DOCTOR GACHET’S HOUSE AND ITS HISTORY

78, rue Gachet
95430 AUVERS-SUR-OISE
01 30 36 81 27 • www.valdoise.fr
The house and garden of Doctor Gachet

© Conseil départemental du Val d'Oise. Photo Michel Jourdheuil.
CONTENTS

5  THE GARDEN
7  GACHET THE DOCTOR
9  GACHET THE ARTIST
11 THE COLLECTION
13 TRACES OF THE PAST
15 VINCENT VAN GOGH
17 THE OTHER ARTISTS
23 ENGRAVING
25 THE ECLECTIQUES
27 PAUL GACHET FILS
29 THE WOMEN OF THE HOUSE
31 THE VANDENBROUCKES
Facing due south and backed against the limestone cliff, the garden – tousled and full of flowers - prolongs terraces, crannies, and openings onto the former quarries or troglodytic annexes which give it its originality. In Doctor Gachet’s time the garden had many domestic and farmyard animals; there were eight cats, geese, ducks, rabbits, and a goat, Henriette - whom Gachet’s son, wrapped up in large black heavy woollen cloak, took for walks through the alleyways of Auvers.

The garden played an important part in the phytotherapy and homeopathy practised by Doctor Gachet. It contains a wide variety of medicinal plants.

The foxglove is very toxic. In medicine its leaves are used as a cardiotonic to treat various disorders and heart failure. Vincent van Gogh painted Doctor Gachet in an attitude of melancholy reflecting the “the heartbroken expression of our time” and with a foxglove flower which – owing to its powers to cure, comfort, and pacify – recalls his medicinal calling.

Just behind the house the small courtyard is shaded by two limes (of which the flowers and leaves are used to make soothing tisanes). Doctor Gachet received his painter friends there for dinners around a vermilion table, which Paul Gachet devotedly preserved.

The thuya at the corner of the house’s south façade was originally on Van Gogh’s tomb in the cemetery of Auvers-sur-Oise. When, in 1905, Vincent was exhumed to be placed in a permanent grave, Doctor Gachet meticulously untangled its roots and replanted the tree in the garden. Like thuya, ivy, with its evergreen leaves, is well known as a symbol of eternity and immortality. Paul Louis Gachet took some plants from his garden to ornament the tomb of the two brothers after Johanna, the widow of Théo Van Gogh, decided to lay him to rest next to Vincent in 1914.

The garden inspired Vincent van Gogh to paint two canvasses. In the first the blue-tinted foliage of the yucca and the Canada thuyas evoke the aloes and cypresses and atmosphere of Provence. In the second Vincent showed Marguerite, the doctor’s daughter, bathed in a gentle light and surrounded by white flowers.
Paul Louis GACHET (called Louis VAN RYSSEL)
Portrait du Docteur Gachet en médecin
Watercolour, 1903

Paris, Louvre Museum, Département des Arts graphiques
© RMN – Grand-Palais, musée d’Orsay, Jean-Gilles Berizzi.
In 1848, at the age of 20, Paul Ferdinand Gachet left Lille to enrol in the faculty of medicine at Paris.

In 1854 at Bicêtre he encountered mad patients for the first time and was assigned in the Salpêtrière hospital to the service of Professor Falret who had a “modern” approach to mental illness. At this time he made a series of drawings of patients to show their characteristic attitudes (today in the collection of the Hôpital Sainte-Anne). From August to October he volunteered to combat a cholera epidemic in the Jura.

In 1857 he enrolled at Montpellier to prepare his thesis: Study on Melancholy, which he defended on 21 June 1858, and through which he qualified as a doctor.

En 1859 he opened his first surgery at Paris, 9, Rue de Montholon, in the 10th arrondissement.

He moved in 1863 to 78, Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis, a surgery he kept until his death in 1909. He also gave free consultations in the Saint Martin dispensary at 31, Rue du Vert-Bois. Alongside allopathy he practised homeopathy (a box with his name containing flasks of granules is preserved in the Paris Musée de la Médecine), phytotherapy, and electrotherapy for nervous and mental disorders. His interest in these conditions led him to study – among others – the cases of sick artists such as Charles Meryon (1821-1868), an engraver, André Gill (1840-1885), a celebrated illustrator, and later - Van Gogh.

