

# CHÂTEAUX PRIVÉS - The World of Private Castles, Palaces and Estates

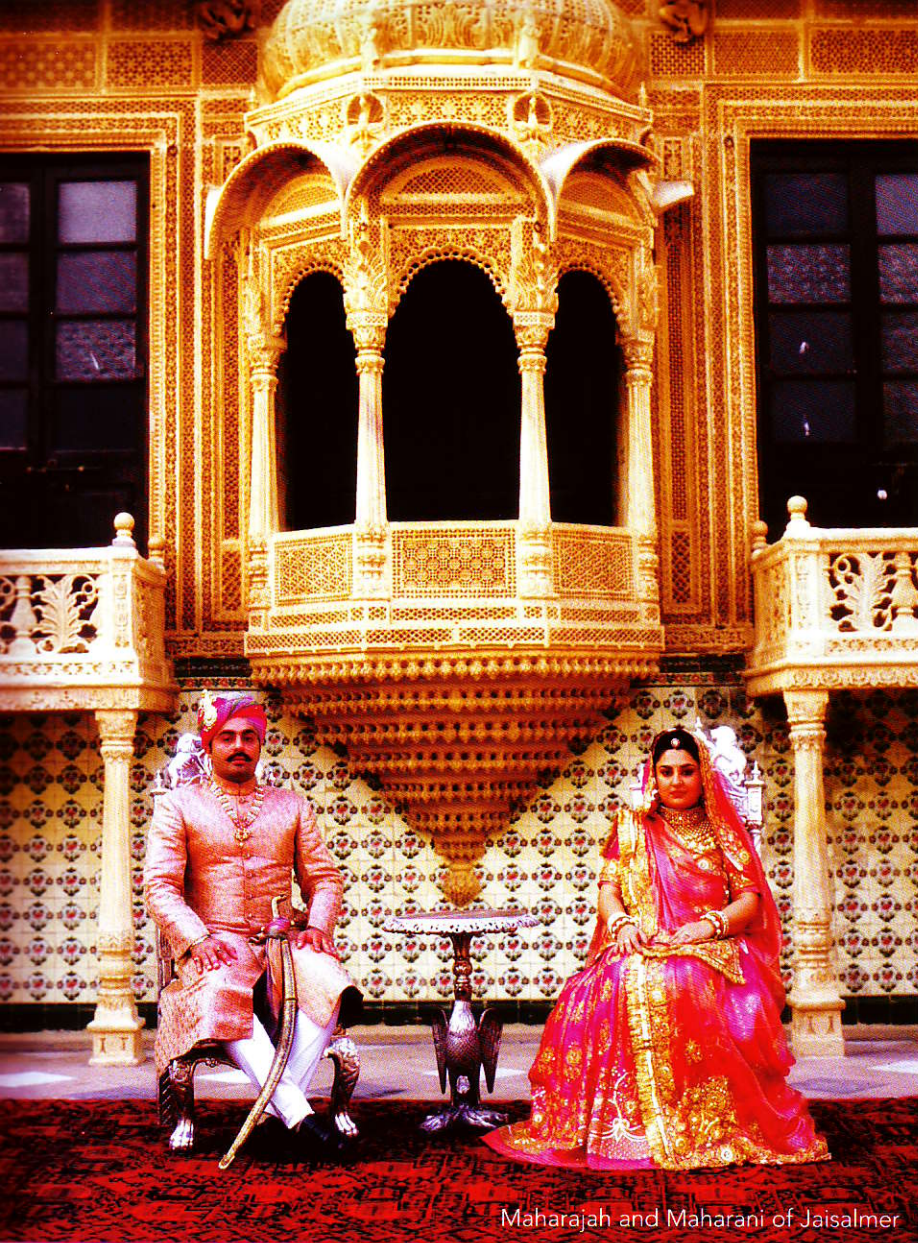
By David Block

Baronville

*Monaco based entrepreneur Freda Katritzky is bringing fairytale dreams to life. In her new book **The World of Private Castles, Palaces and Estates** she features 20 of the world's most fascinating privately owned properties ranging from Scotland and Normandy across the world to China and India. Not only does the book make a uniquely fascinating read, with colourful stories often related by their aristocratic owners, but also Freda's enterprise enables anyone to rent their fabulous properties for weekends, holidays, conferences and movie locations.*







Maharajah and Maharani of Jaisalmer

Take Alnwick Castle, in England's rugged Northumberland, for example. "To many people, their first sight of this glorious medieval castle can seem foreboding and certainly its history lacks nothing in intrigue," said its owner, the Duke of Northumberland. Movie makers agree and have used the awesome setting for the first two Harry Potter films as well as for *Becket*, *Elizabeth* and the UK TV cult comedy *Blackadder*.

