

PARIS FURNITURE

the luxury market of the 19th century

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THE LUXURY MARKET OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Despite the upheavals of the first decades of the nineteenth century, Paris soon recovered its position as a leading centre for furniture and design in Europe. Encouraged by royal and imperial regimes, exhibited at the great international fairs, and collected by international aristocrats, bankers and newly wealthy industrialists, Paris furniture, by the second half of the century, had once again become synonymous with luxury and exquisite craftsmanship. Furniture makers drew their inspiration from a vast array of historical periods and cultural sources to create new and exciting designs that both appealed to the eclectic tastes of the nineteenth-century amateur and yet suited the demands for comfort and convenience of the luxury consumer. Building on the generations of skills and techniques that had characterized French furniture during the years of the Ancien Régime, contemporary makers exploited technological advances and new materials to produce some of the most creative and inventive pieces ever made.

At the core of the book is a survey of over one hundred Paris-based firms, producing meubles de luxe for an international clientele. Additionally the author draws on his extensive knowledge of nineteenth-century furniture to describe each maker's particular style and elucidate any characteristic techniques or materials that may help with an understanding of the work and future attribution.

THE AUTHOR

CHRISTOPHER PAYNE's 45-year career in the Decorative Arts spans both the commercial and the academic worlds coupled with a deep knowledge and understanding of the practical side of furniture making and conservation.

Foreword by DANIEL ALCOUFFE, conservateur général du Patrimoine, conservateur honoraire au Louvre.

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◀ A detail of the 1879 version of Barbedienne's exhibition mirror shown on page 246, the modelling by Carrier-Belleuse overseen by the firm's chief ornemaniste, Constant Sévin.



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A powerful Etruscan mask and stylised patera designed by Jean Brandely for the Diehl centre table on p.329.

◀ *The gothic revival study of 68, rue Ampère in Paris designed by the architect Henri Deverin, in 1880, with a magnificent stone fireplace carved by Antoine Margotin, who also carved the facade.*

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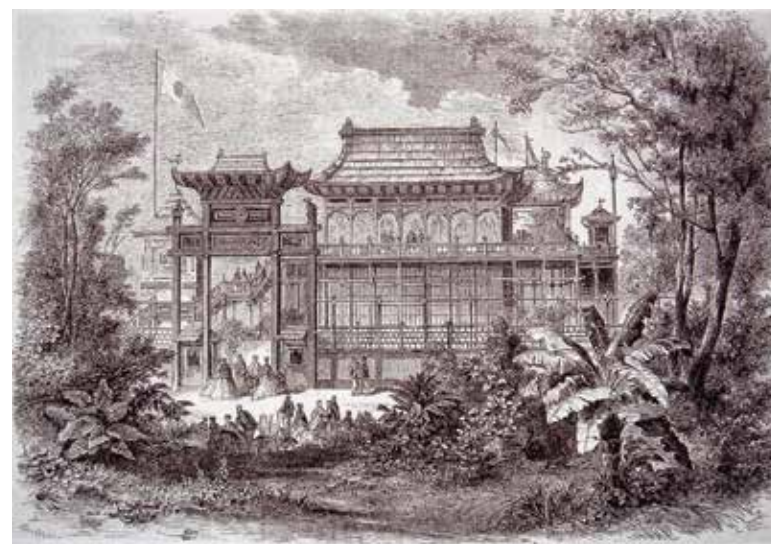
INFLUENCES: THE ORIENT



◀ The exquisite combination of Émile Reiber's design and Christofle's technical ability showing a crane on a cloisonné ground below a rim of ruyi scrolling clouds.

