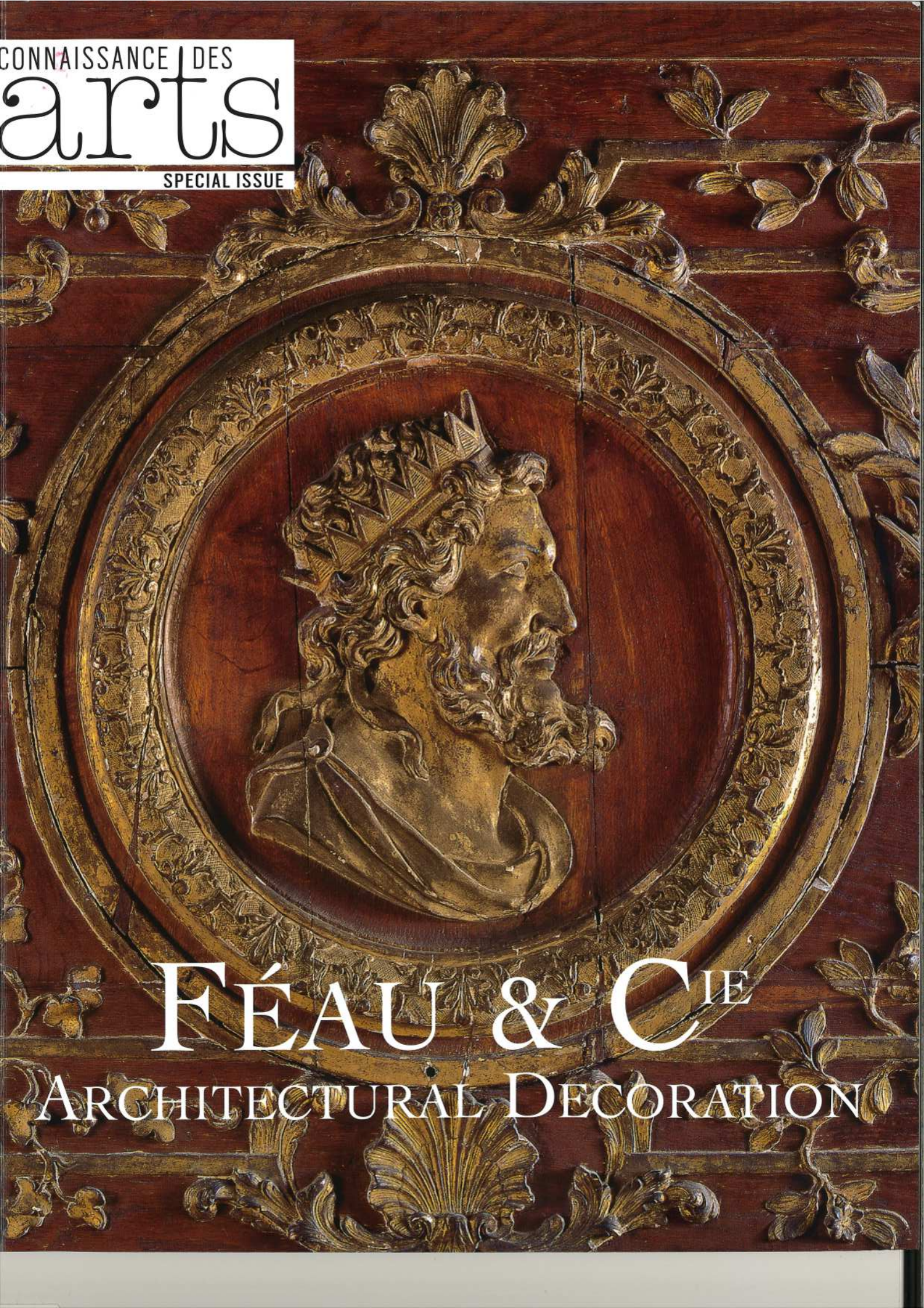
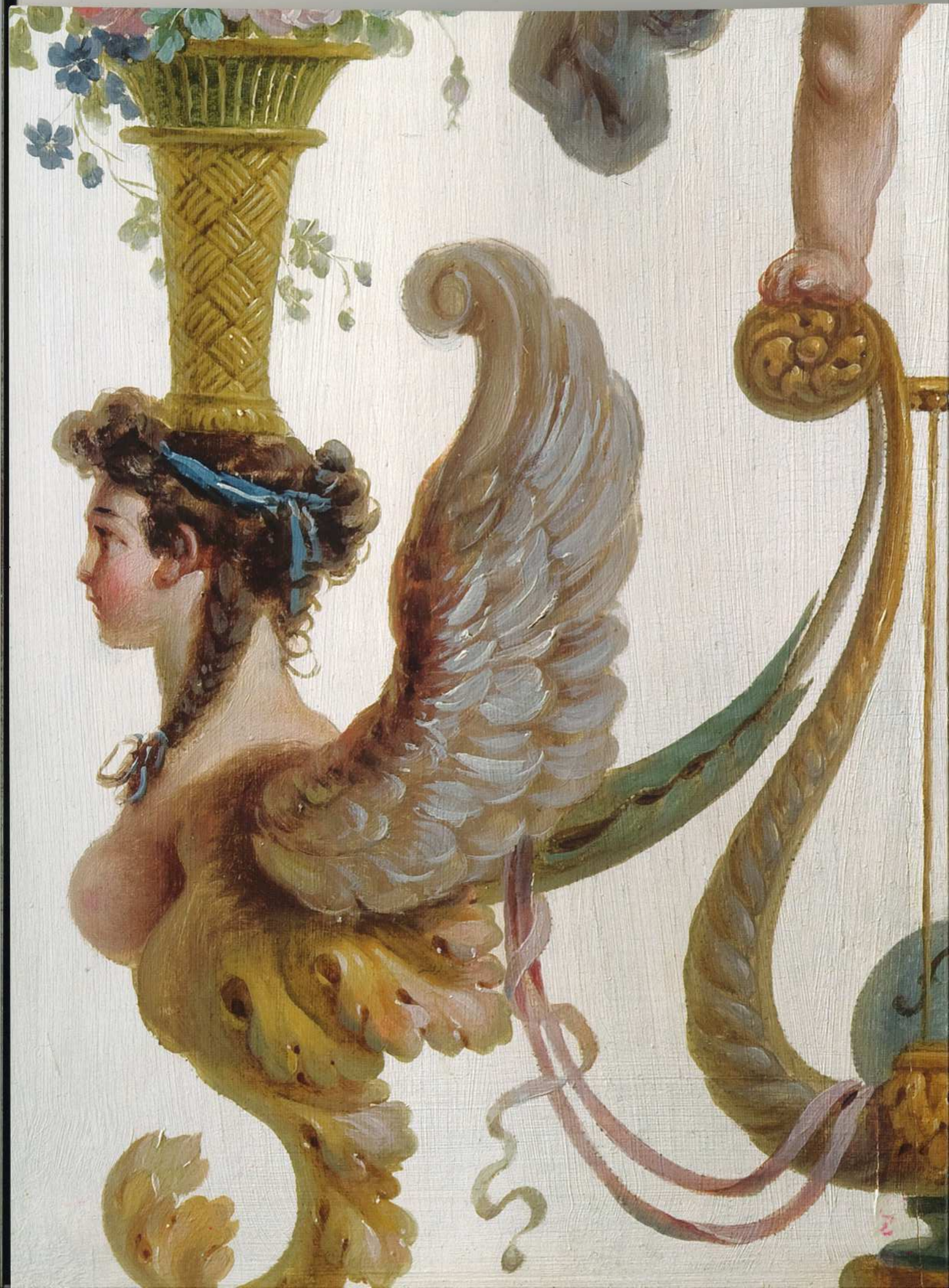


CONNAISSANCE DES
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SPECIAL ISSUE



FÉAU & C^{IE}
ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION

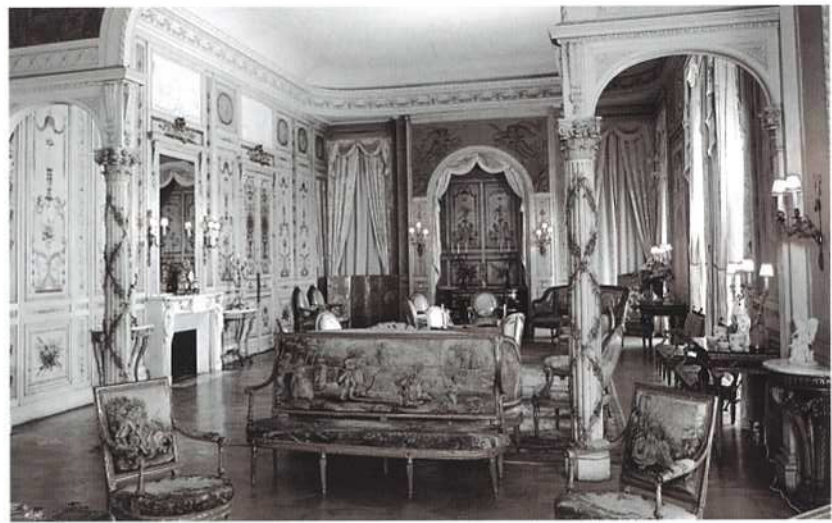




FÉAU & C^{IE}

Texts by Axelle Corty





From one age to another

Top left:
Charles Fournier
(1846–1916), founder
of the decoration
company, in the early
20th century.

Top right:
1935, craftsmen
at Grellou restoring
French Regency
woodwork for the
apartment of the great
collector Paul Lesieur
in Avenue Foch.
Guillaume Féau
bought this historic
ensemble in 2009.

Bottom:
the grand salon of
the Villa Ephrussi
de Rothschild at
Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat,
crafted in around
1910 by the Fournier
workshops.

Page right:
summing up the spirit
of Rue Laugier,
18th-century panels
from Piedmont (later
fitted into an
apartment in Monaco)
standing in a corner
are reflected in
a Viennese trumeau
mirror from the same
period, removed from
the Paar mansion
a century ago.

Imagine: in the heart of Paris, an attractive street in the Rue Poncelet neighbourhood: all you have to do to enter a different universe is open the celadon-green door. The light from the glass roof by Eiffel is worthy of Vermeer. Everywhere, leaning against the walls, are hundreds, thousands of superb, antique wooden panels. Here, a fox painted in a medallion, raising its head to the crow of the fable; there, a garland of fruit. So lifelike is the carved oak that you want to reach out and pick a pomegranate. The atmosphere has a strange density, as if you were peering into historical strata – the combined history of all these decorative ensembles, the oldest of which were crafted in the 17th century, but also the history of Féau, one of those firms that, one can immediately sense, is unique to Old Europe.

These walls within which young men and women are now busy at their work have been occupied since 1885, when Charles Fournier moved here, housing the craftsmen of his decoration and antique woodwork firm under the latest thing, a brand-new glass roof. He founded the company in 1875, during the golden age for his line of work, at a time when financiers and industrialists, the masters of the new world, were building mansions as big and refined as their

A passion for woodwork

Interview with Guillaume Féau

How would you describe what you do?

