

“TREASURES OF THE EARTH”, THE NEW EXHIBIT AT THE PARIS NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

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1. Mineralogy and Geology Gallery Main Entrance of the National Museum of Natural History, Jardin des Plantes, Paris, France. Photo B. Faye.

At the crossroads of Earth, life and man sciences, the National Museum of Natural History of Paris (MNHN, France) is dedicated to nature and its relationship with the human species. The Museum occupies a reference position through various missions: basic and applied research, conservation and enrichment of collections, education and expertise. Its historical heart is located in Paris, in the “*Jardin des Plantes*”. This historic institution founded in 1635, originally as the royal garden for medicinal plants, became the Natural History Museum in 1793. Sample the mineral diversity of our planet is one the missions of the Museum since 1626 when, the first minerals, supposed to have medicinal properties, entered the “*Droguier du Roi*” under the reign of Louis XIII. Result of nearly four centuries of acquisitions, donations and discoveries, the mineralogy collection of the MNHN has about 135,000 samples including, besides a systematic collection of mineral species, gems, crystallographic models and documents belonged to great scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century as Romé de l’Isle, Haüy, Des Cloizeaux, and Lacroix.

The collection is hosted at the Mineralogy and Geology gallery, a section of the unique museum center known as “*Jardins des Plantes*” in Paris (France). The gallery represents the first one built in France (1833–1839) to host a natural history collection. Needing a substantial renovation, the building is closed to the public since 2004, and only after a partial renovation of both fire and electric systems, the gallery reopened exceptionally its doors in 2009 for the temporary exhibition “*Gold in the Americas*”.

Is only in 2010 that a first discussions about a new exhibition of about 250 square meters, to be located at the right of the main entrance of the gallery, started. This is the “*Giant Crystals*” room already renovated and opened in 1987 to host a collection of more than 80 giant crystals mostly from Brazil.

After three years of discussions, finally, the redesigned space could be dedicated to hosting a selection of specimens, emblematic for their scientific, historical and aesthetic viewpoints.

The Renovation Concept

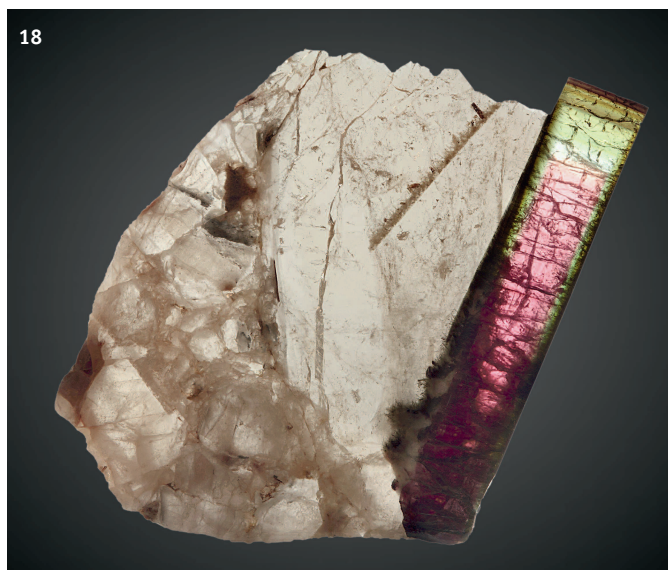
The renovation is conceived around two main constraints: the architectural problems, relied to the historical building needing restoration of both the lobby and the monumental gate, and more actual problems as security, lighting and design.

16. Slice of a **rhodocrosite** stalactite from Capillitas in Argentina (58 cm wide).
TOTAL foundation sponsorship.
Photo: B. Faye.



17. An concretion of small **calcite** crystals friendly named "*Mikey-Mouse*" from Bellecroix, Fontainebleau, France. 15 cm in diameter. Photo: B. Faye.

18. Slice of a highly-zoned **tourmaline** crystal slice with quartz from Brazil. 18 cm high.
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Photo: R. Appiani.



19. Wood crystal models belonged to Haüy. Photo: R. Appiani.