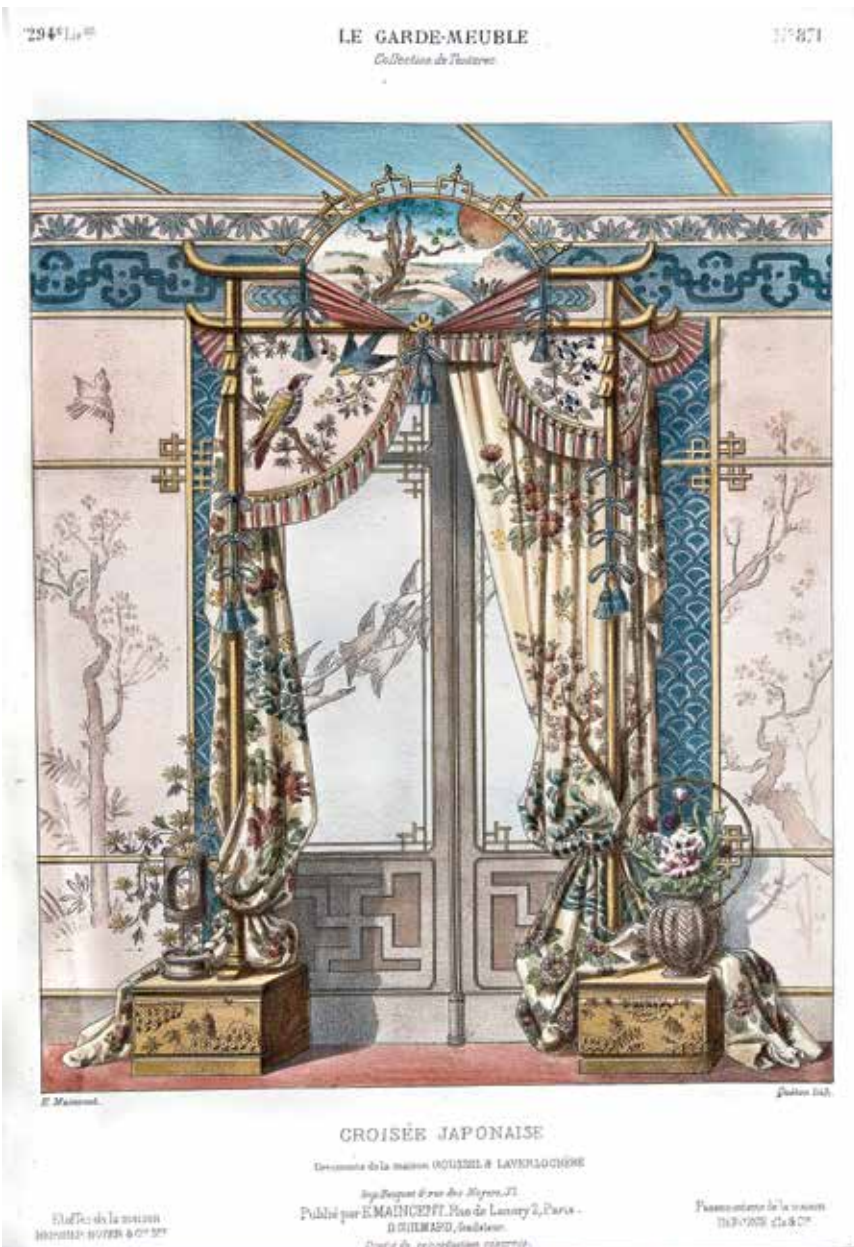
Huge chinoiserie gilt-lacquer panels were installed by Alexis Pacard in the Musée chinois de l'impératrice at Fontainebleau in 1863 above a table made by Fourdinois.

The growing fashion for Chinese artefacts and design was considerably enhanced by the fascination of the Empress Eugénie for the East. In 1863 she created her own Chinese museum at Fontainebleau. The museum was a mixture of items seized during the French Revolution, looted items from the Summer Palace in Peking (Beijing) and brought back as trophies by Franco-British troops in 1860, and a selection of items brought from Siam as gifts during the embassy in 1861. Henri Fourdinois made many items, including a series of vitrines designed by the architect Victor Ruprich-Robert, *inspecteur général des monuments historiques*, for the museum and in 1868 the Empress commissioned a Chinese-style study in another part of the palace. A canvas by Jean-Léon Gérôme, completed in 1864, showed the Siamese kowtowing to Napoléon and Eugénie in the splendor of the Henri II ballroom at a time when France was openly trying to re-establish her influence in the East³⁰.



With the forced abandonment of Japanese “Sakoku” or “locked country” policy in 1854 and the Chinese Empress Dowager Cixi trying to open up China to the West, both countries exhibited at the Paris Exposition universelle of 1867.





Two delightful plates from Désiré Guilmar's Le Garde-Meuble of circa 1870: on the left, Paris' interpretation of the asymmetry of the Japanese style, and the more formal Chinese on the right.

Japanese items reached Paris after the country opened up to the West in 1854. "Such a wave unfurled over Europe and the United States, the Japanese effect offered to the world of art a long awaited renewal"³¹. In the 1860s Japanese wood-block prints (*ukiyo-e*) were imported into Europe and had a profound influence on the new vogue of Impressionist painters. In *circa* 1867 the eminent Grohé, who counted amongst his clientele the Emperor Napoléon III and his wife Eugénie, made a magnificent breakfront side cabinet with a Japanese panel with an asymmetrical flower spray. The slightly recessed outer doors complement the oriental look with unusual lacquer trophies that are perfectly balanced and at first glance look like Japanese lacquer but are Paris made (see illustration p.69).



Although not signed by the maker, this cabinet, unusually in mahogany, is very similar to other Viardot cabinets. Exported to London, one drawer is stamped with the Tottenham Court Road retailer's mark "Jams. Shoolbred, London 4956".

Also not signed this cabinet must surely be firmly attributable to Gabriel Viardot, dating to the 1880s. The cornice is surmounted by a fearsome dragon carved in full relief, entwined in a pagoda-style roof, glaring at the ivory and gilt parrots on branches below set against a rustically rendered elm ground, the beech wood frame with Chinese columnar supports.



The output of the highly productive firm run by Gabriel Viardot is invariably in the japonisme vein and is illustrated p.75 right. This comfortable and exotic day bed is signed “G. Viardot”, dated 1887 and was exhibited at the Paris Exposition universelle in 1889. The dragon’s flowing mane runs down the side of the couch to the swirling scaly tail.

