

# VISITOR GUIDE MAISON TAVEL



Un musée  
Ville de Genève

[www.mah-geneve.ch](http://www.mah-geneve.ch)



# INTRODUCTION

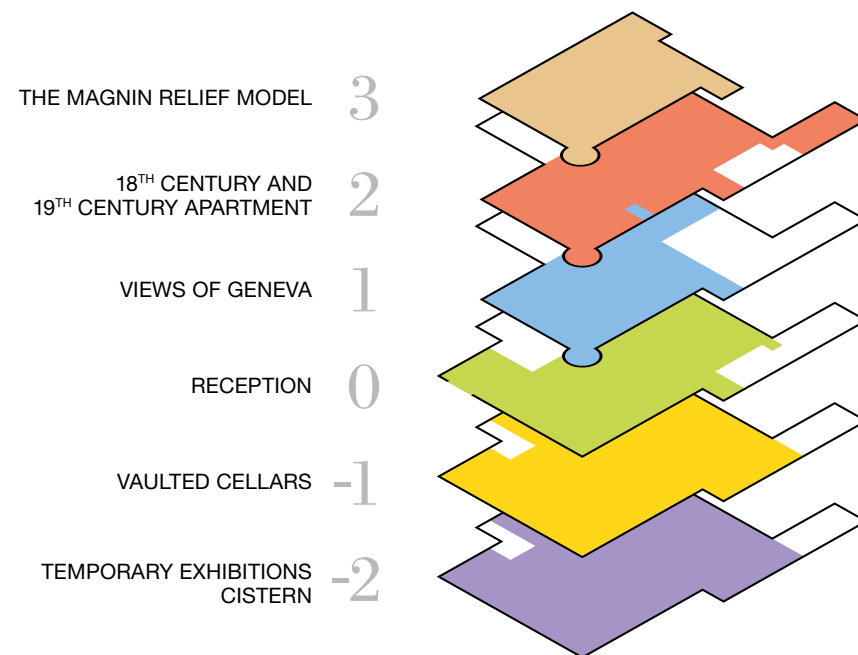
The *Maison Tavel* (Tavel House) is the oldest private residence in Geneva. This remarkable example of Swiss civil architecture bears the name of the family who owned it from the late 13<sup>th</sup> to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Destroyed by a fire in 1334, which spared only the cellars, the house was rebuilt with both the character of a fortified dwelling with turrets, but also that of a city palace with a façade embellished with carved heads. Over the centuries numerous architectural transformations were undertaken, especially by the Calandrini family in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In 1963, the City of Geneva acquired the *Maison Tavel* and carried out an exemplary restoration. Archaeological digs begun in 1979 by the Canton's Archaeological Services, especially in the garden, brought to light vestiges of an 11<sup>th</sup> century tower and a 17<sup>th</sup> century cistern to collect rainwater.

Since 1986, this historical building has been home to the *Musée d'histoire urbaine et de la vie quotidienne* (Museum of Urban History and Daily Life). The engravings, paintings, maps, models, furniture and miscellaneous objects presented come from Geneva's public collections and evoke Geneva's past and its inhabitants from the Middle Ages through to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

# THE MAISON TAVEL FLOOR BY FLOOR



## Map legend



Ten Exceptional Objects



Access for Persons with Reduced Mobility



Cloakroom



Areas Closed to the Public



Lift



Access to Other Levels



Animation

# TOUR ITINERARY

The tour of the house begins on the third-floor attic with the large relief model of Geneva in 1850. It continues down the outside stairs to the lower floors.

The second floor re-creates an 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois interior and may be viewed in any order.

The itinerary is themed from the first floor to the vaulted cellars and offers a glimpse of Geneva in the Middle Ages, throughout the Reformation and at the time of the Escalade\*. It also depicts the economic, political and urban development problems faced during Geneva's history.

In the second basement, there are temporary exhibitions on themes related to the history of Geneva and its inhabitants.

\*L'Escalade, or Fête de l'Escalade is an annual festival held in December in Geneva, celebrating the defeat of the surprise attack by troops sent by Charles Emmanuel I, Duke of Savoy during the night of 11–12 December 1602. The celebrations and other commemorative activities are usually held on 12 December or the closest weekend.

## TEN EXCEPTIONAL OBJECTS

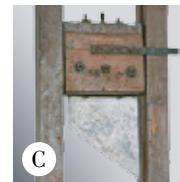
This itinerary showcases a selection of highlights from the *Maison Tavel*. These ten remarkable objects merit a visit in themselves (a thematic tour dedicated to these objects is available at the reception).



