



Second in size only to Notre Dame, the Église Saint Sulpice in the city's sixth arrondissement was built between 1646 and 1760 by a succession of architects—Christophe Gamard, Louis Le Vau, Daniel Gittard, and Gilles-Marie Oppenord—and later modified by Giovanni-Nicolo Servandoni. The notable landmark served as the backdrop for the baptisms of such luminaries as Charles Baudelaire and the Marquis de Sade, as well as the 1822 nuptials of Victor Hugo and Adèle Fouché. Beyond its imposing architecture, the church is renowned for its fantastic murals by Eugene Delacroix; its Chapel of Angels, just beyond the main altar; as well as its extraordinary pipe organ, which has been played by many famed French musicians, including César Franck, Camille Saint-Saens, Charles-Marie Widor, and Marcel Dupré.

On the right side of the choir is a chamber—originally built as a side chapel, but subsequently appropriated for use as a sacristy, or room where members of the clergy prepare for mass, sometime around 1730. At that time, its interior was substantially modified to accommodate its new ecclesiastical function, one which it continues to serve to this day.

A wall was erected to separate the once-open chapel from the sanctuary's nave. It is thought that Jean-Frederic Phéliepeaux (1705-1777), Count of Maurepas and the first church warden of the parish of Saint-Sulpice, may have commissioned the ornate gilded woodwork, which lines the sacristy's walls. Gilles-Marie Oppenord and Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, two of France's best-known "ornemanistes," are often associated with

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# Splendor of St. Sulpice

## RESTORING AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PARISIAN SACRISTY

this decor, while the Slodtz brothers, well-known artists in court of Louis XV, were responsible for the wooden balcony above the sacristy entrance. A few years earlier, the latter had worked with Servandoni and François Lemoine on the chapel of the Virgin.

Over the centuries, however, the sacristy's great stone barrel vault and richly carved oak *boiseries* had been blackened by layers of soot from candles and incense. It is in this chamber that the incense for each mass is kindled.

In 2002, WMF France—with the support of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and WMF through its Robert W. Wilson Challenge to Conserve our Heritage—embarked on the refurbishment of the sacristy as part of a larger restoration campaign for the church, carried out by the city of Paris. Over the course of three years, the vaulted ceiling with its abundant tracery and wooden elements were thoroughly cleaned and sealed. Damaged parts were conserved while any missing elements were replaced. Where possible, the original gold leaf was conserved; other areas were regilded. A patina was used to unify the whole ensemble. The balcony was also cleaned along with its gilded wrought-iron railings.

The chamber's restoration was completed this past February and new lighting is now being installed, which will enhance this architectural gem. The refurbished sacristy will be officially inaugurated this May, in a ceremony that includes an eighteenth-century music recital. ■