Japanese goods became increasingly familiar in Paris due to a comprehensive display at the Japanese pavilion at the Exposition universelle of 1867 and then in Vienna in 1873. The Parisian firms of Christofle and Barbedienne were leading exponents of the new fashion for *japonisme*, albeit mainly in metal furniture with little or no wood-based carcass work. Their work, and that of Viardot, was highly eclectic, drawing in themes from Western decorative arts as well as mixing Chinese and Japanese motifs on the same item, which can often make it difficult if not impossible to accurately define whether the item should be termed *chinoiserie* or *japonisme*. A magazine called the *Art Amateur* in New York was an early user of the word “*japanesque*”³², as

an adequate response to the cabinet by Giroux shown in a line engraving from *The Art Images*³³. Two makers who were leading designers and early proponents of a novel and imaginative oriental style in Paris were Giroux and Duvinage, the former selling his shop to Ferdinand Duvinage and his associate Harinckouk in 1867. Giroux mainly adapted Chinese art; his publication *Meubles et fantaisies* of circa 1840 shows tables in this newly fashionable idiom and reminds one of *papier mâché* furniture of the same period. Number 64 in *Meubles et fantaisies* is in the Louis XV rococo style with cabriole legs and has an oriental-style vase on the platform; as does the even more exotic and eclectic table, number 65, which appears to have a Canton enamel tray top. Number 66

anticipates the Japanese style of the 1870s. Giroux also illustrated an engraving of a cabinet that appears to be Japanese export but the commentary leads us to believe that, unlikely as it would seem, it was made in Paris. The white background of Canton enamels may well have been an inspiration, possibly not a conscious one, for the Duvinage concept of inlay on a white ivory ground. The idea of using ivory was not new, as it had been used in small quantities by, for example, Pierre Gole in Paris in the late seventeenth century.

Signed on an applied metal plaque by Alphonse Giroux and made in circa 1870, this unusual walnut wall niche with a dragon supported by an elephant’s head is made in imitation of Chinese lacquer.



Two delicate gilt-bronze tables by Giroux from the mid-1860s, one with engraved glass shelves and on the right a flower holder, each signed “Alph. Giroux Paris”.



An innovative cabinet made in Paris circa 1890 by the Maison Marnyhac to contain Chinese cloisonné panels with still life renditions of the Hundred Antiques made in the Jiaqing period of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.



Stamped under a handle "A L'Escalier de Cristal Paris", this magnificent example of Parisian japonisme of circa 1890 was made under the direction of the Pannier brothers. The carcass is made of mahogany veneered in gilded black lacquer. The form and base with elephant head feet reflect the cabinet by Marnyhac shown opposite.



The lock of the Ajuda Palace japonisme writing desk shown opposite, with a colourful maple-veneered interior and blue velvet-lined slide, is signed "Ancne Maison Giroux Paris".



Clearly seen in a watercolour of the Ajuda Palace in Lisbon (see p.342) is a rare eclectic lady's writing desk by Duvinage who took over the Giroux business in 1867. In a mixture of Japanese and Chinese styles, the mirrored superstructure and the black-japanned exterior are applied in gilt-gesso with birds amongst foliage; the shelves at either side fold down.



ROYAL AND CELEBRATED COPIES

◀
*A pair of commodes, stamped twice under
each marble top: "Charles Winckelsen 21 Rue
St. Louis AU MARAIS" and dated 1868. Both
locks are stamped "SOUCHET / PARIS", a
relatively uncommon lock maker who also
signed the locks on a pair of small Boulle
revival side cabinets attributed to Winckelsen.*



DESK (*SECRÉTAIRE À CYLINDRE*): 1760-1769

Notable copies: Beurdeley (1889); Crozatier and Dreschler (1850s); Dasson (*circa* 1875); Jansen; Linke (1901, 1910, 1922, *circa* 1940); Zwiener (1884 and 1889)

Copies exhibited: Expositions universelles (Paris, 1878, Dasson; Paris, 1889, Beurdeley, Zwiener); World's Fair: Columbian Exposition (Chicago, 1893, Beurdeley); Salon des industries du mobilier (Paris, 1902, Jansen; Paris, 1905, Linke)

THE *BUREAU DU ROI*

In 1955, Pierre Verlet, Head Curator of Furniture and Works of Art at the Louvre, described the *Bureau du roi* thus: “*Il n’est probablement pas au monde de meubles plus célèbre que le grand secrétaire à cylindre*”²⁵³. In the opening of his chapter on the desk, Watson calls it the “*chef-d’œuvre de l’ébénisterie française*”²⁵⁴. The original desk was started for Louis XV by Jean-François Œben (master in 1759) and completed by his successor Jean-Henri Riesener (master in 1768), and delivered to the *cabinet intérieur* at Versailles in May 1769, “after nine years of painstaking work to bring it to perfection”²⁵⁵.

The mounts for the original desk were modelled by Jean-Claude Duplessis Père with the casting and chasing by Louis-Barthelemy Hervieu (master in 1749). Careful scrutiny of the original notes made by Riesener suggests that there were no surviving moulds for the mounts of this desk as it was a “*pièce unique*”, the wax models for the mounts annihilated by the pouring of the molten metal²⁵⁶. The models were perfected against a wooden carcass specially made for the purpose: “*fait un baty en grand de bois [...] avoir modeler sur led. baty tous les ornements, figures, guirlandes, fleurs, vases, cas-sollette, pendule, moulures, carderond et palmes*”²⁵⁷ [*sic*].