As a company Féau's main activity is to design interiors. We deal in antique architectural woodwork, we make copies and design original interiors. Each one is unique. In twenty years, we have never made the same one twice. We have a very big collection of archives, with models and countless fragments from antique interiors. It's like a palette with which we can compose ensembles to meet the requirements of our clients, who are usually decorators or architects. These are designed in Paris, in the studio on Rue Laugier. We have them made in our workshops in France, and supervise their installation all around the world.

What attracted you to this line of work?

My father and grandfather were decorators. As a young boy, I used to hang around the workshop. A firm that is over a hundred years old, right in the middle of Paris, with a thousand square metres (10,750 square feet) of warehouses – that's rare. I was fascinated. Every little bit of *décor* is steeped in history. When I was sixteen, my grandfather and my father, who understood that I wanted to be a part of it all, suggested that I might like to acquire a share in the business. I had a passion for decorative woodwork. I was always poring over plans and archives and trying to compose interiors. The collection of plans and antique documents here is so rich that I soon came to understand the way *décor*s were created in the different periods. I acquired an expertise that influenced my career: yes, I went to business school, but the thesis I did in my final year was about a plan to shift Féau's activity towards selling and making copies of antique woodwork.

You sensed that there would be a demand for this?

This was the early 1990s, the beginning of the rise of the decorators. A handful of them, including Alberto Pinto and Jacques Garcia, revived the fashion for large-scale classical decors. The mass market for modest provincial woodwork was swept away by the demand for high-end work. At the same time, there was growing awareness of the major decorative ensembles by architects such as Ledoux, Bellanger and Percier and Fontaine, thanks to the research published by art historians. Designed for the highest echelons of power, these ensembles were pieces of architecture in their own right, which never went out of fashion. When you are supplying a client with this kind of ensemble, and you need to add something to adapt it to a room, nothing less than perfection will do. And that is how we became experts at making deluxe copies of antique decorative ensembles.

What techniques do you use?

If the drawing is not very precise, even a big decorative piece becomes mediocre. After two coats of paint the ornament loses its vivacity. With resin you can mould and recreate antique woodwork with very precise detailing. I understood the enormous potential of this technique when I was nineteen. I got in touch with the Aligon family, who had almost a monopoly on fine casts of works by the Nouveaux Réalistes – Niki de Saint-Phalle, Arman, César. Working with Olivier Aligon, I developed a process for moulding antique pieces. We also did our best to ensure that the result was extremely realistic, with the same kind of density and colour as wood. Often, a piece of woodwork in oak and resin will look older than a new one in sculpted oak: you get the same kind of wear on the wood. This technique brings down costs and lead times, especially on large-scale projects.

What are your clients looking for nowadays?

There is always a clientele for very top quality pastiche with luxurious ornamentation. But there is a major trend today towards paring down the big decorative ensembles. For example, you can slightly simplify the ornamentation of an ensemble by Ledoux and paint it white. The architecture is still there, structured but light, understated, almost contemporary. You can hang a good Warhol or Damien Hirst on the wall, or place a sculpture by Dubuffet or a chair by Ron Arad in the room. Why not put a multicoloured work by Sol LeWitt in an interior by Percier and Fontaine? It will look finer than in a simple white cube. I am fascinated by this way of giving big historical interiors a new life. ■

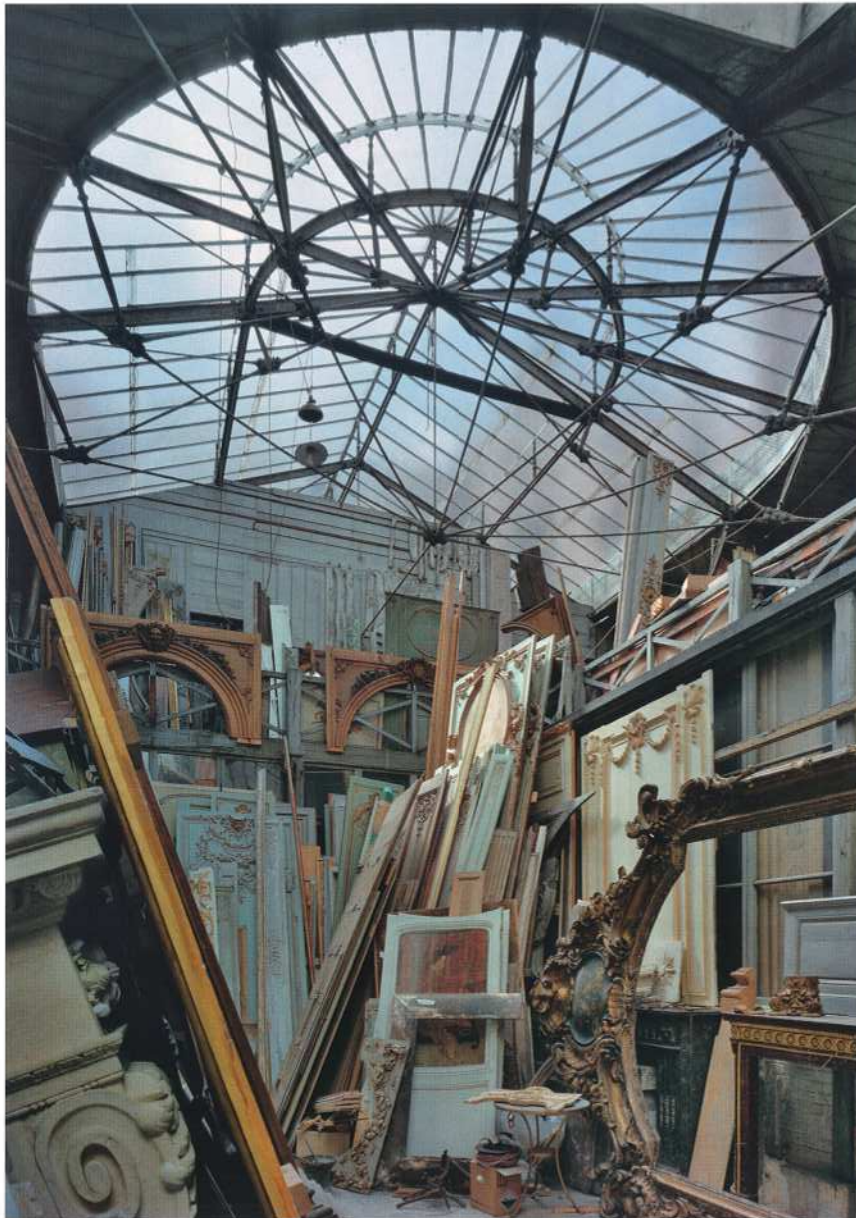
Guillaume Féau
in his office
– a real 'cabinet
of curiosities'.



fortunes and taste would allow. The list of his clients is certainly impressive: the count Boni de Castellane for his Palais-Rose on Avenue Foch, Béatrice Ephrussi de Rothschild for her villa at Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, Henry Clay Frick for his house by Central Park, Henry Ford II for his mansion in Detroit, to name but a few. When Charles Fournier passed away in 1916, Raymond Grellou bought up his renowned firm. But the war changed the world and changed its taste. The new director reduced the painting and gilding activity and put the emphasis on upholstery, moving the company towards decoration. He caught the wave of modernity: in the 1930s Grellou's firm supplied some very fine wooden interiors in the same vein as Ruhlmann and Printz.

At around this time, a young man from a good family, Guy Féau, was developing a passion for the new style of interior. Working as an assistant to the decorator Jean Pascaud, he dreamed of following in his mentor's footsteps. However, family obligations forced him along a more conventional path, for which he no doubt compensated with his knowledge and collection of art. It was left to his son Joël to become a decorator. Having taken his first steps at Jansen, he teamed up with his father to buy Grellou in 1963. Like Carlhian and the other great stalwarts of grand decorative interiors, Jansen closed in the 1970s: fashion had moved on from precious woodwork and now favoured the extreme simplicity of smooth, white-painted walls. But Féau persevered. As regular participants in the great get-togethers for decorative art – the Biennale des Antiquaires, Salon de Mars, Salon de la Société des Artistes Décorateurs – Guy and Joël championed the cause of antique woodwork.

So it was that Joël Féau's son Guillaume grew up surrounded by centuries-old decorative woodwork and archives. He acquired a keen eye and a matchless knowledge of his field. He knew, somehow, that the future for precious woodwork was promising. Sensing that decorators were looking for experts in this field, he decided to develop his activity as a dealer. Today, Féau works with the world's finest decorators, and for its biggest fortunes. New mansions and palaces are springing up, from America to the Far East. It looks as if the second golden age for great decorative ensembles is upon us. ■



Below:
Rue Laugier,
the famous loft with
its magically luminous
glass roof from
the late 19th century.

Page right:
another corner of this
treasure trove. At the
centre, an impressive
Renaissance panel,
the twin of which was
discovered in a barn
by Guillaume Féau.
François Pinault
bought the pair, which
may once have
protected Catherine
de' Medici's wine
store, for the door
of his cellars
at Château-Latour.





Treasures from the Féau archives. Above, a watercolour by the decorator Alexandre Serebriakoff showing the Salon des Muses at the Hôtel Lambert, a famous aristocratic residence on the Île Saint-Louis in Paris, built by Le Vau in the mid-17th century and decorated by the painters Le Brun and Le Sueur. Féau is working on the restoration of this superb Parisian mansion. Among Guillaume Féau's sources of inspiration are the magnificent Neo-Pompeian drawings done in around 1785 by François-Joseph Bélanger (left), an architect for whom he has a special passion. Below, this extremely rare drawing, pen and ink, watercolour and wash, of an 18th-century interior is about two metres long, and probably shows a design for a German royal palace by Germain Boffrand (1667–1754). Done in watercolour, pen, black ink and grey wash on pencil, the drawing on the right shows the refinement of detail characteristic of the 18th century. This sheet is attributed to Gilles-Paul Cauvet, a sculptor and ornamentist who worked on the decoration of the Palais-Royal, or his entourage.





The collection as creative inspiration

The premises in Rue Laugier house an unexpected museum. The piles of antique panels, the fragments of carved wooden friezes and the bookcases full of volumes and old documents contribute greatly to the place's magic. These collections, which begin in the sixteenth century and span the history of decoration all the way up to the 1970s, taking in the modern subtleties of Art Deco, are a massive selling point with visitors. Even more importantly, they embody Féau's DNA. These walls have been home to three successive companies, and each has accumulated archives, storing the records of its activity and the antique ensembles that it owned, and passing these treasures on to its successor. When he took over the firm, Guillaume Féau set about adding yet more riches to this collection. Mad about the marvellously precise models made by craftsmen to present their designs to their patrons, he is always on the lookout for new documents and pieces of antique carved wood that might reveal previously undiscovered styles of decoration. For him, it is vital to cultivate this memory of wood, plaster and paper, for this is the guarantor of stylistic authenticity. 'I hate the bad copies of 18th-century pieces made in the 19th. I fight against adulteration. The antique woodwork that we sell is among the best that was made at the time. The pieces that we make must be as authentic and beautiful as possible', he affirms, passionately. If Féau has been known to fight to the last at auction 'for even a tiny piece of sculpted wood that is of superb quality', this is partly because his collection represents a precious inventory of ornament. In the design studio, friezes, cornices and overdoors are skilfully coordinated to create interiors that are both authentic and always different. Recalling the grand history of architectural decoration, they are vital to Féau's creativity. The collection is the firm's beating heart. ■



Top left: 'I am a passionate collector of maquettes for panelling. The house already had some important ones before I arrived, including pieces for Italian chapels and *palazzi* from the 17th century', explains Guillaume Féau. Antiques of undeniable charm, vivid archives of the decorative arts, these scale models serve primarily to explain ideas to clients. 'The tradition of making these models may well go back to Antiquity', says Féau. Among the treasures in his collection are jewels from the famous house of Carlhian, a decorator to high society in the Belle Époque. Today, Féau is where you must go to see the scale model used to make the legendary bathroom designed for Mademoiselle Dervieux by the architect Bélanger in around 1780. An actress and dancer, this splendid woman used to take her ablutions surrounded by the Neo-Etruscan *décor* modelled here, sitting in a bath heated through the floor. The room had a balcony from which gentlemen prepared to pay for the privilege could observe the spectacle.