**A**  
**LEVEL 0**  
**Weather vane representing the eagle of the Tavel family crest**  
ca. 1334



**B**  
**LEVEL 0**  
***The Escalade (Scaling of the Walls) of Geneva in 1602, View with speech scrolls***  
ca. 1620



**C**  
**LEVEL 0**  
**Guillotine of Geneva**  
1799



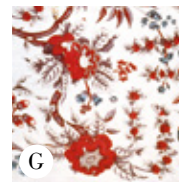
**D**  
**LEVEL 0**  
**Mitre in painted cardboard**  
16<sup>th</sup> century



**E**  
**LEVEL 3**  
**The Magnin Relief Model**  
1896



**F**  
**LEVEL 2**  
**Goldsmith's sign**  
Late 18<sup>th</sup> century



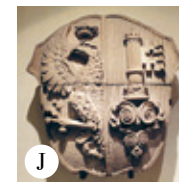
**G**  
**LEVEL 2**  
**Fragment of calico cloth**  
ca. 1790



**H**  
**LEVEL 1**  
***Les Eaux-Vives and Cologny seen from Les Tranchées,***  
Simon Malgo, 1778



**I**  
**LEVEL 1**  
**Carved heads on the facade**  
ca. 1334



**J**  
**LEVEL -1**  
**Coat of arms from the Porte Neuve**  
Cabane, 1740

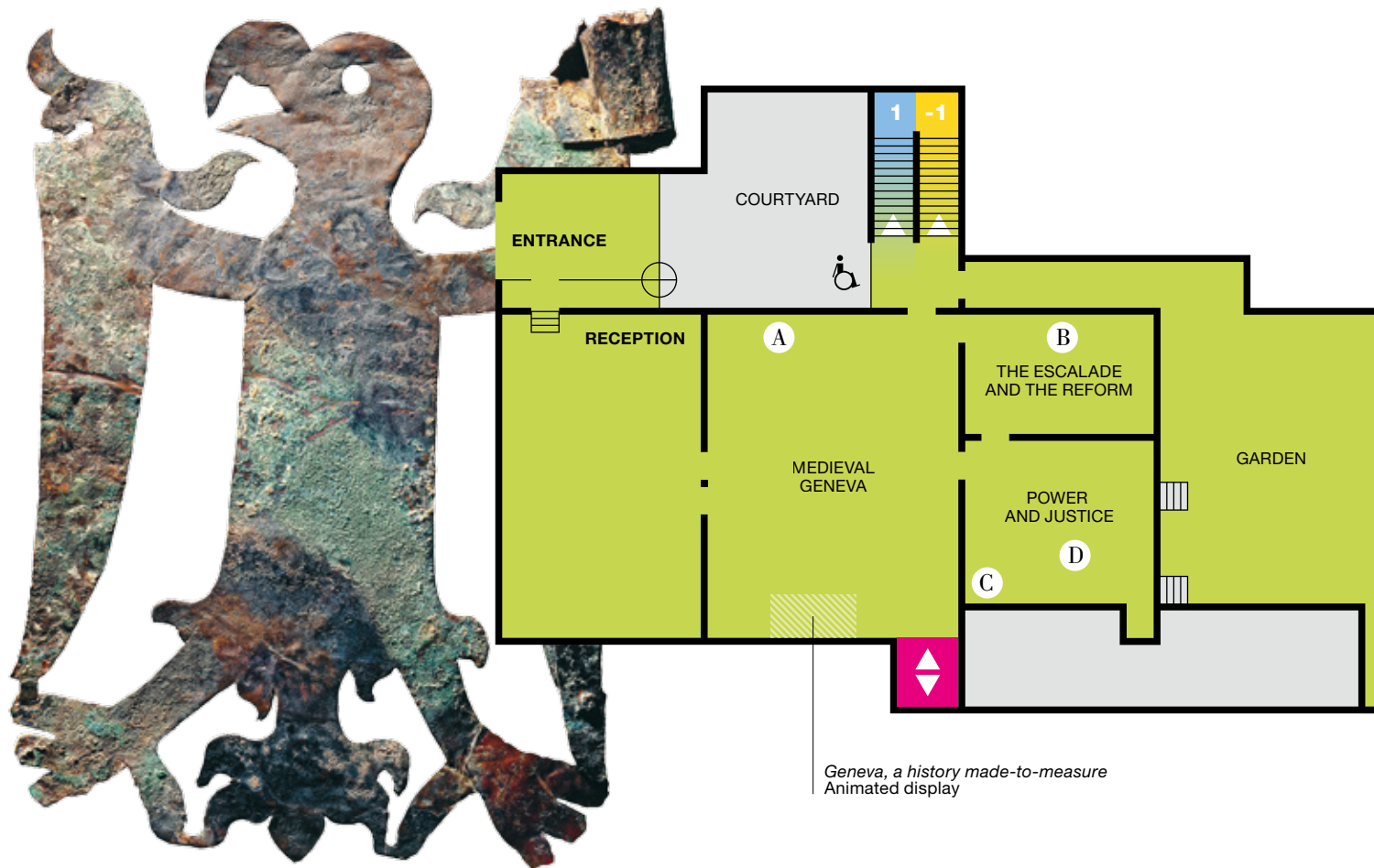
# RECEPTION LEVEL 0

In the Middle Ages, the ground floor was a service area. The great hall, which has preserved some of its 16<sup>th</sup> century tiles, comprises the kitchen, with its monumental fireplace originally surmounted by a stone mantelpiece. Today only a lintel remains, resting on an embedded column with a carved capital. The wall's plastering and medieval graffiti have been preserved, and furniture and tiles recall the style of the medieval interior.

The various objects on the ground floor evoke the influential powers in Medieval Geneva, such as the Counts of Geneva, the Counts of Savoy and the Bishop of Geneva.

The rooms facing out onto the garden are devoted to the Reformation and the Escalade, as well as to the realms of power and justice, and illustrate key moments in the Republic's history.

Weathervane representing the eagle  
of the Tavel family crest  
ca. 1334  
© MAH, photo: J. Pugin, inv. AD 6038





# THE MAGNIN RELIEF MODEL LEVEL 3

The Magnin Relief Model takes up the greater part of the Maison Tavel attic. Architect Auguste Magnin spent 18 years creating this imposing relief model giving visitors an overview of Geneva before the destruction of its fortifications in 1850 and its subsequent transformation. This historically important relief model – the largest in Switzerland – was created entirely in metal. The houses and fortifications are in zinc, and the roofs in copper. Composed of 86 sections set together, it covers a surface area of 32 m<sup>2</sup>. The Magnin Relief Model was presented for the first time at the 1896 National Exhibition in Geneva.

A twenty-minute audiovisual feature about the model in French is available on request from the museum staff.