Archive photographs show that Linke followed the same methodology and it might be assumed that this was common practice in the better Paris workshops during the nineteenth century.

Without doubt nineteenth-century makers and collectors would have agreed with the twentieth-century applause for this masterpiece. The first recorded nineteenth-century example of the desk was made for the fourth Marquess of Hertford between 1853 and 1870. Now in the Wallace Collection²⁵⁸, it has been extensively described and documented by Peter Hughes in the 1996 catalogue²⁵⁹. D. S. MacColl, Keeper of the Wallace Collection, thought in 1912 that the Wallace example was made by Henry Dasson. MacColl noted after his last

conversation with Murray Scott: “Pierre Dasson made copy of the *Bureau du roi*. Emperor allowed Ld H to have *surmoulé*. Dasson made copy for Lady Ashburton at Exhn. 78 Paris 90,000 f”²⁶⁰. Later, Peter Hughes noted that the Wallace example was made in Paris and argues that the maker was probably Dreschler or Drexler, now known to be Carl Dreschler²⁶¹. However, in this author’s opinion, it is likely that Dreschler was only responsible for the metalwork and the chasing of the bronze mounts; the actual cabinetmaker remains a mystery, but may well have been supervised by the Crozatier firm of founders who were recorded as furniture makers in Paris sales and subsequently by the auctioneer Christie, Manson and Woods in the 1890s. A summary of the remarkably poorly documented career of Crozatier



Five views of the rare example with the crossed “Ls” in marquetry on the sides (pp.160-162).



and Dreschler is on pp.301-303. The clock movement of the Wallace Collection copy is signed by the clock-maker Charles Couët in exactly the same manner as the recently discovered copy of the Caffieri and Passemant astronomical clock of 1753 (see p.169).

The original *Bureau du roi* was in the apartment of the duc d'Orléans in 1833, moved to the *grand salon* of the Tuileries by 1851, and by 1855 it was in the Empress Eugénie's *cabinet de travail* at Saint-Cloud, where it was shown in a painting by Benedict Masson and in a water-colour by Fortuné de Fournier. Hughes suggests it was thus being brought back into the limelight just when Lord Hertford was having his other copies of celebrated French furniture made in Paris and London. Queen

Victoria used the *cabinet de travail* during her visit to Saint-Cloud in August 1855 and mentioned "a beautiful *escritoire* (which I wrote at)"²⁶².

Apart from the Wallace example, Henry Dasson is the first of the widely known makers under the Third Republic to have made the desk, in 1875, which he exhibited at the Paris Exposition universelle of 1878. Records show that the curator of the Louvre in the 1870s, Barbet de Jouy, allowed Dasson to make drawings of the original desk but not to make moulds or squeezes²⁶³. Dasson was aided by the sculptors Aubert and Dallier which suggests that Dasson had to make at least some, if not all, of the patterns from scratch, the sculptors modelling from measured drawings. The desk was only

► The first recorded copy of the *Bureau du roi*, attributed to Crozatier and Dreschler, made in Paris for the fourth Marquess of Hertford and now in the Wallace Collection probably made circa 1855. The porcelain plaque copies the post-Revolution alterations of 1794.

opened for Dasson once. Surely the implication is that Dasson had already purchased Dreschler’s models and only needed to see the desk to attend to certain details?

The Dreschler models were most likely made from measured drawings after the desk had been removed from the *grand salon* of the Tuileries and before it had been installed by the Empress Eugénie in her *cabinet de travail* at Saint-Cloud by 1855. The personal friendship between Napoléon III and the Marquess of Hertford might well have afforded the latter’s craftsmen access to the desk during the years that the desk was in store in the 1850s. The desk would have been moved the few kilometres to Saint-Cloud by horse-drawn vehicle and was destined for the Empress’ private use. If it had needed any attention or repair, this would have been the moment; if it had to be repolished, a common occurrence in Paris, the bronzes would be taken off for the work. It is likely at this time that the Marquess’ agents were also able to take squeezes, a process known as *surmoulé*. Subsequently the Empress permitted other copies to be made, one for the King of the Belgians. Another was given to Grand Duke Paul of Russia by President Loubet of France²⁶⁴, no doubt inspired by the original desk being moved to Versailles for the visit of the Grand Duke in 1896.

Beurdeley, Dasson, Linke and Zwiener also copied the *Bureau du roi* as they knew it. Jansen made copies, greatly helped by the fact that he had already purchased master models when he took over Zwiener’s *fonds de commerce* in 1895. However, after the French revolution, Riesener’s original desk had been slightly altered. The model as delivered in 1769 had the interlaced Ls of the King at either end, replaced in 1794 by the two oval biscuit plaques, made by Sèvres²⁶⁵ depicting *L’Amour et l’Hyménée* and *Les Trois Grâces*. The only copy with Sèvres plaques is the first copy by Dreschler. Linke bought his biscuit plaques from the Wedgwood factory in England²⁶⁶. A desk thought to be by Beurdeley but not as yet fully examined, also had Wedgwood plaques²⁶⁷.