Bottom left: this composition of models features a treasure, a cupola from the former collection of the French architect and decorator Georges Hoentschel (1855–1915), a legendary ensemble which now forms part of the French decorative arts ensemble at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Page right: the corridors at Féau are like a maze filled with the accumulated collections of staff and decorative woodwork which are inventoried and then classified every time the house acquires new pieces: a cornucopia of ornament to stimulate the imaginations of the designers.



Expertise and audacity

Joseph Joubert, an essayist and moralist of the Enlightenment period, wrote that 'the imagination is the window of the soul'. That is no doubt why, in matters of *grande décoration*, desires – call them caprices, even – have been so diverse. With over a century of know-how to call on, the house of Féau is constantly facing new challenges. For example, when a *décor* has to be adapted to a space of over ten thousand square metres. Or when the Parisian workshops must carve from solid oak a garland of fruits and flowers faithfully representing varieties native to Texas. Or when a monumental plaster cupola has to be installed in a salon in Moscow measuring two hundred square metres. But new challenges engender new skills. Fitting antique woodwork, and if necessary adapting it to new dimensions, as well as designing, making and installing new interiors, remains the firm's core activity, for which it draws on ancestral skills in the sculpting of wood and plaster, painting and gilding, enriched by the new possibilities afforded by resin. To enhance his range of services, Guillaume Féau now offers his clients to cut and install old mercury mirrors, to enrich their interior by choosing from his superb collection of antique marble fireplaces and fountains, and to put the finishing touch to the ensemble by laying a luxurious marquetry-work parquet, either original or carefully copied in his workshops. 'I learned to copy parquets when the condition of the originals was too poor for them to be restored', he explains. Restoration is indeed another of the firm's specialities, developed in over a hundred years of decorative work, and helped by its remarkable collection of historic archives. Guillaume Féau is an acknowledged expert in his field, adding a further dimension to the purity of style and quality of execution that distinguishes his business. 'It's all too easy to adulterate a style, and a badly made piece of woodwork doesn't age well. That's why all my workshops are in France. I refuse to yield to the sirens of profitability and subcontract to eastern Europe', insists Féau, who should soon be putting his knowledge to work as a new member of the French national antique dealers syndicate. ■

Below:
the design of the
extraordinary cupola
that Féau recently
installed in a mansion
in Moscow was
worked out
on a computer.

A craftsman makes
the wooden structure
for the interior of
the Café Pouchkine
in Paris, which was
subsequently executed
in 'concrete-effect'
resin.

The staff workshop.

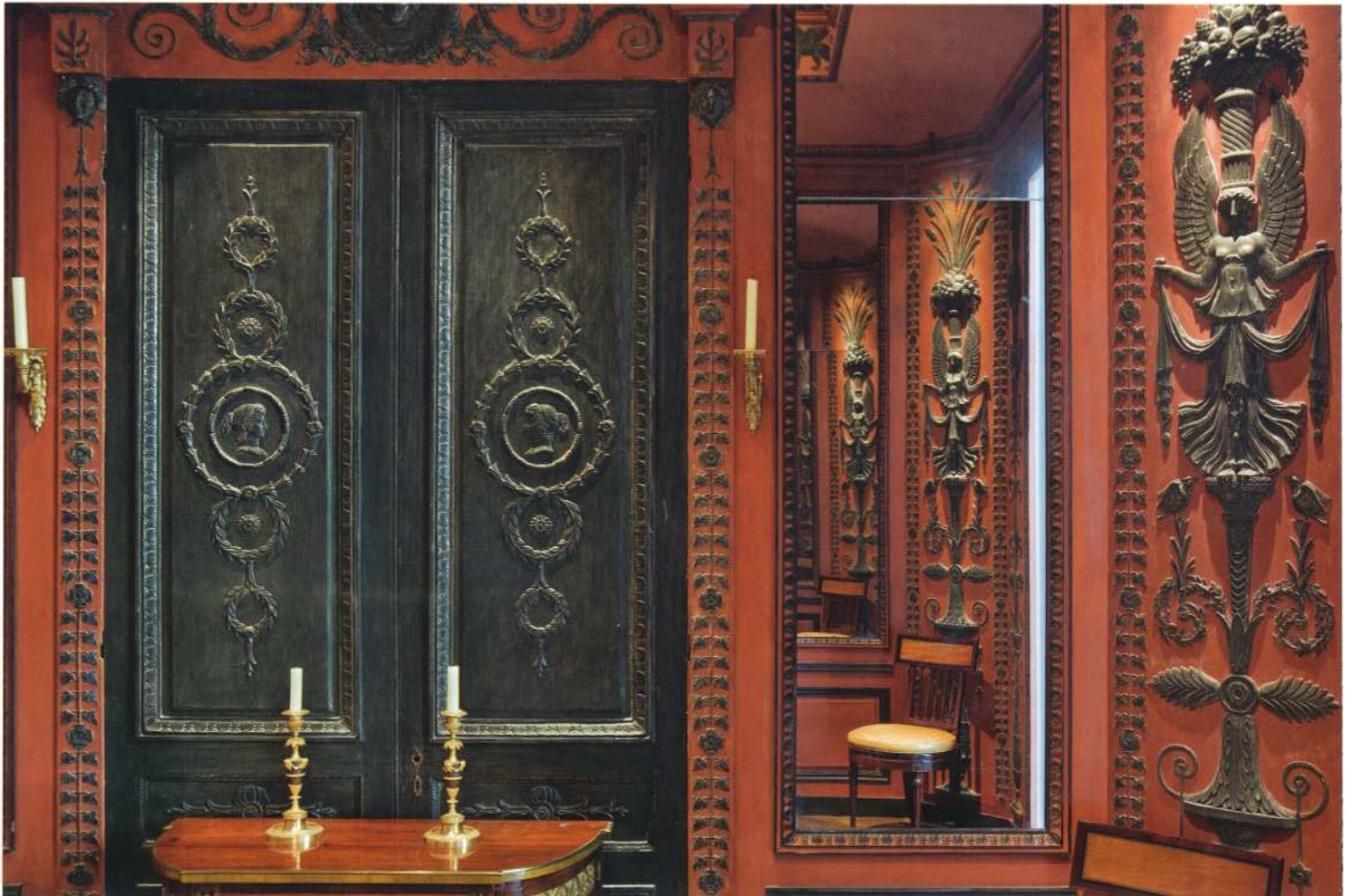
Page right:
restoration of the gold
leaf on panelling from
the former collections
of Jérôme Bonaparte,
brother of Napoleon I,
using a gilding brush
and cushion.







Behind the scenes at the Biennale des Antiquaires in 2010: the booth of François Léage under construction. Guillaume Féau conceived the settings for the presentation of this renowned antiques dealer's most prestigious furniture. Here, he brings together two historical decors from the late 18th century: the famous 'Continents' panelling by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux and an Etruscan-style ensemble designed by Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine.







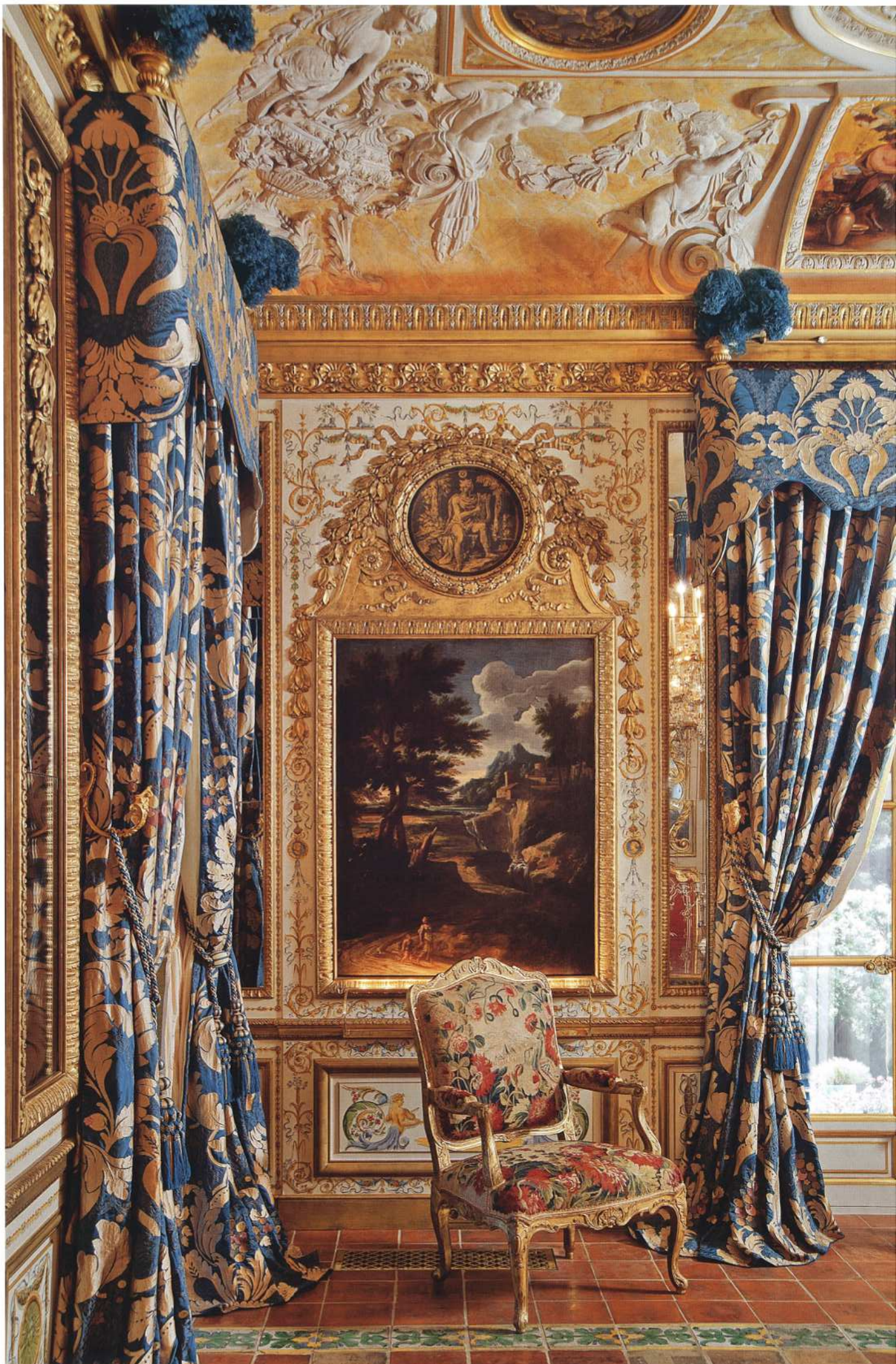
This set of ten panels dating from 1783 has kept its original colours. It comes from the collection of the decorator Robert Carhian and belonged to Léo Delibes, composer of the opera *Lakmé*. 'This woodwork in sculpted solid oak is among the most beautiful I have ever seen', avers Guillaume Féau. It comes from the Café de Foy, a famous establishment in Palais-Royal where Camille Desmoulins harangued the crowds in July 1789, whipping up their revolutionary fervour.