The Magnin Relief Model  
1896  
© MAH, photo: F. Bevilacqua,  
inv. AA 2010-189

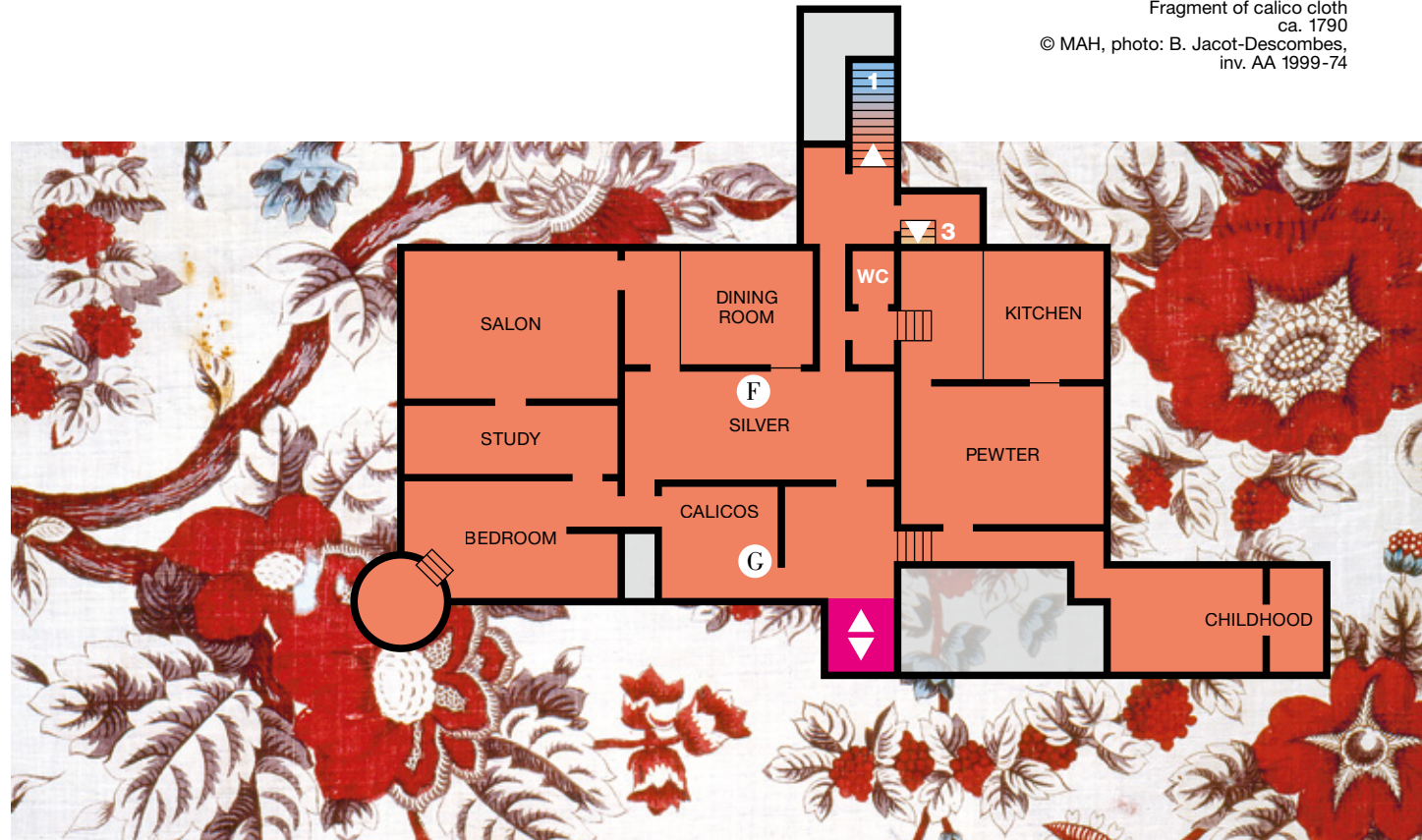


# 18<sup>TH</sup> AND 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY APARTMENT LEVEL 2

The twelve rooms on the second floor are laid out as the apartment was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with its salon, study, bedchamber, turret and kitchen. The wallpaper was re-created using early printing plates. Display cases exhibit objects such as furniture, wallpapers, calicos (printed fabrics), silver and pewter dishes, and kitchen utensils from Geneva's daily life in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

These re-created living areas powerfully evoke the periods represented. The kitchen still has its sink, whetstone and fireplace, and the stove comes from a house in rue Calvin. The tour continues by heading down a corridor to a small bedchamber dedicated to childhood.

The view from the bedchamber turret looks onto the lake, the water fountain and the cathedral's spire.





# VIEWS OF GENEVA

## LEVEL 1

In the Middle Ages, the Tavel family lived essentially on the first floor. The exhibition here today is centred on urban development, ranging from iconography of the City of Geneva to decorative architectural details.

The large room presents doors, door knockers, pieces of ironwork and inn signs, vestiges of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings today vanished from the city's landscape.

In the little room to the left are four 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings representing views of Geneva, at a time when French-style townhouses were beginning to embellish the city. There is also a small model of Geneva in 1813, making it possible to easily imagine the city of the time standing behind its Vauban-inspired fortifications.

The ten carved stone heads adorning the Tavel's House Gothic facade are exhibited on the side facing the street, and are kept here to better preserve and restore them. The copies replacing the originals and the full facade are visible from the turret windows.



**Simon Malgo**

*Les Eaux-Vives and Cologny seen from Les Tranchées, 1778*

© MAH, photo: F. Bevilacqua, inv. VG 0262

# VAULTED CELLARS

## LEVEL -1

The vaulted cellars date from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. They are the last example in Geneva of Roman cellars as vast as this. The arches rest on columns surmounted with carved capitals, their frugal style recalling constructions in Cistercian monasteries.

In the Middle Ages, the cellars were used for trade, opening directly onto the street and isolated from the rest of the residence. A strong room built into the walls and originally closed with a door, served to protect valuables.

The different levels here result from the later constructions of the lower cellars in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They most likely served to store merchandise.

The old weight and measure systems exhibited here, as well as the coat of arms and coinage recall trade.



**Cabane**  
Coat of arms from the Porte Neuve, 1740  
© MAH, photo: B. Baruchet, inv. EPI0582



# TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS LEVEL -2

In 1988, a room was carefully built under the garden to leave the archaeological remains of the Roman tower, visible from the upper windows, and the 17<sup>th</sup> century cistern at the far end (closed to the public) undisturbed.

This area is devoted to temporary exhibitions with paid admission.



