

**Ludwigsburg: A walk on the Baroque side**

Eileen Ernst, MGV 2017

Baroque. The word brings to mind Louis the XIV and Versailles, the spectacular gardens and palace on the outskirts of Paris. If you haven't been there, it is magnificent. If you prefer a quieter, more intimate experience of the Baroque, I suggest a visit to Ludwigsburg, in Swabia, a region in Southwest Germany.

In 1703, King Louis (Ludwig) of the state of Wurrtemberg visited Versailles, and, like many Kings and Princes of his time, decided that he would like a Versailles of his own.

In 1704, the "Versailles of Swabia" was begun -- four hundred and fifty-two rooms on an eighty-acre estate. It was designed to impress -- and it did.

King Louis ordered his palace and gardens completed in the Baroque style. The palace was enclosed on three sides with gardens, formal and elaborate, for his personal enjoyment and an orchard and hunting area to the west.

Today, these gardens are open to the public from March to November, and they exceed 500,000 guests a year. However, visiting the palace and gardens in August, it was busy but not crowded. There is ample space to walk comfortably and lose oneself -- although the orchards and hunting area are gone, absorbed by the town.

Today, the north and south gardens are pure baroque in design. The north gardens were originally terraced -- with canals and gondolas, a little Venice for the King and his guests -- a tribute to the age of opulence for the royals. They have since been redesigned as "parterres" -- formal gardens, symmetrical patterns of plantings, with paths connecting them. The south garden is also remarkable for its stunning parterres, rows and rows of identical plantings, creating a line of color which directs the eye to the horizon. Even in the heat and humidity of August, the blooms looked fresh and alive, and not an inch of mulch to be seen.

Every square inch of soil was planted with begonias, marigolds, impatiens, a tall perennial in the center, usually phlox -- every six feet the same pattern repeating itself on both sides of the pathway. Small sculptured evergreen shrubs stand like sentries around the beds of vibrant colored flowers, keeping guard.

Visitors can meander through the Rhododendron garden, the Astilbe garden, a Rose garden and a vertical garden of climbing vines, large fountains with water lilies, alleys of linden trees, a Japanese garden, and then relax at the palace cafe in the Orangerie, surrounded by citrus trees.

The English garden was built for Queen Charlotte in 1802, a hilly wooded area with a canal and informal plantings, including a folly, a 50-foot tower called "Emrichsburg." In 1954, this was converted into the "Marchengarten," a children's garden. The folly became Rapunzel tower, where children can call Rapunzel to let down her hair, and behold a long golden rope descending from the top to the excited squeals of delighted children below. Boat rides on the canal pass through tunnels which house mannequins performing scenes from fairy tales, complete with sound effects.

The garden is surrounded by conifers, which keep it cool even on a hot, humid day. Tall grasses and shrubs allow children the freedom to run and play hide and seek, with no fear of damage to plantings. Representations of over 40 fairy tales perform at the touch of a button in small huts in the woods, and not a line to be seen for any activity, in a garden full of children -- wonderful!

The Baroque gardens of Ludwigsburg fell into neglect mid-19th century, when the palace was no longer used as a residence by the royal family. Apple trees and potatoes grew, goats roamed freely, and the parterres were lost.

In 1947, plans were made to restore the gardens to their former glory -- and it continues to improve and impress even the locals.



The gardens are now maintained by city staff, under the watchful eye of two master gardeners, and plants are provided by the city greenhouse. Truly, it is a magnificent display of the baroque garden, but there is so much more to it than that, and a day is not enough to fully savor the beauty it contains. It is a magical place for children and adults!