Exquisite interiors

A jewel on the Mediterranean

At the tip of Cap Ferrat, a colonnaded residence built in around 1920 houses interiors of a splendour to compete with the beauty of the Bay of Villefranche outside. 'This project was one of the most important experiences in my whole life. My clients, who are big collectors, asked me to decorate this, one of the world's most beautiful houses', says Guillaume Féau, who spent four years amassing a remarkable set of decorative elements. In the dining room, the 17th-century painted panels can easily bear comparison with those in the Hôtel de Lauzun. The paintings are from Poussin's circle and the medallions are engraved with gold in a very fine *bretté* effect, creating relief that more effectively catches the light from the sun or candles. 'We fitted antique mercury mirrors so that the flames would be reflected with endless depth during dinners.' This bijou-like room contrasts with the very Mediterranean terrace. This surprise effect was very important to the owners of the house. The handsome 18th-century Sicilian flooring provides an elegant transition between the two.









As in many 18th- and 19th-century Parisian mansions, the ceilings of the two halls that follow on from each other are cupolas. The first one crowns the room at a height of five metres and is supported by unusual Parisian woodwork from the Louis XVI period with protuberant columns and cornice. The decoration of the second entrance is probably by Ledoux. Its trumeau mirrors decorated with helmets recall the Café Militaire in Faubourg Saint-Honoré, which Ledoux decorated as a young man. The atmosphere is softened by the lovely Italian Chinciserie-style cupola from the 18th century, no doubt by Tiepolo's circle.



Madame's exquisite boudoir is also museum-worthy. Another small part of this ensemble painted in 1724 by Nicolas Lancret and Claude III Andran is exhibited in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. It was commissioned by François Marie Peyrenc de Moras, controller of the Law bank, for his mansion on Place Vendôme. For Monsieur's study, Guillaume Féau based his design on one of his favourite models: "I really love these panels, which I believe are the work of Henri Salambier, one of the great ornamentists of the late 18th century. We have always refused to sell them, even to Boni de Castellane! We use the little mask as the logo of the house of Féau.' A subtle way of putting the Féau signature on this dream villa?



A Neoclassical apartment in London

In collaboration with Gérard Orts, Féau conceived this interior in the Neoclassical style for a brilliant young financier. Evoking the finest French decoration of the late 18th century, it adorns an apartment on the edge of Hyde Park that boasts a ceiling height of over five metres. In fact, it was formerly a ballroom, and its unusual volumes lend themselves to an effect of elegant solemnity, starting with the entrance. The stucco decoration imitates stone. The rosettes in the ceiling designed by Guillaume Féau pick up the motifs of the remarkable panelling, which no doubt originally adorned Bellevue, Madame de Pompadour's château in Meudon. To design the panels in the main drawing room (below left) he referred to Ledoux's interior in one of the mansions owned by the Commissioner of War, Lenormand de Mézières, while for the dining room (below right) he had his mind on the library built for Louis XVI at Versailles by the architect Gabriel.







The delightful Chinese room (above) elegantly combines contemporary wallpaper chosen by the Parisian antiques dealer and decorator Gérard Orts with 18th-century mercury mirrors cut and fitted by Féau. The play on perspectives seems to expand this intimate room which offers an agreeable contrast with the monumental, architectural atmosphere of the apartment as a whole. The copies of antique panelling are a blend dominated by the ornamental register of Ledoux's late interiors and the style of early ensembles by Percier and Fontaine. The handsome stylistic harmony that results is heightened by the marble floors, also installed by Féau. The combination of stucco/stone and wood bestows a real sense of majesty on this apartment.





In Vienna, an 18th-century fantasia in a mansion by Hoffmann

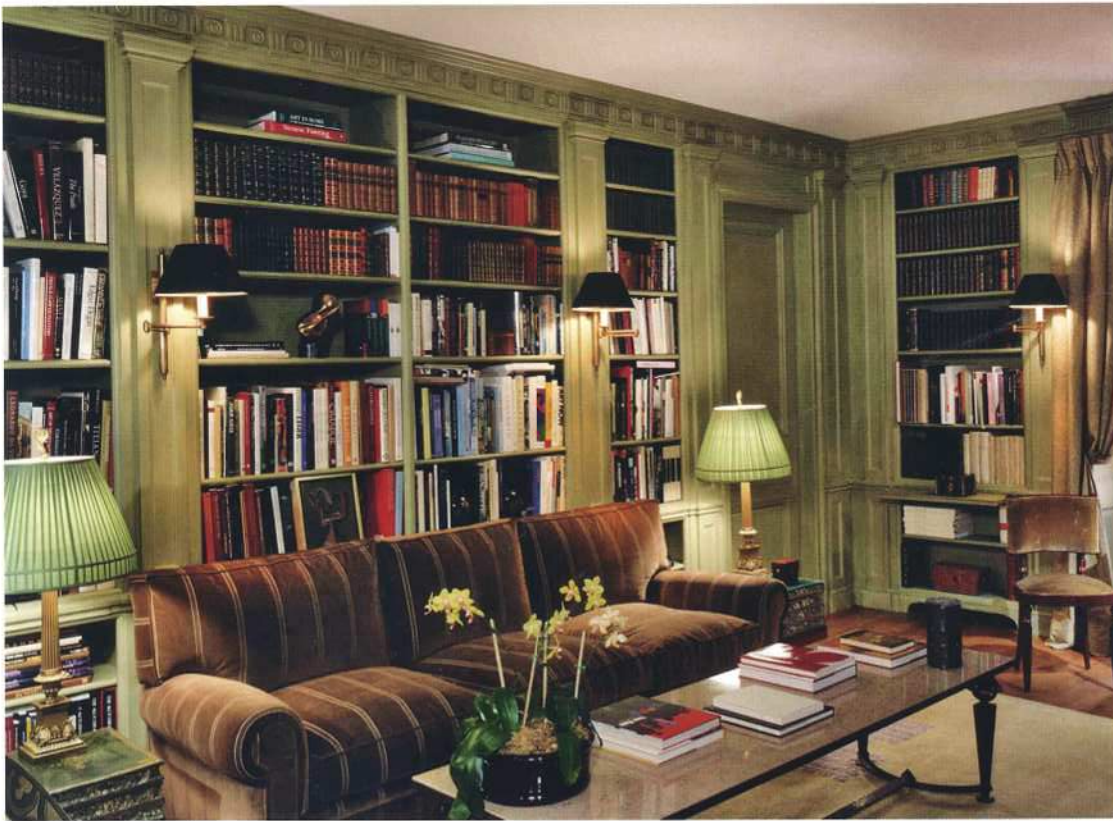
The Villa Primavesi is tucked away in the heart of the very elegant Hietzing neighbourhood, near the imperial palace of Schönbrunn. It was built by the great Austrian architect Joseph Hoffmann on the eve of the First World War for an important banking family, and is a fanciful cross between modernism and classicism. Its pediment is adorned by a monumental sculpted epebe. After a succession of ups and downs, this huge house was bought by a private individual. Three of its rooms still have their original decoration from the halcyon years of the Viennese Secession, and the owner, a cultivated Austrian and connoisseur of that movement, also acquired several decorative ensembles by Hoffmann. However there was a need to recreate the atmosphere in a number of the rooms that were restored. Since his client was also a lover of 18th-century refinement, Guillaume Féau conceived a harmonious succession of interiors. The dressing room for the lady of the house is lined with French Regency Chinoiserie panels copied from an ensemble in the Féau collection dating from 1715. This original is thought to have been made for a mansion on Place Vendôme. Generous storage space is concealed behind each panel. The luxurious lacquers are from the workshops of Anne Midavaine, one of the great Parisian names in this field since the 1930s, and a great friend and partner of Féau.



Madame's study (below) is decorated with panels painted in around 1780. These rare pieces once adorned the Paris apartments of the Rothschild family in the Hôtel de Saint-Florentin. In other rooms, Féau has catered to his client's tastes with a variation on Ledoux's famous 'Continents' panels (page right, top). This exercise in harmonious proportions was made possible by Féau's vast collection. For Madame's bathroom (bottom right), he was quick to suggest a magical adaptation of Percier and Fontaine's 'Turkish boudoir' at the Hôtel de Beauharnais, an Ottoman fantasy from the turn of the 19th century. This bold initiative met with an enthusiastic response from his young client.







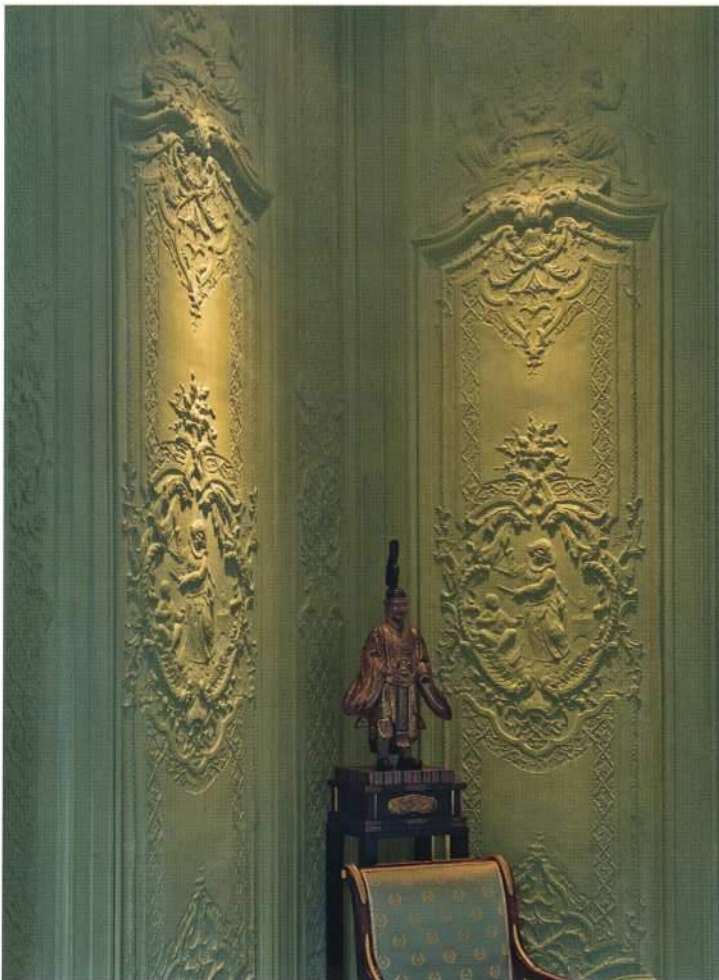
Houston: homage to André Arbus

The spirit of the architect and designer André Arbus (1903–1969) lives again in this library and study, which is no doubt the most intimate room in the spacious Louis XVI-style residence owned by two famous collectors in Houston. The couple wanted their interiors to have a French flavour, while serving as a foil to their priceless collection of works by Léger, Picasso, Miro, Basquiat and La Tour. In his collaboration with Laurent Bourgois, who has a real gift for creating typically French atmospheres, Guillaume Féau designed this interior with clean lines in lacquered oak, harking back to Art Deco. Their starting point was a famous commode by André Arbus in celadon lacquer, a 20th-century homage to the elegance of the 18th.