A rare example, illustrated on pp.160-162, without the oval “*biscuit*” medallions but with marquetry interlaced Ls was recorded in 2014²⁶⁸, although, despite an unsubstantiated attribution to Dasson, there was no signature found even during the subsequent extensive restoration and the maker and exact date remain unproven. It was clearly made after research had discovered that Riesener had altered the original in 1794.

Another alteration to the *Bureau du roi* dating from the 1790s was the substitution of various attributes in marquetry for the original royal iconography; these attributes were copied by the later makers. In the eighteenth century the large gilt-bronze plaque at the rear of the desk originally depicted seven infants, representing the Virtues, holding a profile portrait of Louis XV; this was changed to a portrait of Minerva after the Revolution. Also, on the original version, the seated bronze figure of Apollo held a lyre and Calliope three volumes of Homer but these were lost before any nineteenth-century versions were made and none show these attributes. There are no records to indicate how early copyists obtained the models for casting the elaborate and complex bronzes. Zwiener made a copy for Ludwig II of Bavaria for the *petit appartement* at Schloss Herrenhimsee²⁶⁹. By 1882 the king had heard of the Marquess of Hertford’s collection “and arranged for a reliable man to be sent to Paris to study closely the original in the Louvre”²⁷⁰. This work cost the “extremely high price of 55,564 marks”²⁷¹. It might be assumed because of the date of this commission that it was made by both the Zwiener brothers in Paris.

In 1871 it was reported that the Dreschler model was inventoried at 3,500 francs, and by 1891, £5,000. A report in 1884 said that the copy by Henry Dasson was sold for £4,500²⁷². In the days before comprehensive and digital auction records, two copies were noted on the market and more signed copies are noted below under the relevant makers’ names²⁷³. The desk was considered so important that in 1787 Benneman was commissioned to make a flat-top version without the elaborate cylinder for Louis XVI (see p.224).



COMMODOE: 1761-1763

Notable copies: Krieger; Linke

Known as a “*commode à la grecque*”, in the interim or Transitional style between the rococo of Louis XV and the neo-classical style associated with the reign of Louis XVI, this distinctive form was made first by Ceben and then his successor, Riesener, amongst others.

This particular form of commode was made by Ceben for the duc de Choiseul and madame de Pompadour, with similar models by Riesener and Ceben’s brother, Simon. Seventeen examples with different veneers were made by the Ceben brothers for madame de Pompadour, supplied between 1761-1763 for Versailles and the chateau d’Auvilliers.

In the nineteenth century, a commode was loaned from the Palace of Fontainebleau and was illustrated in a line engraving in the Exposition rétrospective de l’Union centrale des Arts décoratifs, Paris, of 1882²⁷⁴ and this may have been the impetus and opportunity for copyists.

The indistinct mark “CL37” on a pair of this model is for François Linke’s brother, Clément, or Clément’s son of the same name. Both the Clément Linkes worked independently from François, supplying locks and hinges to the wholesale market and possibly, from the evidence of these commodes, small decorative mounts.

This example, stamped by Krieger, of circa 1890, may well have been made for him by Linke who, in his earliest inventories, listed the model as number 379.



Nineteenth-century versions did not have the complex mechanical interior of the original table. This example, in mahogany with parquetry veneers, made in circa 1870, is signed “P. Sormani/10, r. Charlot/Paris”.

WRITING AND TOILET TABLE: 1763-1764

Original exhibited: Exposition de l'Union centrale des Beaux-Arts appliqués à l'industrie (Musée rétrospectif, Paris, 1865); “Marie-Antoinette” Exhibition (Petit Trianon, Paris, 1867); Bethnal Green Exhibition (London, 1872-1875)

Notable copies: Poteau; Sormani

The original table, now in the Wallace Collection, inspired nineteenth-century copyists but no exact copies were made. The Wallace Collection example has an elaborate marquetry top and the copies are usually of different proportions and taller, a number are listed in the Wallace Collection catalogue²⁷⁵.

The original is signed by Jean-François Leleu although it is thought to have been made in Œben's workshop, and was bought by Richard Wallace for his father, the fourth Marquess of Hertford, at the Earl of Clare sale in 1864. The combination of writing and toilet functions is typical of the inventiveness of mid-eighteenth-century cabinetmakers, and similar variations continued to be made by Leleu who had been apprenticed to Œben.

A nineteenth-century adaptation, widened to form a commode, was made by Ternisien et Dantant²⁷⁶. Although it was a model also made by Sormani, one has been recorded with a dubious Sormani signature on the gilt-bronze banding. An example by E. Poteau is listed in the musée d'Orsay archive. The opportunity for copyists may have stemmed from the Earl of Clare auction in 1864 or the subsequent exhibitions.

► An imaginary kaleidoscope view, painted in circa 1900²⁷⁷, by Edwin Foley, shows the towering lit à couronne with a plumed baldequin, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the table de toilette by Œben, which was copied by Poteau and Sormani, and the edge of the green lacquer cartonnier by Dubois, also in the Wallace Collection²⁷⁸.



THE CABINETMAKERS



Linke's innovative grand bureau, the sculpture by Messagé, exhibited in Paris in 1900 and again in Saint Louis in 1904.