During the war of 1870 he was a doctor with the ambulance of the Grand-Orient de France, and during the Commune he created an antiseptic vulnerary “for wounds from firearms and blades” to be prepared in a pharmacy.

From 1872 the garden of the house at Auvers allowed Doctor Gachet to grow medicinal plants for phytotherapy preparations or homeopathic dilutions, which he used in particular to treat the members of the painter Pissarro’s family or his animals.

Eclectic both in art and medicine Doctor Gachet was always curious about new medical practices. He often treated his artist friends in exchange for drawings, canvasses, or theatre tickets. On Pissarro’s advice Vincent van Gogh came to Auvers for the doctor’s reassuring presence, not to be treated by him; Doctor Gachet simply recommended him to immerse himself in his work as a painter – a kind of precocious art-therapy – so as to forget the health worries he had in Provence.
Paul Ferdinand GACHET (called Paul VAN RYSSEL)

L’Hirondelle

Frontispiece of an album of twelve etchings, 1886

© Collection Maison du docteur Gachet – Conseil départemental du Val d’Oise / D.R.
Born in 1828 at Lille, Paul Ferdinand Gachet was interested in art from his earliest days, and attended drawing classes and visited the city’s museum.

In 1852, when a student in Paris, his friend from Lille, Amand Gautier, joined him and enrolled at the Beaux-Arts. Thanks to him Paul Ferdinand started going to artists’ cafés and continued practising art. Alphonse Leroy initiated him in engraving.

Once qualified as a doctor, from 1865 to 1876 he gave free artistic anatomy classes at the 10th arrondissement municipal drawing school at 19, Rue des Petits-Hôtels (1865-1876), under Justin Lequien’s direction.

In 1872 the first visitors to the house at Auvers were Armand Guillaumin (1841-1927), Pissarro (1830-1903), and Cézanne (1839-1906). They painted there, but Doctor Gachet also encouraged them to make etchings. They engraved copper plates together, using distinctive signs to distinguish themselves: a flower for Pissarro, a cat for Guillaumin, a hanged-man for Cézanne, and a duck for Gachet. The Delâtre workshop at Montmartre was commissioned to do the printing. Subsequently, Doctor Gachet acquired a press. The doctor also adopted a pseudonym to sign his works - Paul van Ryssel (“from Lille” in Flemish), often abbreviated to PVR.

In Paris Doctor Gachet maintained many artistic friendships: with Richard Lesclide (1825-1892), founder of the journals Le Vélocipède illustré and Paris à l’eau-forte in which Paul van Ryssel published engravings; Henri Guérard (1846-1897), an engraver who married Eva Gonzalès, a student and model of Manet; Murer (1841-1906), patisserie-chef, collector, and amateur painter; Norbert Goeneutte (1854-1894), engraver and painter. He also went to dinners with Renoir, Monet, Sisley, Cabaner…

He was also a member of the Éclectiques, an association that gave him the occasion to etch many invitations to the monthly dinners at which the members met together.

He participated in exhibitions and salons, especially in the “Indépendants” from 1891.
Vincent VAN GOGH

L’Église d’Auvers
Oil on canvas, early June 1890

Paris, musée d’Orsay (donation Paul Gachet)
© RMN – Grand-Palais, musée d’Orsay, Hervé Lewandowski.
As an amateur and practitioner of art from childhood and through spending much of his time with many artists Doctor Gachet also quite naturally became a collector. His meeting in 1858 with Alfred Bruyas (1821-1877) from Montpellier, Courbet’s patron and a collector, has a certain influence on his desire to possess works by painters of his own time.

In addition to his purchases, his unpaid consultations and treatments enabled him to obtain works from his artist friends. He helped his friend Amand Gautier, a realist painter, for a while; this “patronage” was recompensed by works.