Fans of *The Da Vinci Code* can dig further into its mysteries for themselves at another of the featured piles: the Château de Villette close to Paris, one of two châteaux owned by Chinese American entrepreneur Olivia Hsu Decker. It will be seen as the home of Sir Leigh Teabing the character played by Ian McKellen, opposite Tom Hanks in the forthcoming movie of the book (court cases permitting).

In the style of the Grand Siècle, but thousands of miles across the world in Beijing, stands an extraordinary replica in 17th Century French style of a François Mansart Château... Built by another leading Chinese entrepreneur, the builder tycoon, Zhang Yuchen. "I am a builder-developer with a passion for French culture and literature," Zhang explains.

"That's very modest," commented Freda. "Zhang Yuchen is one of the most inspiring owners. It took him over four years to build his château in the image of one of Francois Mansart's masterpieces, the Maison-Laffitte château, using over a hundred dedicated craftsmen. It operates as a luxury hotel and in 2007 we will be holding the Castles of the World Exhibition there."

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Ainwick Castle, England



Among the other stylish personalities that the enterprising Freda has succeeding in collecting into her publication and onto her books is a glittering list of aristocracy and high achievers. Among them are Princess Gloria of Thum and Taxis, The Maharajah of Jodhpur, the Duke of Argyll, George Frederick Prince of Prussia (with the fairytale Hohenzollern Castle), the Earl of Carnarvon, The Duke of Brissac, the Marquis of Bath with magnificent Longleat and its Safari Park and not least her near neighbour HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco.

To make a success of her business, Freda had not only to locate the world's best properties, she then had to convince the owners to collaborate in a commercial - albeit public-spirited venture. "It wasn't difficult convincing them," said Freda. "These days there has to be a commercial aspect to managing a palace or castle as the maintenance costs are so high. Some



of them have over 500 rooms so they absolutely depend on visitors. The owners were all very interested in the concept and particularly liked the fact that the text in the publication came from them. It is difficult for someone simply visiting to write about a castle after having visited it for a few hours; the owners can do this with so much more knowledge and passion – and some, like the Marquess of Bath, are themselves extremely accomplished writers."

Freda was inspired to start her business from her habit of stopping at castles and stately homes on the way to or from business meetings. After many years as a management consultant supporting other people to build up their business, she decided to try her hand at establishing an enterprise for herself in an area that encompasses her passions for travel with history and architecture. "Seeing so many privately owned castles each offering a different type of "living history" to its visitors helped transform a pastime into a new business enterprise," she said.

Freda founded Châteaux Privés in 2004 in Monaco, where she's lived since 2001. "With castles offering everything from gourmet cuisine to butterfly sanctuaries

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Her business is different from most others in the field because of its authentically international nature. Most castles-to-rent enterprises cover just one country. And uniquely, as the name Châteaux Privés implies, it focuses only on privately owned castles. Most importantly, the rental income the owners derive goes toward work to conserve the properties for future generations.

With Volume One of The World of Private Castles, Palaces and Estates now produced, Freda is busily meeting wholesalers, distributors and retailers to expand its distribution. She also deals with daily







Longleat House



enquiries via her website from individuals and companies looking for castle locations for events and then scouring the world looking for their ideal venues. "In some cases we can also help ensure that you will also have a very warm welcome from the owners themselves," she added.

Freda's vivacity belies her gruelling business life. Even her holidays tend to include visits to castles to see how suitable they are to be either in the next edition of the book or to

way to visit them is by camel. It was certainly the most amusing way I have so far visited a palace, though quite daunting at first, particularly as dusk approached!"

As if Freda's timetable isn't overflowing with scintillating activities, she has recently launched yet another endeavour. "Castles which are open to the public and have caring and visionary owners equate to living history for all to enjoy, and this is something we are interested in supporting", she said.

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"Anyway, developing my business is always great fun and endlessly fascinating," she continued. "All the owners have their own vision for their castle and this is the most interesting aspect of all. It means that no two castles offer the same attractions or visiting opportunities. For instance, the Marquess of Bath, as well as an author is also a highly talented and original artist and his stately home encompasses an amazing safari park, while the Countess of Vendeuvre has a fabulous collection of miniature furniture in her Château in Normandy. In India, the Maharawal of Jaisalmer has a palace for each day of the week and a good

"So we are building a special service for people who are interested in buying a castle for themselves".

"This is living history about the visionary owners currently preserving our world heritage, and their magnificent properties. As well as my book enabling the owners themselves to portray their homes and giving the reader a personal and inside view, it also serves as a guide to an architectural diversity of luxury and fairy-tale destinations, each with a fascinating history and its own magnetic attractions."

The World of Private Castles, Palaces and Estates 20 properties in 128 pages is published annually in English, French and German and costs \$25. It can be ordered at leading bookshops, or at [www.chateauxprives.com](http://www.chateauxprives.com).



Replica of Maison Laffitte Château, Beijing





Hohenzollern Castle



Château de Villette, Paris