◀ *In a nationalistic Gallic style, this innovative Diehl cabinet was at the 1867 exhibition. The central, silvered bronze plaque is by the animalier sculptor Emmanuel Frémiet.*



This curious inkwell is incised under two of the feet with the “BY” mark. It is typical of Beurdeley’s inventive style, a style that, however amusing, does not really work.

Branded “A. Beurdeley”, this Transitional-style multipurpose lady’s desk, inspired by an earlier model by Bernard Vanrisamburgh, known as BVRB, epitomises the very best Parisian cabinetmaking of the 1880s.

THE BEURDELEY DYNASTY
ACTIVE 1804-1895

BEURDELEY, JEAN (1772-1853)

1804 – 355, rue Saint-Honoré
1820-1839 – 364, rue Saint-Honoré
1840 – pavillon de Hanovre on the corner of the rue Louis-Legrand and the boulevard des Italiens

BEURDELEY, LOUIS-AUGUSTE-ALFRED
(1808-1883)⁷⁷

Took over from his father in 1840
Exhibitions:
1855 – Paris – Exposition universelle – bronze medal
1867 – Paris – Exposition universelle – gold medal

BEURDELEY, ALFRED-EMMANUEL-LOUIS
(1847-1919)

Took over from his father in 1875
Exhibitions:
1878 – Paris – Exposition universelle
1880 – Paris – exhibited at the first exhibition of the Union centrale des Beaux-Arts that concentrated on metalwork
1889 – Paris – Exposition universelle
1893 – Chicago – World’s Fair:Columbian Exposition

The three generations of the Beurdeley family built on the originally humble family fortunes and became one of the most important furniture-making firms in Paris of the nineteenth century. The family amassed a large collection of works of art, and a notable number of Chinese ceramics were left to the Louvre Museum. The firm was established in 1804 by Jean Beurdeley who was noted as a “*marchand de curiosités*”, selling furniture and works of art, many on commission from some of the best craftsmen of the day.



Louis-Auguste Beurdeley took over the family business in 1840 and transferred the retail element and fabrication and restoration workshop to rue Louis-Legrand where he considerably expanded his father’s business and became a major force, attaining an exceedingly high standard in the manufacture of *meubles de haut luxe* in Paris. He became a prominent dealer in French furniture and *objets d’art* in Paris and maintained the workshop, later developed by Alfred-Emmanuel. As the third and last generation of active



The magnificent architectural cabinet from the 1867 exhibition, colorfully veneered in contrasting rosewood, purpleheart, boxwood and satinwood. The only signature is the “BY” inscription on the reverse of the large central trophy on the cornice.

This exquisite octagonal guéridon of elegant and singular design is typical of Beurdeley trying to improve on the previous century. The gouache panel incorporated in the table is in the manner of Louis Le Masson, commissioned around 1782 by the Sèvres porcelain factory to design the “Arabesque” service for Louis XVI⁷⁸.

makers in the family firm, Alfred-Emmanuel took over the thriving business in 1875. He increased the success of the firm, which has gained worldwide recognition for the refinement and quality of its gilt-bronze mounts for furniture and decorative objects. When the business finally closed in 1895, a large quantity of the furniture and works of art created and collected by the Beurdeley family was sold in a series of auctions. However, the wealthy Alfred-Emmanuel kept many pieces, which were taken to his *hôtel particulier* in Paris and later bequeathed to his children.

Louis-Auguste Beurdeley had several important official orders, notably an armoire for the duc de Nemours



in 1846 for the Tuileries, and two further pieces for the palace in 1852. In 1853 he made furniture for the marriage of the Emperor to Eugénie which was exhibited at the 1855 exhibition. The 1867 Paris exhibition furniture included the magnificent bookcase (illustrated on p.267) of an overall Renaissance form but with applied decoration in the Louis XVI “Pompeian” style. Here it is evident that Louis-Auguste Beurdeley had seen and was familiar with the decoration of Marie-Antoinette’s boudoir at Fontainebleau decorated in the same manner. For the *cabinet de travail* at Saint-Cloud he supplied a giltwood suite comprising a pair of console tables, two settees, six armchairs, six side chairs and a fire screen⁷⁹. The cabinet shown opposite is influenced by one in the manner of Baumhauer that originally stood in the salon de Mercure at Saint-Cloud and now in the Louvre, Compiègne and the Tuileries. Pierre Verlet wrote that the Beurdeleys were “*du grand art, qui laisse rêveur. Un XVIII^e qui continue de vivre*”. However, Beurdeley was adept at adapting the



The lyre mount on the stretcher of this gilt-bronze table is a recurring Beurdeley device.

Louis styles to suit the modern market. Displaying the pride he evidently took in his work, Beurdeley wrote to a “M. Le Comte” on 4th July 1867 showing his displeasure in only receiving a gold medal at the exhibition when he had been hoping for “La Croix”⁸⁰.