In 1874, for the first exhibition that was to be termed “Impressionist”, held in the photographer Nadar’s studio, Doctor Gachet lent Cézanne’s *Une moderne Olympia* and Guillaumin’s *Soleil couchant à Ivry*.

What with purchases and gifts Doctor Gachet’s rather heteroclite collection became quite substantial over the years until it included several thousand prints from the 15th to the 20th century, old paintings, mainly Flemish, about a hundred works by Amand Gautier, about thirty oils by Paul Guigou, a few Daumiers, canvasses and drawings by less well-known painters of the period, and above all the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works for which it was celebrated: 44 paintings and drawings by Van Gogh, 42 by Cézanne, 13 by Pissarro, a few Monets, Renoirs, Sisleys etc.

Posters, books, faïences, items made from copper, tin, plaster, and bronze, journals whether illustrated or not, fabrics, antique furniture, and various objets d’art also invaded the house.

Until his death in 1909 Doctor Gachet kept his collection practically intact.

His children over the years, on the other hand, sold works, such as *Mademoiselle Gachet au piano* by Van Gogh and finally, between 1949 and 1954, donated to the State nine Van Goghs, eight Cézannes, six Guillaumins, one Monet, one Sisley, one Renoir, in addition to works by the doctor, drawings, prints, and personal items. These donations are now part of the collections of the Musée d’Orsay. Other works were also given to the Museum of Lille, the Amsterdam Van Gogh Foundation, and items having belonged to the family are scattered in various institutions.

Before disposing of these works Paul Gachet fils made an inventory of his father’s collection in a six-volume manuscript, bought in 1962 by Georges Wildenstein for the Paris Wildenstein Institut.
Léopold ROBIN
Le « salon » d’Auvers au temps du docteur Gachet
Watercolour, 1903. Present dimension and location unknown, repr. in the work of Paul Gachet, Deux amis des impressionnistes : Doctor Gachet et Murer.
As soon as you arrive on the site of Doctor Gachet’s House you are enchanted by the charm of the past. The garden’s layout, its many terraces, its corners, the perfumes of the medicinal plants, and then the interior of the house with its small perfectly preserved rooms, take us back to the 19th century.

In the garden, on the pillar of the second opening in the cliff, you can see characters in old Chinese, doubtless painted between the wars by one of the Asian visitors of Doctor Gachet’s children wanting to see their father’s collection. They can be translated by: “The essential thing is to keep on performing”. Other ideograms decorate a red door on the first floor of the house and signify: “A beautiful work requires much solitary toil”.

Of the furniture and unusual objects Doctor Gachet managed to acquire a few traces still remain today. In the living-room, where the light filters through old stained glass, we find an impressive chest and a cathedra, a high-backed chair from the abbey of Mériel, on which was hung the magnificent blue/green self-portrait of Vincent van Gogh. The fireplace still has its firedogs and its period toile de Jouy. And the piano, like the one that belonged to Mrs Gachet and then to her daughter Marguerite, recalls the portrait of the young girl at the piano painted by Vincent van Gogh.

On the first floor landing, if you look up you can appreciate the old stamp wallpaper. While the paper in the large bedroom, a little further on, was created from strips of paper found on the walls.

In the beige bedroom we find one of the two presses for printing intaglio engravings that belonged to Doctor Gachet. It is a very old machine, probably made well before 1800, mainly made of wood, whereas in the 19th century presses were cast iron. Both presses were installed in the attic, in the studio, and were used by almost all the artists who visited the house.