Simplicity and light in Brussels

This collectors' home near Brussels has no need of gilt to exude a feeling of elegant majesty. For the couple living here, who are rather more attracted to contemporary art, Guillaume Féau had the idea of paring down an interior conceived by Percier and Fontaine. 'I needed to convince them that an interior painted white, only just underlined by one dark colour, could produce a magnificent architectural effect conducive to a contemporary atmosphere.' They loved the idea and gave him a free hand with this set of panels that are perfectly adapted to the proportions of their house. 'I didn't have the five metre ceiling height that there is at the Hôtel de Beauharnais, so I had to make choices, to simplify details here and there, alter the position of certain elements. Thus a frieze from a cornice, say, became a frieze over the door. But the spirit of the original is respected.' The decoration is simplified, in much the same way as a musician will adapt a score. The Versailles parquet (p. 37), which Féau also left untreated, adds its own rhythm in this atmosphere that is marvellously at home with the light of the North.











A collectors' home in Atlanta

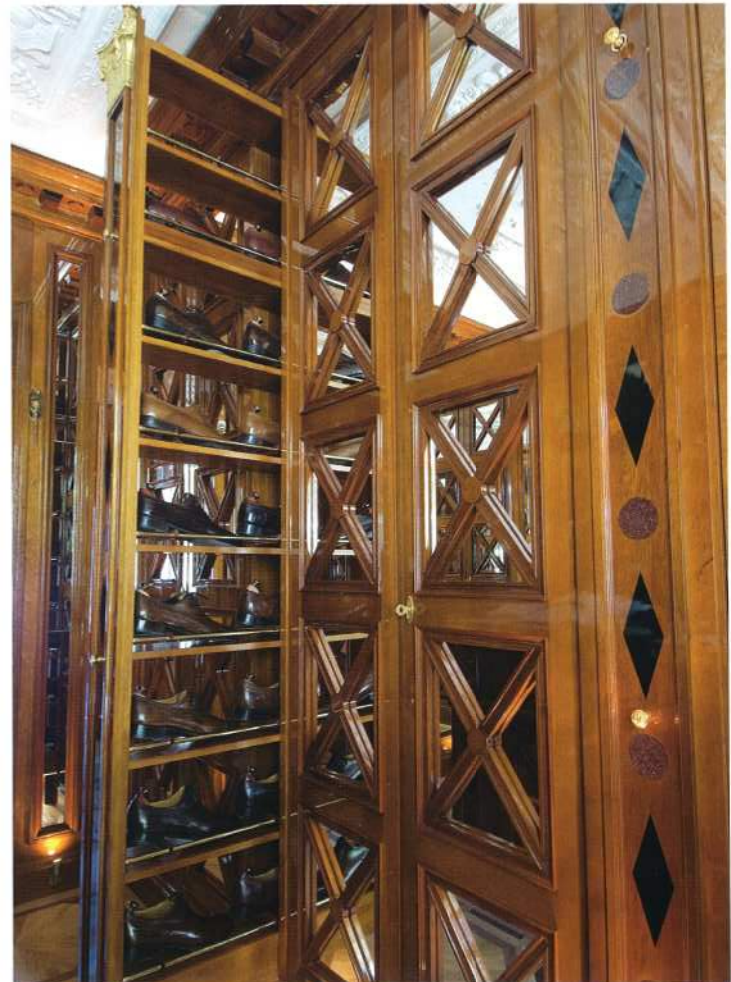
On the outside, this 600-square-metre house is not much different from the other recently built, luxury properties in its residential district. But go inside, and the work of decorator Brian J. McCarthy, abetted by Guillaume Féau, takes you into another world.

The owners, two American antiques collectors, wanted their home to offer a series of atmospheres inspired by 18th-century France. The project, which also offers the last word in modern comfort, has been carried off to perfection. Behind each door is a new visual surprise, a new world amplified by a ceiling height of 3.6 metres.

For the drawing room (page left) Féau supplied a copy of the solid oak panels that once decorated the handsome château of Galluis (no longer standing) near Montfort-l'Amaury, which are part of its collection. The finishing touch is provided by an 18th-century fireplace acquired from Féau. These furnishings have plenty of tricks up their sleeve, too, such as the 16/9 television that emerges from behind the bookshelves (above) at the press of a button.



The luxurious octagonal dining room is inspired by Venetian double frames in the Féau collection, combined with other decorative elements from the archives. The precious panels in Chinese lacquer are from the workshop of Anne Midavaine. Who would ever dream that an air conditioning system is hidden in the cornices? The majestic doors conceal presentation stands for the Sèvres porcelain and the magnificent silverware, acquired from the world's leading antiques dealers, from which the lady of the house can choose when composing her table setting. Each room is different, eclectic without being disparate. The trumeau mirror above the red marble fireplace was made after a 17th-century original at the Château du Champ de Bataille. One of the salons boasts a copy of one of Féau's finest ensembles, the painted 'Fables of La Fontaine' panels originally made to decorate the townhouse of Médard Brancour, builder to King Louis XV. For the painting, Guillaume Féau went to the most highly qualified specialist studio in Paris.





In Paris, a mixture of decorum and family life

For his own home, just outside Paris, Guillaume Féau has combined his favourite decorative ensembles with a number of practical features suited to everyday family life. The hall (page right) is inspired by Ledoux's 'Continents' panels from the 18th century, which he has admired ever since he was a child. The resin panelling conceals a cupboard for the children's coats. The floor in blue and white marble was also designed by Féau. In the dining room, a First Empire atmosphere prevails. The details of trophies and lances come from designs by the architects Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine for the mansion of General Leblond de Saint-Hilaire. Other elements were inspired by the decoration of Malmaison, Empress Joséphine's beloved château. Italian engravings from Guillaume Féau's own collection heighten the intimate charm of this convivial room.







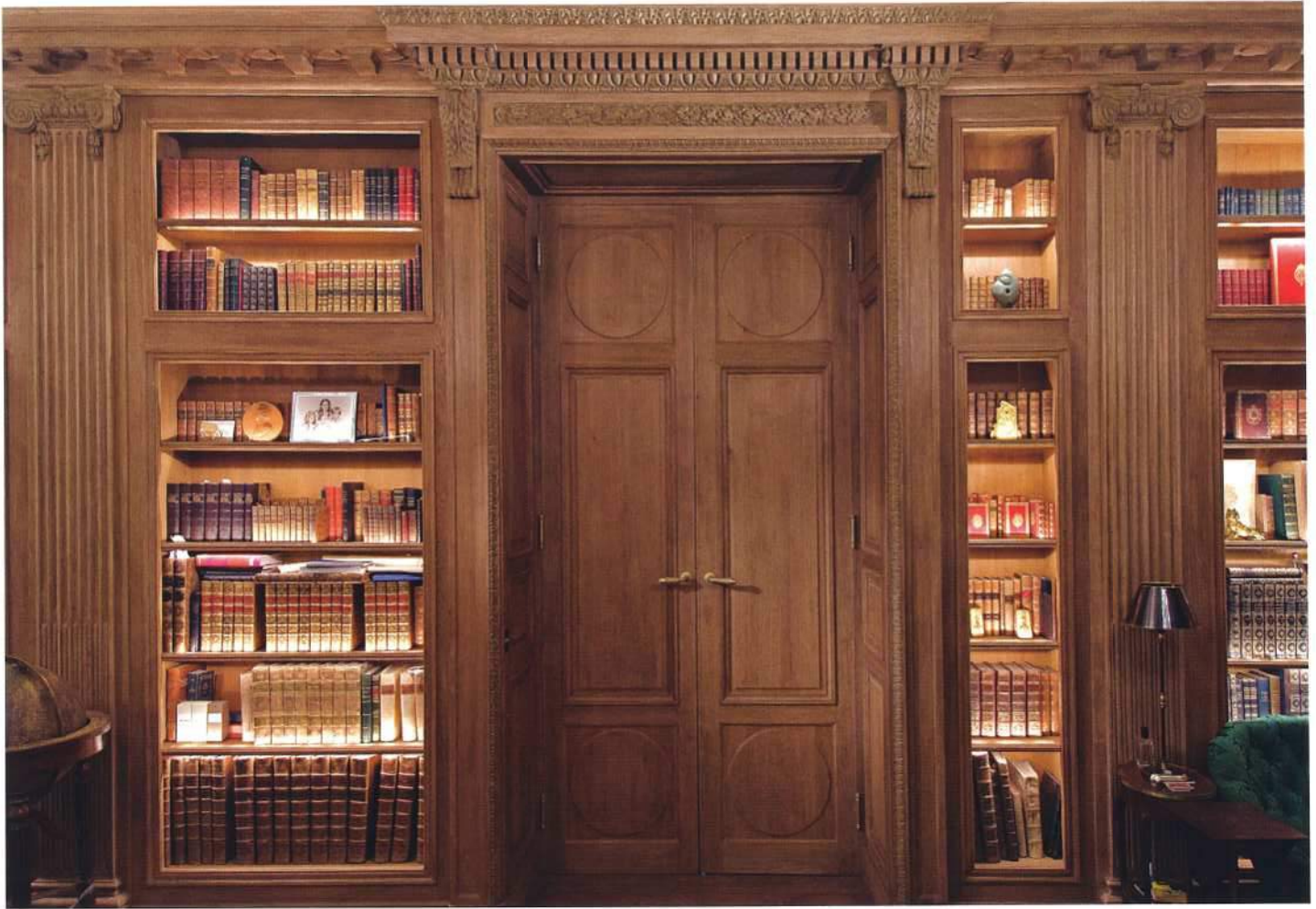
Allegory of Nobility

Although much admired (and coveted) by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, this ensemble was eventually installed at the Louvre in Abu Dhabi. 'It is an extremely rare piece of work, made in around 1620. Few decorative ensembles from this period have survived', notes Guillaume Féau, who found it tucked away in a barn. 'Anyone would have thought it was just a pile of wood, but the paintwork was well preserved.' After a thorough cleaning *chez Féau*, the incredible splendour of this ensemble comprising ceilings, plinths and quadruple doors came shining through. The sophistication of its ornamentation indicates that the 'Allegory of Nobility' was reserved for the highest circles of power.





The Spirit of Ledoux, from Paris to Brussels



These splendid doors from the late 18th century (page right) inspired Guillaume Féau to design this library (above) for two young collectors in Brussels. 'They are one of the treasures of our collection. The ovolos, garlands and jamb-lining show striking similarities with the decorative work of Ledoux. It is my belief that he designed them, probably for a royal building. The quality of execution is perfect.' Féau created this library by combining decorative elements created by the great architect. The gallery of a hundred square metres is lined with this oak structure, which forms a worthy display case for the couple's collection of antique books and archaeological objects: an ideal interior for the modern connoisseur.





