



# New Series "Versailles" Hopes to Mark French TV Golden Age

New series "Versailles" hopes to herald TV golden age in France, following Emmy success

By THOMAS ADAMSON

*The Associated Press*

## VERSAILLES, France

Will the Sun King usher in the dawn of a French television golden age? The makers of the new historical drama "Versailles" hope so.

Based on King Louis XIV, the series has a budget of \$30 million ??? making it the most expensive show [France](#) has ever produced. And the biggest surprise for a nation known for Gallic pride: The show will be in English.

The ambition is none other than to put France on the international television map. French television had already been making global strides with the French zombie series "The Returned" bagging the 2013 International Emmy Award and [Netflix](#) launching in France with a new French political thriller, "Marseille." With "Versailles," the goal is to compete head-to-head in the United States with the likes of Britain's "Downton Abbey" and American fantasy smash hit "Game of Thrones."

The show will be broadcast from November in France on Canal+. The plan is then to bring it to the United States, Britain and beyond.

In order to give it more international appeal, "Versailles" was filmed entirely in English, from a script by British and American writers. That's tantamount to sacrilege in a nation that fiercely defends its language ??? and where intellectuals rail against Hollywood domination.

The producers are unapologetic.

"I'm not sure what the French Academy would say. We're going to get a lot of flak. But they should relax," said co-producer Claude Chelli. "It's realpolitik ??? if you want to be heard and seen everywhere in the world, you have to go through English."

When "Versailles" airs at home this fall, it will be subtitled or dubbed into French.

"I know it seems strange to French people. But it's nice to have another angle to our own culture," Chelli said. "The English and American (scriptwriters) brought something and wrote stuff that no French person could write."

The show's plot has been shrouded in secrecy. All that is known so far is that the series explores the life

of Louis XIV and features George Blagden from "Vikings" as the womanizing king; Lizzie Brochere from "American Horror Story"; and Amira Casar as a trouble-ridden courtesan.

"I'd like to see it at the Emmys," said co-producer Fabrice Larue. "Already, we've gotten strong signs of interest from networks in the U.S."

The cast has relished every moment in the fabulous costumes of Madeleine Fontaine, who is known for her work on the award-winning 2001 "Amelie."

"Louis XIV had fabulous taste, invented fashions and high society, and this show has it all," said Casar, who was able to cope with the ordeal of wearing a corset for days on end thanks to "old school" drama training.

Blagden felt slightly less at ease when the clothes came off ??? in the season's many torrid scenes.

"Sex scenes are always awkward. Anyone that's ever done a sex scene in our industry know that they are the most embarrassing and really awkward as they're really technical, difficult to shoot," he said. "I'd not done a lot of them before these series."

For him, the best part was playing one of the most colorful figures in history.

"It's a bit of a big undertaking. But it's the role of a lifetime," he said. "His nickname is the sun king, and he's known in France as the king who created luxury."

There's also the added job security of playing a character who you know can't be killed off ??? since Louis XIV's reign of 72 years and 110 days is the longest of any monarch of a major European country.

"On my last show 'Vikings,' the writer can kill you off whenever you wanted," Blagden said. "I suppose when you do a series about someone as famous as Louis, you think 'Maybe we could get 60 seasons out of this.'"

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