A few everyday objects can also be found in the house (gardener’s clogs, a board for the washing, an old smoothing iron, kitchen instruments on the cast iron cooker...), and artist’s equipment (easels, brushes, jars full of pigments...) presented in the showcases.
Vincent VAN GOGH
*Portrait de l’artiste*
Oil on canvas, 1889

Paris, musée d’Orsay (donation Paul Gachet)
© RMN – Grand-Palais, musée d’Orsay, Gérard Blot.
In 1889, feeling better after a year in the asylum of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole, near Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Vincent van Gogh wanted to forget his health problems and mental troubles by going back north to the Paris region. He wrote to his brother Théo, who owned a gallery in Paris, to find him somewhere he could live calmly. Following the advice of Pissarro, whose paintings he sold, Théo oriented Vincent towards Auvers-sur-Oise where Doctor Gachet, friend of painters, an amateur painter himself, and a doctor interested in nervous disorders, could be a counsellor and someone to talk to.

Vincent arrived in Auvers on 20 May 1890 after 3 days in Paris where he met his sister-in-law Johanna and his 5 month old nephew, also named Vincent. He was enchanted with the village's appearance and Doctor Gachet's welcome and settled into the Ravoux inn in a small room under the eaves at 3.50 Frs. a day. He followed the doctor's advice and devoted himself entirely to painting from sunrise to sunset to forget his difficulties in Provence. In 70 days he painted over 70 canvasses.

On Sunday Vincent was regularly invited for lunch with the Gachet family and used the occasion to paint: two canvasses of the garden, the portrait of the doctor, one of his daughter at the piano, and a bouquet of anemones made the site and the Gachet family enter the history of art. Never having made etchings before on 25 May he was initiated by Doctor Gachet with whom he engraved a plate and printed a few copies with sepia ink. L'Homme à la pipe, Van Gogh’s only etching, is actually a portrait of Doctor Gachet. A canvass followed on 4 June showing the doctor in a melancholy pose leaning on the “vermilion table” (still to be seen on the site) next to two books by the Goncourt brothers and a foxglove stem in a glass. He later made a second version of this portrait to give to the doctor.

On Sunday 8 June Théo and his family came to dine with Vincent at Doctor Gachet’s. These moments of happiness for Van Gogh were replaced a few weeks later by the return of negative feelings: guilt towards his brother who had supported him for 10 years, absence of artistic recognition, depressing ideas – pushing him to want to die. On 27 July he shot himself in the chest with a revolver. Seriously injured he returned to his inn where Doctor Gachet and Doctor Mazery cleaned his wound but could not take out the bullet. Called to his bedside Théo spent many hours with his brother before he died at 1.30 in the morning on 29 July.

Vincent was buried in the cemetery of Auvers on 30 July in the presence of artists who came from Paris, such as Émile Bernard, Charles Laval, Lucien Pissarro, the paint supplier Tanguy… and Doctor Gachet, who, very moved, said a few words: “… Art, which he cherished above everything else, will make him continue to live.”
Camille PISSARRO
La Route de Louveciennes
Oil on canvas, 1872, 59.8 x 73.5 cm
Paris, Musée d’Orsay (gift Paul Gachet)
Camille PISSARRO (1830-1903)

Born in the Danish West Indies in 1830, Camille Pissarro settled in France in 1855. He enrolled with the Académie Suisse attended by Monet, Courbet, Piette, Cézanne…

He painted numerous landscapes around Paris and first stayed at Pontoise from 1866 to 1869. He stayed there a second time from 1872 to 1884. This was when Pissarro regularly saw Doctor Gachet, Cézanne, and Guillaumin.

Cézanne and Pissarro often painted together. Pissarro, considered as the father and master of the Impressionists, advised his friend to be more sensitive to nature, to lighten his palette, and to use a lighter brushstroke (to avoid impastos).

Pissarro was fully committed to the new so-called “Impressionist” movement. Indeed, he took part in the eight exhibitions of the group from 1874 to 1886 and pushed Cézanne to participate.
Paul CÉZANNE
La Maison du docteur Gachet à Auvers
Oil on canvas, circa 1873, 46 x 38 cm

Paris, Musée d’Orsay (gift Paul Gachet)
© RMN-Grand Palais, musée d’Orsay, Hervé Lewandowski.
Paul CÉZANNE (1839-1906)

Born in Aix-en-Provence Cézanne was for a time a member of the Impressionist movement and is considered to be the precursor of Post-Impressionism.