Rothschild Jupiter

This Jupiter bearing its lightning bolt comes from the main salon of Samuel-Jacques Bernard, Conseiller d'État under Louis XV. The son of the financier Samuel Bernard, one of the richest men in Europe, he had a passion for art and luxury and spent some of the fortune he inherited from his father on commissioning Germain Boffrand to build a superb mansion in Rue du Bac, where he took a close personal interest in the decoration. The panels, which belonged for a while to the Rothschild family, are now held in the Jerusalem Museum – apart, that is, from this one, acquired by Féau, which has inspired many of his interiors.

Surprise inside

A magnificent patinated orange, set off by a subtle grey heightened by a light band of blue: these unusual colours are only one of the surprising features of this interior by Ledoux. Féau is proud to own three of his panels. Guillaume Féau himself is passionate about this Parisian interior: 'It is made up of panels in false pine, and the veins of the wood are actually extraordinarily precise trompe-l'oeil paintings. Some of Ledoux's more original patrons commissioned superb interiors that verged on the strange, the kind of thing you would never expect to see behind the very plain architectural exterior: an aesthetic built on the effect of surprise at a time – the late 18th century – when it was prudent to be discreet about one's extravagance.'

Plain wood or paint

This very handsome woodwork, presented here in François Léage's booth at the Biennale des Antiquaires (page right), comes from the château at Galluis, in the Yvelines. It was saved in 1983, when the folly built there for the Duchesse du Maine in 1704 was demolished. 'When I bought it', says Guillaume Féau, 'this Regency piece had been stripped. Originally, I am sure, it was painted. The taste for interiors in plain wood dates from the Second Empire, when people enjoyed dark, slightly mysterious atmospheres.' This ensemble can thus be presented in several different ways, depending on one's taste.







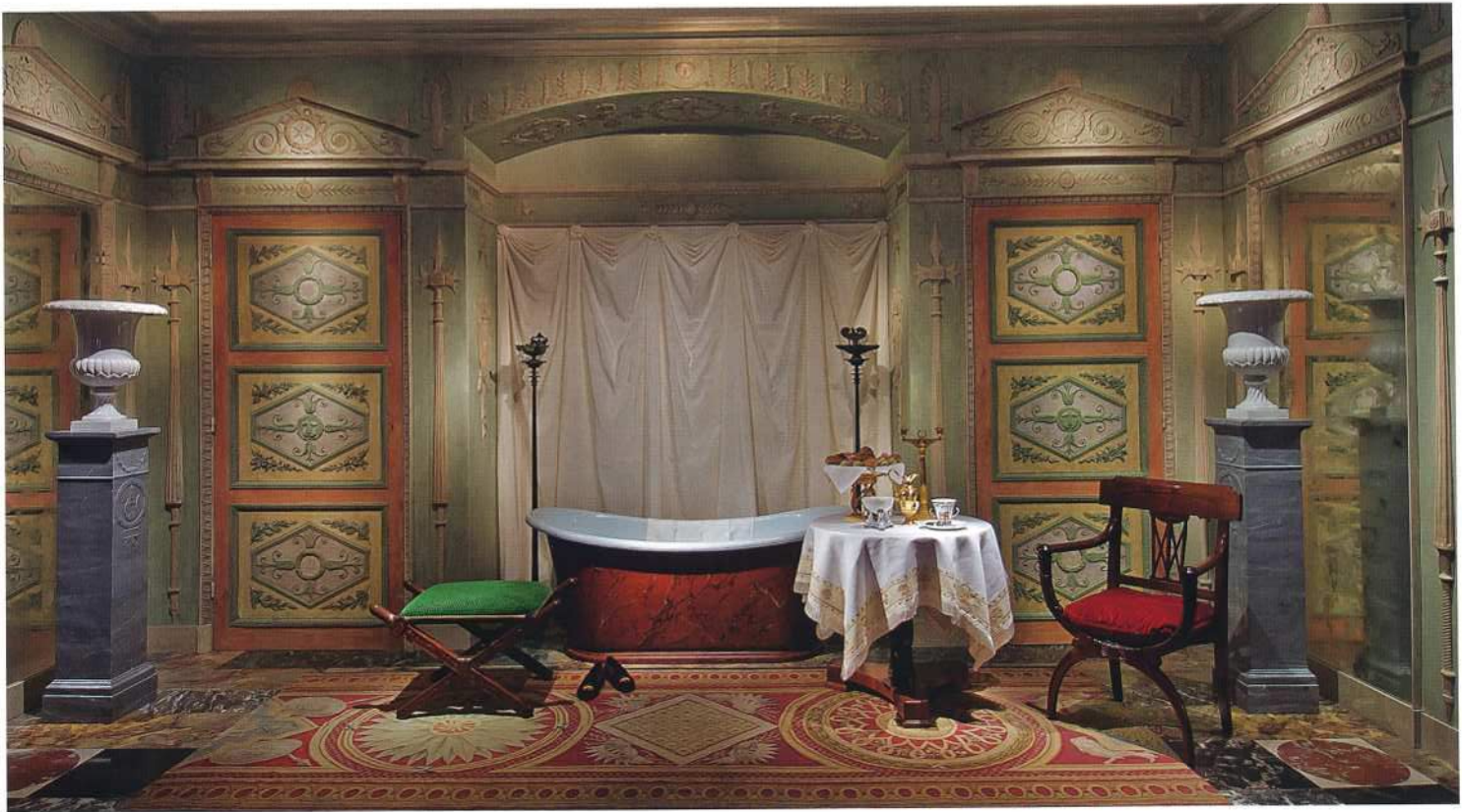
Love nest

This door (page right) in painted mahogany is part of an ensemble of two double doors from 1787 that Guillaume Féau sold to a collector. They originally embellished the home that the Neoclassical architect François-Joseph Bélanger moved into shortly after the beginning of the Revolution, just after marrying his mistress, Mademoiselle Dervieux, a dancer at the Opera. The technique of painting on plain wood grounds and the style used here were very much in the vanguard at the time, and anticipate the Empire style. In their way, too, the doors tell the story of a saga that prompted much gossip in late 18th-century Paris: the competition between Mademoiselle Guimard and Mademoiselle Dervieux, two 'filles d'Opéra'. 'La Guimard' started it by having Ledoux build her a grandiose townhouse in Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin. A few years later, her young rival settled a few blocks away in Rue Chantierine (now Rue de la Victoire), moving into a building commissioned from the architect Alexandre Brongniart. Bélanger designed the decoration, which was as novel as it was splendid. 'In a way, this was Bélanger's riposte to Ledoux', comments Guillaume Féau. The competition between the two women had contaminated their architects. The same quality of invention is manifest in the two-score panels of painted paper backed onto canvas (page left) that Guillaume Féau attributes to Bélanger. 'What you have here is the dawn of Romanticism, with landscapes inspired by Hubert Robert. In my opinion they would have been placed among pilasters and mirrors. The effect at night-time must have been magical.'