The Beurdeley dynasty has an important place in the annals of Parisian *meubles de luxe*. One of the best makers, their work is always of a very high quality, technically superb although sometimes lacking somewhat in style. What inventiveness they had was often a little misguided and certainly did not match the international acclaim of, for example, Linke. This may be partly due to an apparent inability to draw to a high enough standard. Pen and ink sketches by Alfred-Emmanuel Beurdeley⁸¹, albeit made whilst on a visit to London and not studio drawings, show a slightly naïve hand compared, for example, to



One of a pair, this table was sold in the last vente Beurdeley auction in 1979⁸⁵ and catalogued as “grande table en bronze”. With a porphyry top, this magnificent table is made entirely of gilt bronze with the marque au fer “A. Beurdeley a Paris” on the underside. It had previously been in the second “vente de feu Beurdeley Père” in 1883 where it was purchased by his son Alfred⁸⁶.

This distinctive cabinet can be compared to a secrétaire, a masterpiece from the Beurdeley private collection sold in London⁸⁷, based on what is now a “lost” model by Nicolas Petit, supplied to the Garde-Meuble.



Linke, who took drawing classes at night school or used his professional artist and sculptor Léon Messagé.

Henry Dasson and Alfred-Emmanuel were founder members of the Union centrale des Beaux-Arts appliqués à l’industrie where many copies of eighteenth-century models were shown. Although an incisive look into the work of the Beurdeleys has been compiled by Mestdagh, it is believed that the bulk of the working daybooks, including costings and clientele, were destroyed by order of the family⁸³.

As intrepid collectors of a wide range of items, especially oriental wares, the Beurdeley family was aware of the use, presentation and value of oriental lacquer to enrich their furniture, and fine quality examples can be seen on p.71 and p.151. The fourth Marquess of Hertford, or his heirs, owned a table by Beurdeley, sold at Christie, Manson and Woods in 1913⁸⁴, described as “an oblong table, by Beurdeley, a Paris – 51 in. wide [...] ebonised wood [...] with [...] lacquer depicting Chinese landscapes [...] mother-o’-pearl [...] *or molu*”. The house made copies of eighteenth-century furniture,



Inlaid with colourful seventeenth-century Florentine hardstones, an image of this table is in the Beurdeley photographic archives in the musée des Arts décoratifs⁸².



The Beurdeley stand at the 1893 world fair in Chicago. In the centre is the firm's copy of the Louis XV Bureau du roi, first shown in Paris in 1889. Other copies are on view alongside pieces based on the Louis XV and XVI styles.



First exhibited in 1880⁹¹, this inventive desk with Cupid's bow holding a frieze, the legs formed as quivers of arrows, has finely detailed gouache panels painted with idyllic rustic scenes and trophies of Love by an unheralded artist, Mathieu.

some exact but most with a slight personal variation in the detail, usually of the bronze mounts (see p.221 top).

The Beurdeleys were not only making new furniture but evidently selling and restoring earlier pieces as well. In 1872 the firm sold a variety of objects, including an important marquetry cabinet, now attributed to A.-C. Boulle, to the newly knighted Sir Richard Wallace for a total of 260,000 francs⁸⁸. The family had a flourishing and extensive business selling antique furniture, arms and armour, medals, jewellery and sculpture. In 1920 an auction of their paintings alone realised 752,346 francs⁸⁹.

Beurdeley was one of the handful of makers to attempt a copy of the *Bureau du roi* by Eben and Riesener. One was exhibited in Chicago in 1893 and a version is now in India in the Salar Jung Museum on the southern bank of the Musi river in Hyderabad. The photograph shown here of the Chicago exhibition shows the desk in the centre of the stand, flanked by a mixture of copies and creative furniture, including his extraordinary Japanese lacquer cabinet in a pastiche of the Louis XV rococo style with a candlearm at each side⁹⁰.

Beurdeley copies of the *Bureau du roi* all appear to have Wedgwood jasper plaques, unlike the first copy for the Marquess of Hertford which has Sèvres plaques, as those on the original replaced by Riesener in 1794. One of the most curious aspects of one copy by Beurdeley, seen by the author in the 1980s, was that it had a gilt-bronze plaque with a profile medallion of Louis XV on the back, in place of the gilt-bronze depiction of Minerva on the eighteenth-century desk at Versailles. This example was sold by the Amos Gallery to a private collector in Indiana and is now in California. The dealer Amos always maintained that the plaque was the original eighteenth-century plaque, saved after it was removed by Riesener and sent to the United States for safekeeping. Unfortunately the author was not able to inspect the plaque in detail in the 1980s. Although the story seems fanciful, the mystery still remains – could the plaque really be the original, or incorporate the original medallion, or be a facsimile or a *surmoulé* of the original? There is evidence of what the



An extraordinary creation by Beurdeley, who has adapted mounts in the style of Charles Cressent of the 1730s to create an eclectic form with delicate end-cut marquetry.

original looked like in the description in an inventory of 1776: “[...] un groupe d'enfants représentant les Arts et les Vertus cardinales portant le médaillon de Louis XV”. This description certainly appears to be the same as the Amos example, of which a photograph exists in the Wallace Archive⁹². There are the following possibilities: first that it is the original, or second that it is a *surmoulé* copy of the original. Another possibility is that it is a confection by Beurdeley or a *fondeur*. If any workshop were capable of all three scenarios, it would be that of the Beurdeley family. Erudite, wealthy and passionate collectors over a wide range of the fine and decorative arts, they would have had access to all the auctions of *fonds de commerce* since the early nineteenth century, auctions such as that of the important Feuchère firm who had access to models dating back to the previous century.

