Proust’s passages on fashion inspired Yves Saint-Laurent, when he built his villa, the Château Gabriel, on a hilltop in coastal Normandy, to name each room after a character from Proust. Yves Saint-Laurent said that no other novelist had written so much and so well about fashion. For information and additional photographs, see the December 1983 issue of Vogue and the December 2005 issue of House and Garden. Here are some photographs by Marianne Haas that show the interiors of the Château Gabriel:

*The music room.*
The winter garden, modeled after the conservatory of Princesse Mathilde de Bonaparte whose salon Proust frequented and wrote about.
Another view of the winter garden, the most lived-in room of the château.
Yves Saint-Laurent’s bedroom and study inspired by Charles Swann, a connoisseur of women, art, and music.

The grandest of the guest rooms inspired by the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes.
Here is an excerpt from my biography that details some of the research conducted by Proust in order to clothe Albertine in Fortuny gowns:

In February 1916, Proust worked on a leitmotiv he was creating for scenes in the two sections that close the Albertine cycle, *The Captive* and *The Fugitive*. He wrote Maria de Madrazo to obtain information about Fortuny dresses. Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo, the famous Venetian couturier who made his own fabrics by a secret process, was the nephew of Maria’s husband and cousin to Marcel’s friend “Coco” de Madrazo. But first, Marcel asked Maria for advice about investments. He had recently sold “some minor shares” at a loss in order to reduce a bank loan and remembered she had told him once about some “astonishing tips about American shares.” Did she have any leads on “American stocks or gold-mines, which might compensate a little for the loss I’ve incurred with the bank.” (For this letter to Reynaldo Hahn’s sister in which Proust sought information about Fortuny’s dresses, see Marcel Proust: *Selected Letters in English* 3: 334-35.) Such a request sounded like the old, reckless Marcel, not the “burned,” reformed speculator who had made so many pledges to Hauser never to take such risks again. (Fortunately for Proust, Reynaldo advised Maria not to “bother to reply to Marcel in detail; he gets rather fussy about his shares and has got into the habit of writing to all and sundry.”) [Marcel Proust: *Selected Letters in English* 3: 336. n. 6.] Broaching a safer topic, Proust asked Maria for “advice about female costume, not for any mistress but for fictional heroines.” He particularly wanted to know whether or not Fortuny had ever used as motifs “for his dressing-gowns . . . those coupled birds, drinking for example from a vase, which are so recurrent on the Byzantine capitals in St Mark’s.” And if so, did she know “whether there are pictures in Venice (I should like a few titles) showing cloaks or dresses from which Fortuny drew (or might have drawn) inspiration. I would find a reproduction of the painting and see if it might inspire me.”
A few days later Proust sent Maria a second letter in which he summarized the role of Fortuny dressing gowns in the Albertine episode, explaining why he wanted to know which Carpaccio paintings might have inspired the couturier: “At the beginning of my second volume a great artist with a fictitious name who symbolizes the Great Painter in my book as Vinteuil symbolizes the Great Composer (such as Franck), says in front of Albertine (who I don’t yet know will one day be my adored fiancée) that according to what he has heard an artist has discovered the secret of the old Venetian materials etc. This is Fortuny.” During the period of her engagement to Marcel, he gives her some Fortuny dresses, a brief description of which “illustrates our loves scenes,” which was why Proust needed to describe dressing-gowns, and “since, as long as she is alive, I don’t realize how much I love her, these gowns chiefly evoke Venice for me, and the desire to go there, a plan to which her presence is an obstacle etc.” (In May 1915, Proust had expressed a similar interest in Fortuny and Mme Straus offered to loan him one of her Fortuny coats. Proust declined the offer, apparently because he needed to see dressing-gowns, as he later explained to Mme de Madrazo.) Later, after Albertine’s death, Marcel goes to Venice “where in the paintings of X (let’s say Carpaccio) I find one of the dresses I gave her. In the past this dress evoked Venice for me and made me want to leave Albertine; now the Carpaccio in which I see it evokes Albertine and makes Venice painful to me.” Proust concluded by telling Maria that while the “Fortuny leitmotiv” was “not very extensive,” it was “crucial,” and was “partly sensual, poetic and sorrowful.” In early March, Proust described The Fugitive as being “almost entirely about death and survival in the memory.” (Marcel Proust: Selected Letters in English 3: 341.)

Maria replied by loaning Marcel a book about Carpaccio with two of the paintings that had apparently inspired Fortuny, The Holy Cross and The Legend of St Ursula. In thanking her, Proust made an additional request: “when you see Fortuny I’d be most grateful if you could ask him for the most direct possible description of the cloak.” (For passages where Proust used the information regarding Fortuny’s garments, see The Captive 5: 497-501, 531, 538, 554.) Whether or not Fortuny provided the description is not known, but Proust’s consultation of a modest schoolgirl and a renowned artist show his constant search for precise details to enrich his palette. Lucien, who now visited more frequently, was asked for advice concerning Albertine’s gold vanity case, one similar to
the ones Proust had given the Alton girls in 1911. (See *Correspondance de Marcel Proust* 15: 111; *Correspondance de Marcel Proust* 10: 358-59 and n. 2. Lucien Daudet, *Soixante Lettres*, 164-67. See also *La Prisonnière* 3: 424 and 1580, n. 1.) Marcel asked Lucien if a girl could take one along in an automobile. Proust would use Albertine’s vanity case, ordered from Cartier’s, to demonstrate Marcel’s obsessive jealousy. When they take the train out to La Raspelière for dinner with the Verdurins, he realizes that if she had a vanity case, she could do her sprucing up in the train and would not have to leave his side when they arrived at the villa.

In Marcel’s recollection of how Albertine looked in the Fortuny cloak she had worn on their last excursion to an airfield near Paris, Proust used a detail from his correspondence with Alfred Agostinelli. He attributing to Albertine a line from Alfred’s last letter: “that melancholy occasion which she was to describe in her last letter as ‘a double twilight since night was falling and we were about to part. . . .’ ” (See *Correspondance de Marcel Proust* 15: 111; *Correspondance de Marcel Proust* 10: 358-59 and n. 2. Lucien Daudet, *Soixante Lettres*, 164-67. See also *La Prisonnière* 3: 424 and 1580, n. 1.) Agostinelli, like Albertine, like all those lost and mourned, had been consigned in Proust’s emotions to the general law of oblivion.

That spring, as the battle raged, Proust wrote at least the first draft of *Paris during the war*. One change captured by the novelist was the face of Paris: “. . . there was a marchpast of allied troops in the most variegated uniforms; and among them, the Africans in their red divided skirts, the Indians in their white turbans were enough to transform for me this Paris through which I was walking into a whole imaginary exotic city. . . .” (*Time Regained* 6: 106.)

**La Raspelière = Les Frémonts**

La Raspelière, the villa owned by the Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer, was inspired by the villa Les Frémonts, a property owned by Proust’s friends the Finalys. Proust stayed there when he was a young man. On one such visit the painter Jacques-Émile Blanche, who later painted the oil portrait of Proust, was also a houseguest and did a pencil sketch of Proust. After years of neglect, Les Frémonts was recently acquired by Mike Le Bas, a descendant of the Finalys, who hopes to raise enough money to restore
the villa to its former glory. Here are two photographs of the way the abandoned house looked when we saw it in 1988.