

Arab sheikh restores French theater

Restoration work is now entering its second stage at the Imperial Theater in France's Palace of Fontainebleau, which has been renamed as Theater Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

From the Newsroom*

São Paulo – In an initiative from sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, president of the United Arab Emirates, a historic, underutilized French theater is undergoing comprehensive restoration work. Located in the Palace of Fontainebleau, in the namesake city some 50 km from downtown Paris, the old imperial theater has been renamed after its patron: Theater Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Giles Coulon/TCA Abu Dhabi



View of the stage prior to the renovation

Renovation at the theater, which reopened to visitors in 2014, will enter its second phase, including machinery, the upper levels of the salons, and the podium. The first phase saw 25 specialists and 135 craftsmen work on restoring the original décor – local publications said the total cost was EUR 5 million.

The Imperial Theater in the Palace of Fontainebleau was built between 1853 and 1856 at the request of Napoleon III. The architect in charge was Hector Lefuel, and the design was inspired by the small Marie-Antoinette theater in Versailles. The Imperial seats 400 people, and it was only used no more than a dozen times.

Although it is located within the area of the Castle of Fontainebleau, a World Heritage Site of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) and a former home to 34 French monarchs and emperors, the theater is somewhat cut off from the more popular buildings in the compound. The site is also home to Ecoles d'Art Americaines, an art,

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architecture and music school.

In 2007, the governments of Abu Dhabi and France signed an agreement for the museum's restoration – the agreement also includes the Louvre Abu Dhabi project in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, with its opening planned for November of this year. In appreciation, the then French minister of Culture, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, renamed the theater after the sheikh.



“The protection of cultural heritage anywhere is of the utmost importance to ensure that the history of our societies and civilisations is passed onto future generations,” said through a statement Mohammed Khalifa Al Mubarak, chairman of the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority.

The start of the second phase of the theater's renovations is set for June. The total completion of the restoration is planned for 2019, twelve years after the agreement was signed. While the works don't begin, the place can still receive guided visits.

Quick facts

The Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan Theatre (former Imperial Theatre)

Where: Château de Fontainebleau, 77300 Fontainebleau, France

Price: from EUR 3 to EUR 14

Information: <http://www.musee-chateau-fontainebleau.fr/Le-theatre-de-Napoleon-III>

***Translated by Sérgio Kakitani**

<http://www.anba.com.br/>

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