An important collection of Beurdeley furniture and decorative furnishing items, including wall lights and desk objects, was offered at auction in London in 2011. The collection was distinguished by being sold by



Beurdeley exhibited a similar free-standing cabinet in 1878 with a marquetry still life, showing his ability to innovate as well as copy earlier forms. This example, using fine quality lacquer, is most probably the one sold in the Beurdeley auction of 1895⁹³.

One of a pair of cabinets, in purpleheart and citronnier, the capitals have every leaf individually screwed in, reminiscent of the late seventeenth-century work of Domenico Cucci for Louis XIV. The style of the cabinets echoes that of Bernard Molitor and the central plaque of the Three Graces was used by Adam Weisweiler⁹⁴.



A sumptuous cabinet exhibited at the 1867 Paris exhibition with an eclectic design incorporating Chinese lacquer in imitation of Japanese. Philippe Bury commented at the exhibition on the fine quality of the chasing and gilding of Beurdeley's work which reached a standard rarely, if ever, surpassed by other Paris makers. Two distinctive Beurdeley features can clearly be seen, the pearl beading around the frieze panels and the diamond paterae in gilt bronze "joining" the trellis. Beurdeley made the same model with vernis Martin panels instead of lacquer⁹⁵.

the Beurdeley family as having been made by Alfred-Emmanuel Beurdeley, or probably more correctly, under his supervision. It is dubious that such a wealthy gentleman, the third in line of a dynasty, would actually be working on the bench. The furniture was of a very high standard, as would be expected from furniture decorating his *hôtel particulier* in the rue de Clichy. The Bonham's catalogue illustrated several black-and-white photographs taken as part of an inventory in 1901. They show rooms furnished in a predominately eighteenth-century manner, almost all copies of, or imitating, the Louis XV and Louis XVI rococo and neo-classical styles. He did not appear to have at home any furniture in his more daring style.

When Alfred-Emmanuel retired in 1895 he sold the remaining stock-in-trade at auction. The sale comprised three hundred and sixty-five lots of furniture and decorative arts, including a copy of the *Bureau du roi* catalogued as having being made in 1889. Interestingly, another copy can be seen in a 1901 photograph in the Beurdeley *hôtel particulier* in the rue Clichy. Later Beurdeley *vente de commerce* catalogues showed an extraordinary range of items for sale including giltwood furniture and seat furniture, and one assumes that it was made in-house. Frustratingly, the 1895 catalogue did not indicate if any of the items were signed. The Bonham's catalogues showed, as would be expected, that the veneered case furniture was signed but none



The unusual lacquer cartouche is typical of Beurdeley's inventiveness, although he has used a well-rehearsed Boulle-style screw foot.

of the chairs appeared to be – does this indicate that, like some Linke pieces of giltwood, they were not in fact made in-house? Only one item in gilt bronze carried the “BY” signature, a pair of wall lights in *Régence* style.

The quality and refinement of Beurdeley's bronze work are the first indication of whether or not the piece is from the firm's workshops. The exquisite burnishing and attention to detail shows the exacting finish that the Beurdeleys required of their craftsmen. This detail is also seen on the cabinet work; for example, many pieces with Chinese or imitation lacquer have ebony-capped drawers to complement the black ground of the lacquer. For reasons unknown, Beurdeley did not make many commodes, favouring writing desks of many variations, all of which have a green moroccan leather writing surface. The quality of the interiors was always exemplary, often using mahogany.

A copy of the Benneman *Bureau du roi* with four Beurdeley brand marks underneath has, intriguingly, some mounts with the “ZN” mark for Zwiener, which suggests an as yet unknown collaboration. Perhaps the foundry mistakenly used the Zwiener master models, which would seem unlikely, or possibly Beurdeley

handled or restored the desk. Many questions like this simply cannot be answered. As with most of his contemporaries with the exception of Dasson, Beurdeley furniture is unlikely to be dated. One exception is the astronomical clock, the copy of the one made for Louis XV, which is signed “A. Beurdeley 1893”.

The workshops were closed in 1895 and a series of five public auctions took place between 19th October 1897 and 24th May 1898, amounting to some 2,000 lots from the pavillon de Hanovre and the workshops on the rue d'Autencourt in the 17th district. Other Beurdeley auctions include:

- 1864 – a collection of ceramics, including Chinese, terracottas and gilt-bronze items;
- 1895 – 6-9th and 27th May-1st June – there were some 360 lots mainly copying eighteenth-century models. Linke purchased the models for a cabinet on stand in the style of Weisweiler from the auction and adapted it under Linke index number 684;
- 1898 – 11th and 12th March;
- 1899 – 15th and 16th March;
- 1901 – 30th March;
- 1979 – 6th May – Collections Beurdeley.



A solid gilt-bronze table, exhibited in 1878, sold in the vente Beurdeley in 1895⁹⁶.



An extraordinary tour de force by Alfred-Emmanuel Beurdeley in delicately carved walnut, exhibited at the Paris Exposition universelle 1867.



A pair of refined pier tables by Beurdeley, the carved and giltwood with all the crispness of his best gilt-bronze casting.