To have an idea of the extent to which his work was new and original it has to be remembered that he did not only discover geometric simplification but also invented a pictorial light, i.e. a subjective, arbitrary light, different from natural light. In 1885 he declared: “Light is something that cannot be reproduced but must be represented by colour”.

He took up residence at Auvers-sur-Oise in 1873. Still not appreciated or recognised he painted landscapes, still lifes, and portraits with a requirement for objectivity and pictorial truth. Throughout his life this insistence and demand for exactitude brought him back to the same subjects, such as - among the best known - the Mont Sainte-Victoire, the bathers, or compositions with apples.

"Light is something that cannot be reproduced but must be represented by colour."

"
Armand GUILLAUMIN

*Soleil couchant à Ivry*

Oil on canvas, 1873, 65 x 81 cm

Paris, Musée d’Orsay (gift Paul Gachet)
© RMN-Grand Palais, musée d’Orsay, René-Gabriel Ojéda.
Armand GUILLAUMIN (1841-1927)

A painter and engraver he was one of the first and most faithful participants in the Impressionist group. One of his remarkable pictures is Soleil couchant à Ivry, a work with violent and contrasted colouring, presented at the first Impressionist exhibition (1874), and which was part of Doctor Gachet’s collection. Another, Femme nue couchée, attracted de Vincent van Gogh’s attention when visiting Doctor Gachet (1890):
“Gachet” he wrote to his brother Théo, “has a Guillaumin, Naked Woman on a Bed, which I find very beautiful.”

“Gachet has a Guillaumin, Naked Woman on a Bed, which I find very beautiful.”
Vincent VAN GOGH
L’Homme à la pipe (Portrait of Doctor Paul Gachet)
Etching, 1890, 18 x 14.7 cm
© Collection Maison du docteur Gachet – Conseil départemental du Val d’Oise / D.R.
The term “engraving” derives from the Greek graphein which means to write or to draw. In its wider meaning it entails creating a matrix in order to obtain the print, i.e. to produce a certain number of copies of the work.

The term engraving covers all the techniques that use incision or carving to produce an image or text. The principle consists in incising or carving a matrix with a tool or mordant (acid) to obtain either a design in relief (linocut, woodcut) or an intaglio. After inking it is printed onto paper or some other material. The final work obtained in this way is called a print. The origin of printing takes us back into the distant past. The first print/signature known is that of a human hand on the walls of caves in the Palaeolithic.

Various engraving techniques exist.
Examples:

**LINOCUT** / Material used: linoleum, PVC plaques
Examples: … easy to produce even in schools… Picasso, Alechinsky

**WOODCUT** / Material used: wood, plywood
Examples: Japanese prints, Paul Gauguin

**BURIN** / Material used: metal, copper
Examples: Albrecht Dürer, Hieronymus Bosch

**DRYPOINT** / Material used: metal, plastics….
Examples: Rembrandt van Rijn

**ETCHING** / Material used: metal, copper, steel
Examples: Daubigny, Picasso, Gachet, Pissarro

Of all these techniques etching is considered to be the one painters prefer as it allows great freedom of creation. This may be why Doctor Gachet made this technique his own – improving his skills over the years and also encouraging his friends to “bite the copper”.

Indeed, Pissarro, Guillaumine, Cézanne, and Gachet himself shared the workshop in the attic to make their plates. Van Gogh, too, was taught the intaglio technique and how to print from the press Doctor Gachet owned at the time. *L’Homme à la pipe*, printed in sepia ink, is thus the only etching by Van Gogh, of which an example, the property of the Department, is on show in the house.
ANONYMOUS
A “Dinner of the Eclectiques ”
Photograph, n.d. From left to right: Rodolphe Piguet, Casimir Barcinski, Ernest Causin, Louis Letourneau, Alexis Martin, Dr Gachet.
© Société du Vieux Montmartre.
An article by Paul Alexis in *Le Cri du peuple* in August 1887 tells of Paul Ferdinand Gachet’s wide-reaching eclecticism: “Ceaselessly up hill and down dale, with an extraordinary activity he does everything all at once: his consultations in his surgery and his painting, homeopathy and allopathy, literature and fishing, without forgetting the education of his children…”