© Photo: Mike Sommer, in-objective.com

# CISTERN AND GARDEN

Excavations carried out in the garden of the Maison Tavel in the 1980s brought to light a huge cistern (6.70 metres high and with a radius of 3 metres) in perfect condition.

Built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the then owners, the Calandrini family, this cistern offered a constant water supply for this small urban noble residence on the hill of the Old Town, where groundwater is unattainable and any wells quickly dried up.

Built of masonry covered with an impermeable coating, the cistern was filled by an ingenious rainwater filtration system consisting, among other things, of sand and of bronze inlet filters.

Its brick dome, covered with flat tiles and capped by a disc of limestone rock, is still visible in the house's garden.



Maison Tavel  
Rue du Puits-Saint-Pierre 6  
CH – 1204 Geneva  
T +41 (0)22 418 37 00 | mah@ville-ge.ch  
Open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
Closed on Mondays.

Free admission to permanent collections  
Paid admission to temporary exhibitions  
Free admission up to age 18 and the first  
Sunday of the month

Cloakroom on the 1<sup>st</sup> sublevel  
Toilets on the 1<sup>st</sup> sublevel and  
on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors  
Partial PRM access, lift available



T +41 (0)22 418 25 00  
Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.  
adp-mah@ville-ge.ch

## Audio guides

Audio guides for your smartphone in French, English, German and Russian are available online at [izi.travel](http://izi.travel).

## Guided Tours

For groups in French and in English  
By reservation no later than 15 days prior  
to the desired date

## School Groups

Visits adapted to the age of pupils  
CHF 50.- per class; free for schools  
from the Canton of Geneva  
By reservation no later than 15 days  
prior to the desired date

Activities for the younger audience and adults are scheduled all year round.

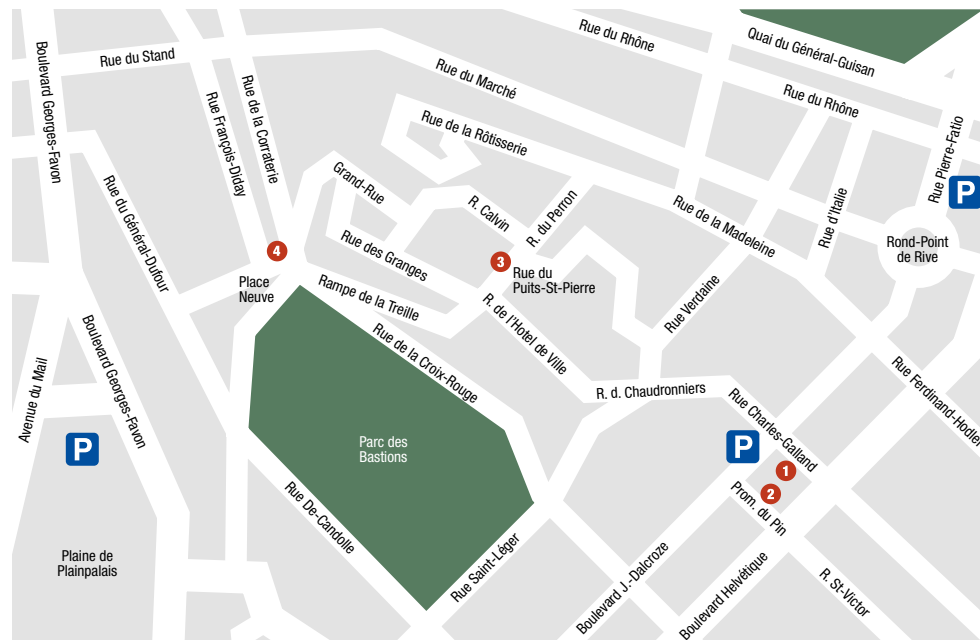
More information on: [www.mah-geneve.ch](http://www.mah-geneve.ch)

Head of the veiled woman  
ca. 1334  
© MAH, photo: F. Bevilacqua, inv. AA 2006-0123

## THE MUSÉES D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE

Of a multidisciplinary nature, the Geneva Musées d'art et d'histoire extend an invitation to take a voyage back through time. They comprise a network of several different sites that constitute the largest museum group in Switzerland.

- ➊ Musée d'art et d'histoire
- ➋ Cabinet d'Arts Graphiques du Musée d'Art et d'Histoire
- ➌ Bibliothèque d'Art et d'Archéologie du Musée d'Art et d'Histoire
- ➍ Maison Tavel
- ➎ Musée Rath





Cover:  
© MAH, photo: B. Baruchet

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MUSÉES D'ART  
ET D'HISTOIRE  
DE GENÈVE