy images of Impressionism and the more dynamic colors and lines of Expressionism, and range from seascapes to intimate family scenes to the dappled, candid portraits for which Sorolla became known as the "painter of light." Interspersed among them are the objects from which he took inspiration, including folk art, archaeological finds, classical Spanish art, and lamps from his friend Louis Comfort Tiffany.

Ruiz points out that while the Prado may tell the "official" story of Sorolla's career through his famous paintings of Spanish public figures, "the Sorolla Museum is representative of the most personal landscapes and family portraits, where his art expanded freely. Beyond that," he adds, "displaying Sorolla's paintings in his house, amid his furniture and pottery collection, integrates them into his life, which is the substance his art is made of."

Museo Sorolla
General Martínez Campos, 37
28010 Madrid
museosorolla.mcu.es



The Museo Sorolla displays the private collection of renowned Spanish Impressionist painter Joaquín Sorolla.

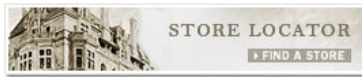
Kris Wilton has written about art for *Modern Painters*, *Art+Auction*, *ARTnews*, and *Artinfo.com*, for which she was executive editor, and about other cultural topics for *Slate.com*, *The Village Voice*, and *Entertainment Weekly*. She is based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

1. Photograph by Martin Charles/Courtesy of Sir John Soane's Museum, London
2. Courtesy of Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris
3. Photograph by C. Recoura/Courtesy of Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris
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