Doctor Gachet was a member of many societies or associations. For him the most important was the Société des Éclectiques, founded in 1872. Its aim was to bring a few friends, artists or poets, lovers of good food together around a table to talk about the latest picture, book, or successful show. Its members met one Monday a month in a Paris restaurant and each session was convened with an invitation card and summarised by minutes taken by two selected members. Elected as a member of the society in November 1873 Doctor Gachet became its president in 1888. The poet Alexis Martin succeeded him but Martin’s death in 1904 put an end to the group.

In over thirty years 300 invitations were engraved by the Éclectiques. Their styles varied greatly: Impressionism, Japanism, historicism; sensitive portraits or landscapes. There were also a number of caricatures representing the members of the Society or the concerns of the time. More than 25 engravings signed by Doctor Gachet, under the pseudonym Paul Van Ryssel, were used as invitations to the dinners and he also played the role of printer since he printed a large number of invitations, designed by other members, on his press (still present on the first floor of the house).

From 1886 the doctor also participated in the “dîners du Rouge et du Bleu (Blue and Red dinners)” which brought together art critics and painters exhibiting in the *Salon des indépendants* founded in 1884. Amongst these guests there was the young Post-Impressionist generation: Seurat, Signac, Lucien Pissarro, Odilon Redon… Doctor Gachet himself exhibited in the *Salon des indépendants* from 1891 in his own name, and then under his pseudonym.
ANONYMOUS

Paul Gachet fils in his garden at Auvers
Photograph, album Bignou, circa 1935-1940

© Musée d’Orsay, Dist. RMN – Grand-Palais / Patrice Schmidt, D.R.
Paul Louis Gachet (1873-1962) studied to be an agronomist at the school of Grignon but he never practised this profession. He declared himself to be an artist under the pseudonym of Louis van Ryssel – echoing the artist’s name of his father, Paul Van Ryssel – and exhibited in the Salon des indépendants between 1903 and 1907. He was inspired by the examples of Van Gogh and Cézanne. He accomplished his artistic education through his contact with the works of these painters.

After his father’s death in 1909 he devoted a part of his life to the major project Doctor Gachet evoked in a letter to Théo: “[…] to make not a catalogue but a complete biography [of Vincent Van Gogh] – for an extraordinary man there cannot be something ordinary”¹. This work never saw the day but his research resulted in a posthumous publication - Les 70 jours de Van Gogh à Auvers (Van Gogh’s 70 days at Auvers).

For nearly 50 years, in a house stuck fast by memories and with his sister and wife as his silent witnesses, Paul Gachet tirelessly classified his father’s papers and made an inventory of his countless collections. He edited a few publications including Deux amis des impressionnistes, Doctor Gachet et Murer (Two friends of the Impressionists, Doctor Gachet and Murer), which came out in 1956.

The importance of Doctor Gachet’s collection of paintings, intact at his death, was known in art circles despite its inaccessibility. The catalogue in six volumes, drawn up by Paul Gachet and kept at Paris in the Wildenstein Institute, gives the measure of this collection made up not only of paintings but also of cardboard boxes overflowing with drawings and prints. The works were never photographed or lent except for the major exhibitions devoted to Cézanne in 1936 and Van Gogh in 1937. Mystery surrounded the house.

In 1949, 1951, and 1954, with his sister Marguerite, and then by himself, Paul Gachet donated major works to the State of which some were totally original. In this way nine Van Goghs, eight Cézannes, six Guillaumins, one Monet, three Pissarros, one Sisley, and one Renoir, as well as drawings and prints, entered the Louvre. For these donations he received the Légion d’honneur - which his father had never had. At his death in 1962, following his wishes, the last items and the house were auctioned.