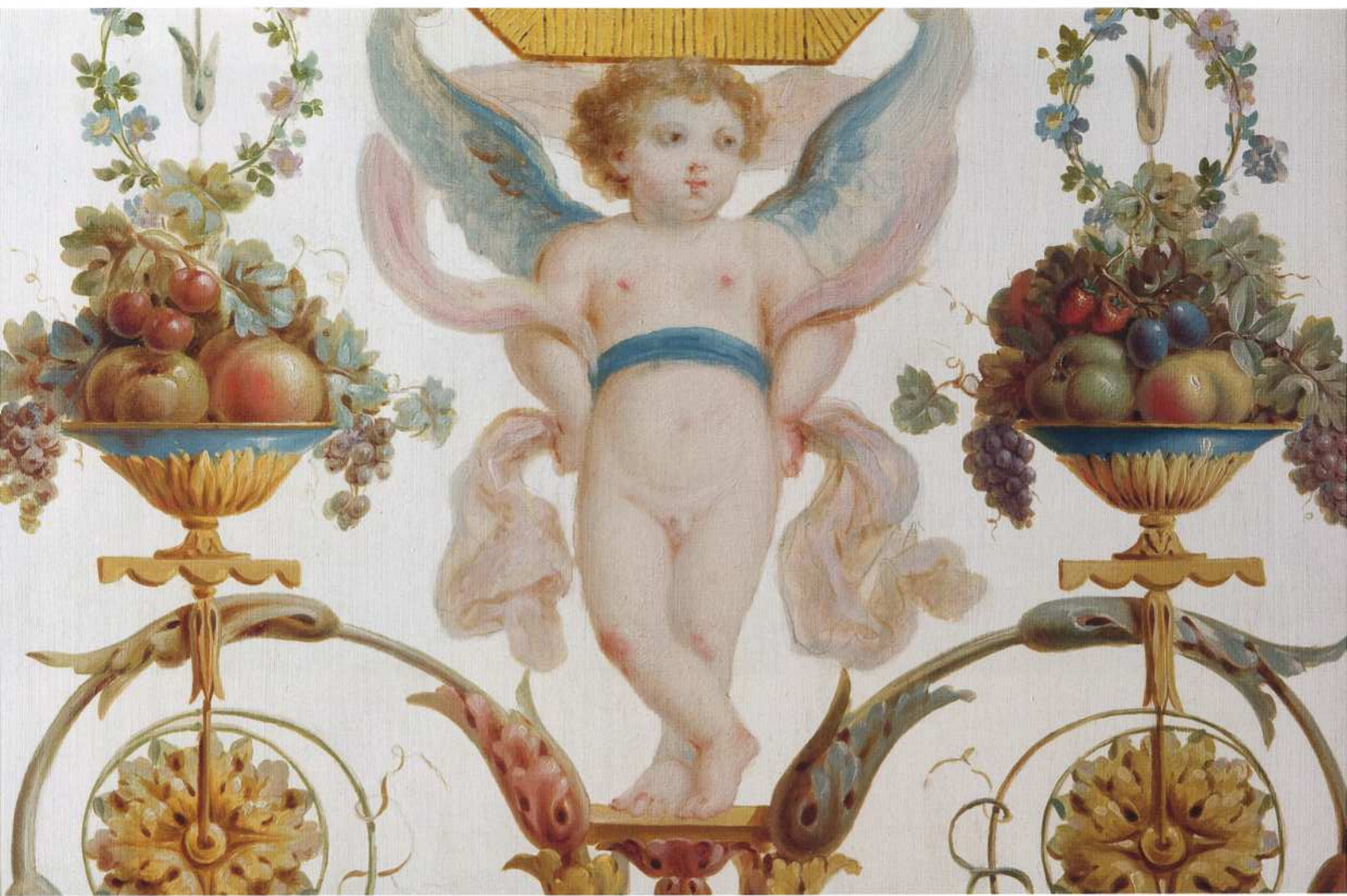
A taste for curiosities

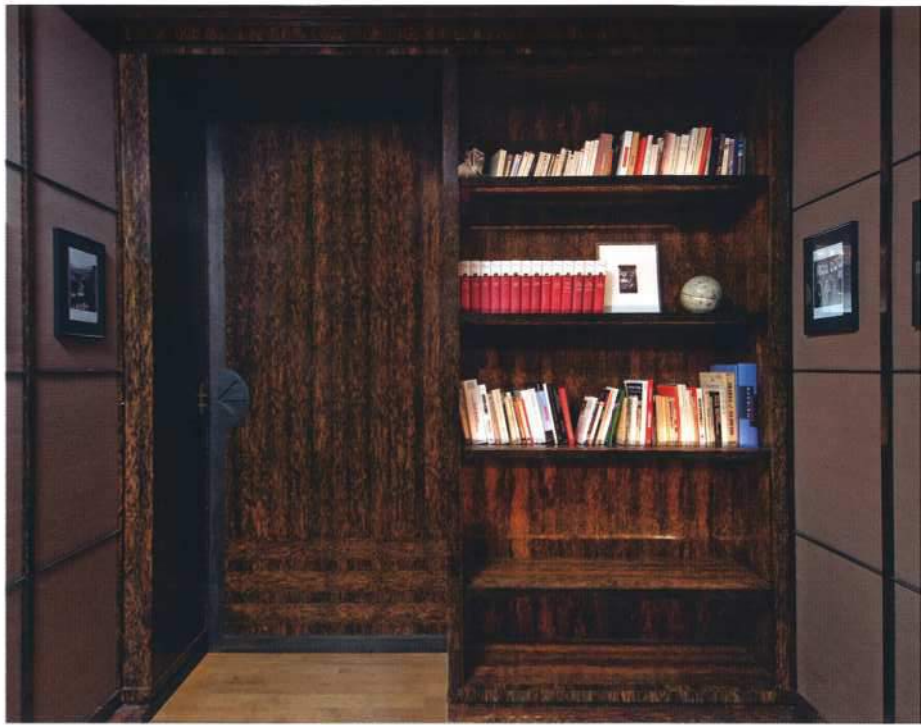
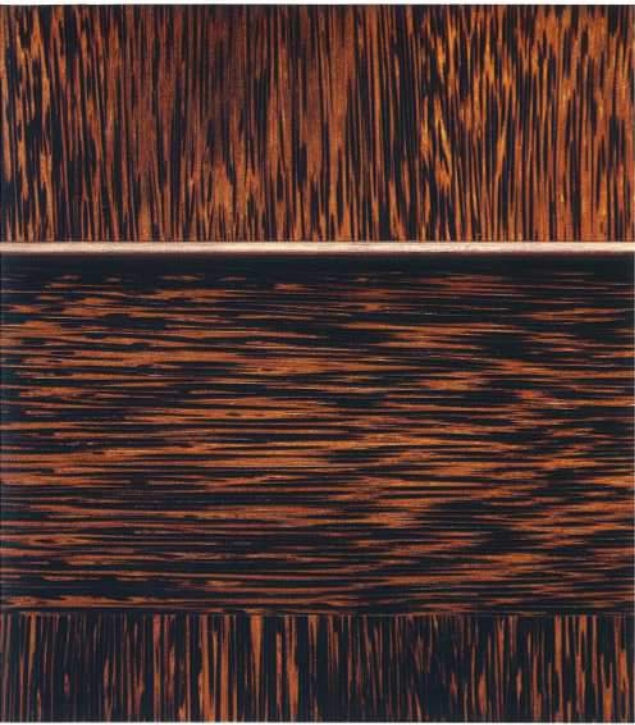
A gendered cherub gives a foretaste of this set of two double doors whose refined decoration opens wide onto erotic fantasy in its selection of mythological scenes chosen mainly for their risqué content (page right). 'It must certainly have come from the rooms of a *grande cocotte*, someone of the stature of Guimard or Dervieux, if not one of those two', says Guillaume Féau, who found this piece in New York. Once restored, the oak doors will recover all their freshness. While the 18th-century panels with fruit and vegetable motifs are more modest, their iconography is still spectacular. Each of the ten panels has five or six vegetable garlands painted on it. The pedigree of these fully-fledged still lifes is remarkable: they once belonged to the great decorator Georges Hoentschel (1855–1915), a friend of Marcel Proust's who worked for the Duc de Gramont, the King of Greece and the Emperor of Japan.



Percier and Fontaine, Empire period

These panels (above) dated to 1806 were commissioned from Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine, who worked for Napoleon I, by someone in the Emperor's close circle, General Vincent Leblond de Saint-Hilaire, for his château at Soisy. Guillaume Féau found them in a château in Burgundy, dismantled. 'They were bought from Carhian after the war and never fitted. The colours are very probably original.' At once elegant and martial – the lions symbolise strength – these panels now adorn the bathroom in a Florentine *palazzo*.





Evergreen Printz

Guillaume Féau designed this bookcase (page left, top) for the American financier Bob Rubin, now chairman of the Centre Pompidou Foundation (the American friends of that cultural institution), who owns the famous Glass House designed by Pierre Chareau. This Francophile and great collector has been an important presence in Féau's career. 'I met him in the United States when I was a young man and he helped me financially to develop my own business. I did two projects for him, one of them in his apartment at Palais-Royal, the former home of Jean Cocteau.' Rubin, a great connoisseur of design, was charmed by the wooden panelling copied from an ensemble attributed to Printz, a leading decorator of the 1930s. Its rigour is lightened by the discreet liveliness of the palm wood. The original was sold at the Biennale des Antiquaires, where Jacques Grange acquired it on behalf of a client.



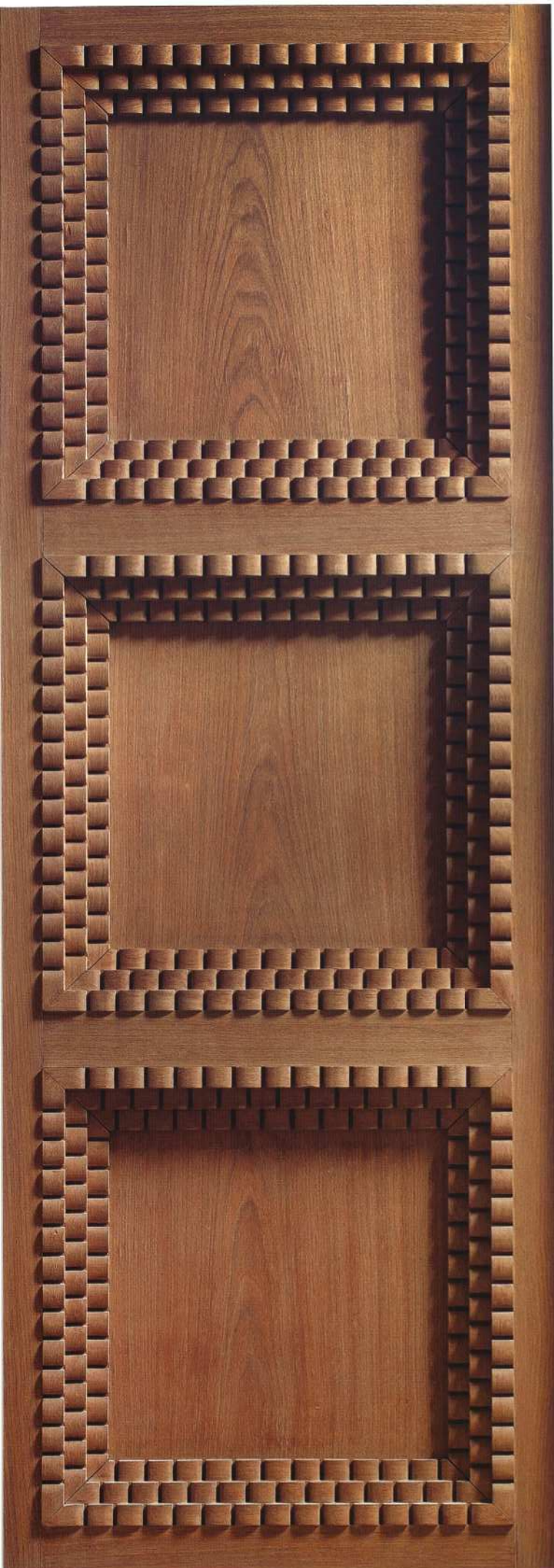
In the office of Roux-Spitz

The architect Michel Roux-Spitz (1888–1957) designed some magnificent Art Deco interiors in Paris. 'His office in Rue Octave-Feuillet was a real architect's construction, articulated around a desk-cum-banquette extending over six metres. These magnificent cabinets (page left, bottom) in darkened pear wood with gilt bronze details completed the ensemble.' This impressive piece of furniture was displayed at the annual Maastricht art and antiques fair (TEFAF) in March 2010, on the booth of the visionary Belgian antiques dealer Philippe Denys, not long before his sad death.

The ultimate in luxury according to Maurice Dufrene

A friend of Guillaume Féau, the Brussels-based dealer Philippe Denys was a great champion of Art Deco, and he was second to none when it came to blending it with contemporary design. He also loved the Viennese Secession. There is a little bit of Joseph Maria Olbrich in the stylised arabesques of this ensemble from 1910 by the cabinetmaker and decorator Maurice Dufrene, which the two men presented at a Biennale (left). The mother-of-pearl details highlight the precious marquetry work in ebony, cherry wood and lemon wood, built specially to accommodate electrical fittings – in those days, the height of luxury. The interior was designed for the David-Weill family mansion in Neuilly.





Ruhlmann on the Champs-Élysées

1925 was the year of the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs, known for launching the movement that bears its name, Art Deco. It was also when Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann, a decorator and *ensemblier* courted by the elite of Parisian society, designed this ensemble for Harold Harmsworth, an extremely wealthy British press baron and founder of *The Daily Mirror*, who had been made Viscount Rothermere in 1919. He owned an apartment at number 154 on the Champs-Élysées, with a fine view of the Arc de Triomphe. For this luxury residence, Ruhlmann designed the drawing room in Indian rosewood and mahogany, a space of 80 square metres epitomising the spirit of the age.

The solid wooden columns echo the fireplace. The ten bas-reliefs were the work of Louis Pierre Rigal, winner of the Prix de Rome for history painting in 1919. 'This ensemble recalls Ruhlmann's pavilion at the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs', observes Guillaume Féau. 'It is surely bound for the collections of a leading museum.'





