

A CASTLE FIT FOR A

by Erin K. and Jamie C. Schonauer

Once upon a time, there was a king who had very expensive tastes!



FAIRY-TALE KING

ITS ELEGANT, stunning towers and secluded hilltop location make Neuschwanstein (noy-shwan-shine) look like a castle out of a fairytale. Nestled among the snow-capped Alps, Neuschwanstein, or "New Castle of the Swan," towers boldly above the Pollat Gorge. Located in the southern state of Germany called Bavaria, the castle attracts 1.4 million visitors per year. One famous visitor, Walt Disney, was so inspired by its fairytale looks that he modeled Disneyland's Sleeping Beauty's castle after Neuschwanstein.

More than 100 years ago, Neuschwanstein was home to King Ludwig II. In 1864, at only 18 years of age, Ludwig II found himself king of Bavaria. After his father King Maximilian II died, Ludwig II took the throne. The teenage king had a passion for music, theater, and all things medieval, but not for ruling Bavaria. Besides, his reign didn't go as planned; he lost a war to Prussia in 1866 and his sovereignty. So King Ludwig II, known as the Fairytale King, escaped into a fantasy world by building castles inspired by German legends and music. His most famous is Neuschwanstein.

The castle's décor was greatly influenced by German composer Richard Wagner's operas, especially Lohengrin and Tannhäuser (fann-hoi-zer). These German legends are depicted in murals and motifs throughout the castle. Silver swans from Lohengrin decorate the king's bedroom washstand and embroidered swans adorn silk curtains in his salon.

To give Neuschwanstein its theatrical touch, the king hired stage designer Christian Jank to produce sketches. Architects Eduard Riedel, Georg Dollmann, and Julius Hofmann used Jank's drawings to create the castle. Before construction began, dynamite, then a new invention, was used to even the steep, rocky peak on which the castle was built. By 1869, construction was under way. The stone foundation was put into place and the castle's brick walls were erected. In one year alone, 400,000 bricks were used. Then, a layer of limestone was added to the façade. Other construction materials included sandstone and marble.

The inside of the castle was equipped with modern amenities: a telephone system (Bavaria's first), central heating, an elevator, automatic flushable toilets, hot and cold water, and an electric paging system—all high-tech for the 19th century.

The keys to the fairytale castle unlock majestic rooms. Based on Byzantine style, the Throne Room is decorated ornately with gold and mosaics. The gilded style is complemented with a crown-shaped chandelier weighing more than a ton. This enormous room occupies the western wing of the castle and is two stories high. Surprisingly, this room doesn't even have a throne because Ludwig II's throne never arrived due to his death.

Covering the entire eastern portion of the fourth floor is Singers' Hall. This was one of the King's favorites. It paid homage to medieval knights and legends that he admired and read about when he was a child. The hall's artwork tells stories of the German saga, Parsifal.

Hiding behind the King's study is a fake cave inspired by Tannhäuser. Made by set-designer August Dirgl, it's complete with artificial rocks, a waterfall, and colored lighting. If you move one of the cave's rocks, a glass door opens that leads to the conservatory.

As you make your way to the bottom of the main staircase, a limestone dragon sits. He's the "guardian of the tower."

Unfortunately, King Ludwig II's obsession with building castles and his excessive spending made the government believe he was insane. In 1886, it officially declared his insanity. Shortly after, the King was mysteriously found dead in Lake Starnberg. At that time, construction came to a halt leaving Neuschwanstein unfinished. Although King Ludwig II's fairytale didn't end happily ever after, today his vivid imagination and fantasy world are alive for all to see.

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King Ludwig II liked to sleep during the day and play at night. He enjoyed taking midnight sleigh rides in his lavish sleighs. One was even equipped with a battery-operated light.