¹ Letter to Théo, 15 August, 1890.
Vincent VAN GOGH

Mademoiselle Gachet au piano
Oil on canvas, June 1890, 102,5 x 50 cm

Basle (Switzerland), Kunstmuseum © DR
The most important forgotten figures in the history of Doctor Gachet’s House are certainly the women who lived in it: Blanche, the wife of Doctor Gachet, who died very young, Mrs Chevalier, the governess of the children, Marguerite, the doctor’s daughter, or indeed Emilienne, Paul Gachet’s wife, met at Murer’s.

**Blanche CASTETS (1843-1875)**

In 1868 Paul Ferdinand Gachet married Blanche Castets. Nothing is known of her, except that her family came from Mézin in the Lot, and that her father was a cork merchant and rich enough to provide a comfortable dowry. Their daughter, Marguerite Clémentine Elisa, was born in Paris on 21 June 1869. Paul Louis Lucien was born at Auvers-sur-Oise on 21 June 1873.

Her fragile health was the main reason for purchasing the house at Auvers. Ill with tuberculosis she died in Paris in 1875. Few memories are left of Mrs Gachet: a few notes on a partition bearing witness to her talent as a musician - appreciated by the composer Cabaner - dresses kept in the reserves of the Musée Galliera at Paris, and the memory of the bouquets arranged for the painters and immortalised by Cézanne.

**Anne Louise CHEVALIER (1847-1904)**

After Blanche’s death the children were brought up at Auvers by a governess, Mrs Chevalier. She stayed nearly 30 years in the Gachet family’s service looking after the children and the house. The artist-doctor also used her as his model on several occasions. At her death, in 1904, she was buried in the cemetery of Auvers-sur-Oise. The medallion on her tomb was made by Paul Gachet.

**Marguerite GACHET (1869-1949)**

Marguerite, Doctor Gachet’s daughter, figures in two canvasses painted by Vincent van Gogh in 1890. One shows her in the garden, the other at the piano. The latter was hung in the young girl’s room – the first room on the left from the vestibule on the 1st floor – between two “high” Japanese prints.

Some, with no real evidence, suspect a love story between her and the painter. But her silence and discretion concerning all the artistic and historical details for which her brother would be the sole witness, leave her life shrouded in mystery - a young woman playing the piano, as though not part of this world.
ANONYMOUS

Ursula Frances MARKS VANDENBROUCKE

Photograph, about 1955

© Musée d'Orsay, Dist. RMN – Grand-Palais / Patrice Schmidt, D.R.
After the death of Paul Gachet fils in 1962 the house and its furniture were sold at an auction. Returning from the United States Colonel Gilles Vandenbroucke and his wife Ursula Marks were looking for a house in which to pass their retirement. They purchased it and set up home there with their two sons, Lucien and Gilbert.

Mrs Vandenbrouke, a literary critic and art historian, participated under Georges Wildenstein’s direction in a collection of texts, studies, and documents on Gauguin and his life and works published by *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1958. So the couple discovered the house with a particular sensitivity to its heritage.

When they arrived the house was stuck in the past - less than rudimentary electrical installations, no running water or central heating. However, the Vandenbrouckes only carried out the indispensable works of modernisation so as to preserve the site’s essence.

They opened it to the visitors coming in pilgrimage - a trend that increased in the 1980s. Anxious to guarantee the conservation of this building with its indefinable charm in 1991 they succeeded in having its façades, roofs, and garden listed in the supplementary inventory of Historic Monuments, and looked after it with love until their deaths in 1992.

In 1996 the Department Council of the Val-d’Oise bought the house from the couple’s heirs. When he delivered the house’s keys to the President of the Department Council, Lucien Vandenbroucke handed him a portfolio containing a series of sketches by Doctor Gachet. He had found it as a boy in a “cabinet of secrets” which is no other than the chest still present today in the living-room.

In 2013 Lucien, then a diplomat in the Sudan, expressed the wish that the graphic works of Doctor Gachet – original drawings and engravings – which his parents had possessed should be hung again on the walls of the house where they had been created. After eight months of negotiations he signed a donation in favour of the Department Council of the Val-d’Oise.