Sculptures

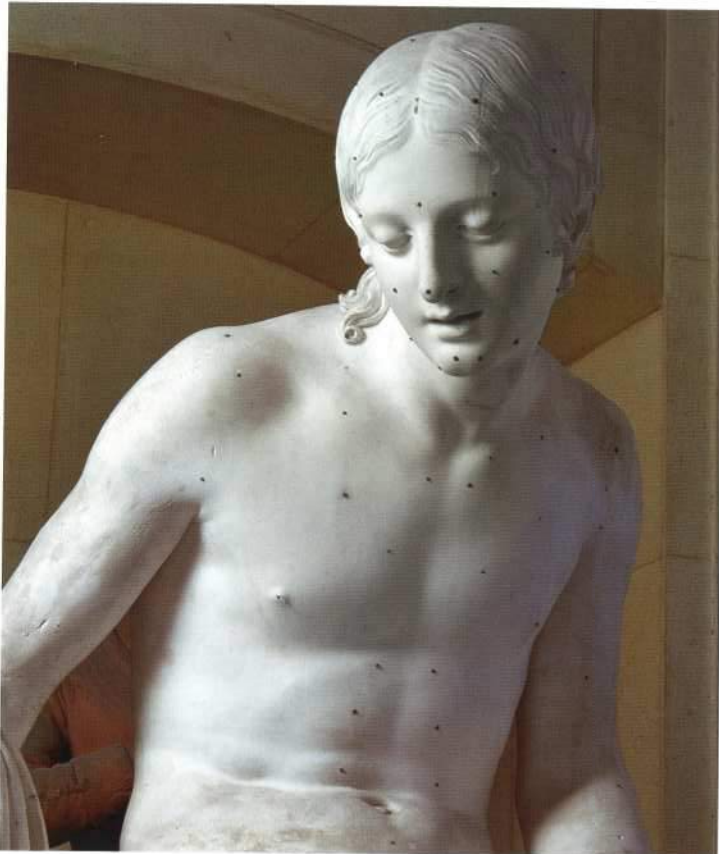
fireplaces

fountains

Every outstanding interior has its high point. The majesty of a fireplace, the beauty of a statue or the elegance of a fountain confirms its elegance with a flourish. Some of the rarest works offered by Féau to its clients include statues like this Narcissus (below left), commissioned by Vivant Denon, the first director of the Louvre during the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte, from the sculptor Pierre-Nicolas Beauvallet. He intended to put it in Marie-Antoinette's dairy at the Château de Rambouillet. This plaster is the piece exhibited at the Salon of 1807. The marks used as reference points for sculpting the marble are still visible, but this was never done because of lack of funds.

This bust of a king, in fact a late Renaissance representation of the god Jupiter (below right), decorated the stairs at the mansion of the Dukes of Provence in Sommières. Guillaume Féau found it, along with a dozen busts of the same origin, in the boiler room of a townhouse in Paris's Pigalle district.

The atlas (page left) also had an eventful history. The 17th-century original still supports the beams of Jean Cocteau's old apartment in Palais-Royal. The piece in Rue Laugier cohabits with a set of some hundred marble and porphyry fireplaces, every one of them outstanding. The elegant fireplace shown here, its decoration inspired by Ancient Rome, is attributed to the great tastemaker of early 19th-century England, Thomas Hope. A financier, writer and lover of Antiquity, which he coloured with his own exotic fantasies, in his leisure time Hope was also a successful sculptor. According to Guillaume Féau, he designed this model for a Russian client.



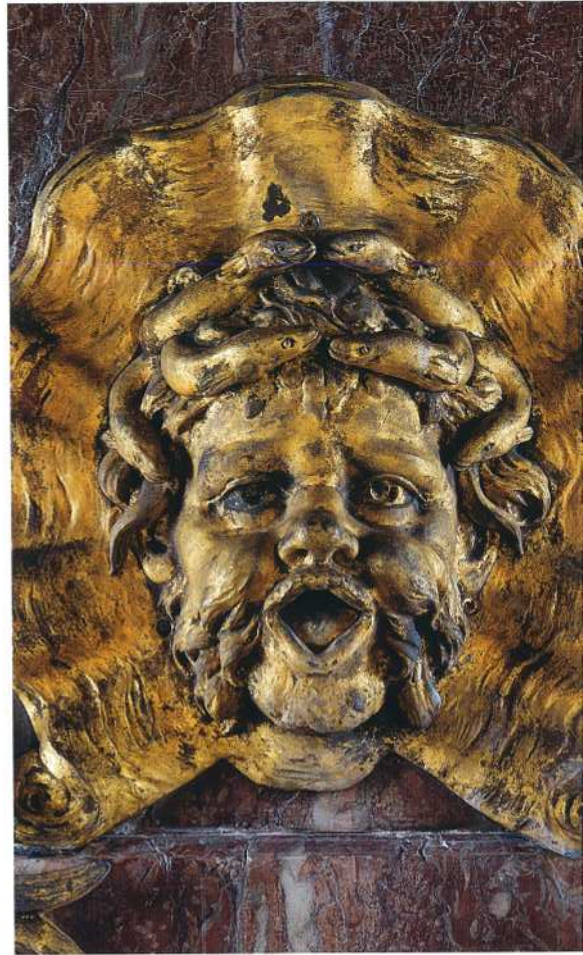


A crowning masterwork

'The fireplace is a concentrate of the decoration. Mediocrity is fatal here', judges Guillaume Féau. These three outstanding models are certainly free of any such taint. On the left, a fireplace designed by Percier and Fontaine, identical to the one in the Hôtel de Beauharnais, with its vase-shaped andirons. Typical of the Empire style, the gilt bronze, set off by the green-black granite porphyry, was probably made in Thomire's circle. This masterwork is part of a complete decorative scheme, including broad cornices and imperial eagles.

It contrasts with the discreet liveliness of the model in grey marble designed by Bélanger. A noteworthy feature is the chasing, showing the coat of arms of Claude Baudard de Saint-James, a colourful Parisian financier and Superintendent of the Navy. It was installed in his splendid hotel at 12 Place Vendôme. The property now belongs to the jeweller Chaumet, and is open to the public. Page right, this French fireplace in white marble is a work that Féau especially admires for its sculptural quality. Amusingly enough, this monumental piece was discovered in a tiny Parisian apartment.



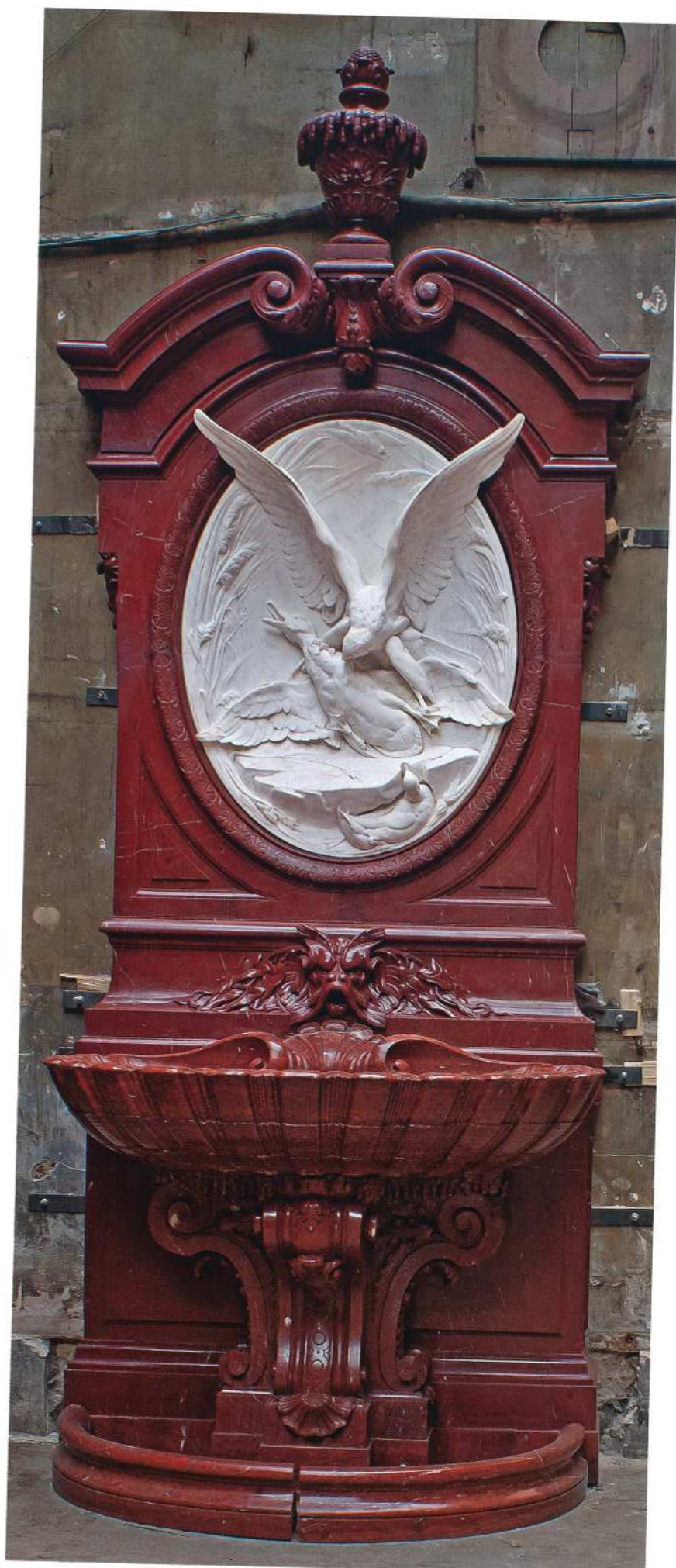


Rivers and hunting

Fountains are another kind of marble 'jewellery' that add a special touch to the most handsome houses.

This 18th-century outdoor model comes from a French château. Made in Belgian red marble and lead gilt, it represents a poetic allegory of a river, comprising a mask coiffed with eels, moss and reeds. With its spectacular system of three crisscrossing jets, a photograph of this piece appears in John Whitehead's authoritative book on *French Interiors of the Eighteenth Century* (1992).

As for this monumental piece over four metres high, in white statuary marble and red marble (right), it is a boot-washer sculpted by Charles Cordier (1827–1905). As Féau explains, 'This fountain was originally surrounded by a much bigger basin in which ten people could clean their boots at the same time when they came back from the hunt.' The central medallion is a falconry scene by the animal sculptor Auguste-Nicolas Cain (1822–1894). At once an artwork and an architectural element, this piece was installed in the Château d'Ermenonville in around 1880. It was probably commissioned by Marie-Charlotte Blanc, the widow of François Blanc, who made a fortune as founder of the Société des Bains de Mer in Monaco. She bought the château for her daughter Louise shortly after she married the Polish prince Constantin Radziwill. Guillaume Féau: 'It is a magical, museum-worthy piece, witness to the lavish way of life of European high society in the late 19th century.'



A short who's who

François-Joseph Bélanger (1745–1818)

Bélanger's style was less monumental than that of Ledoux, his great rival for the elegant clientele of the Chaussée-d'Antin district, and while he was similarly influenced by Antique models, his repertoire was more inspired by Pompei than by the columns of temples. He is best known, among others, for the interiors he designed at the Comte d'Artois' châteaux of Maisons-Laffitte and Bagatelle, and for the mansion owned by the great financier Baudard de Saint-James on Place Vendôme.



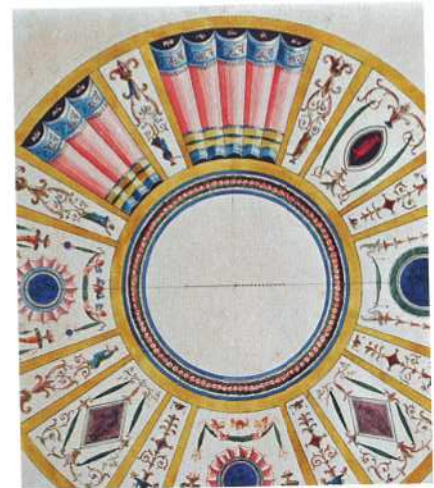
Jules Hardouin-Mansart (1646–1708)

The great nephew of the august Classical architect François Mansart, Jules Hardouin-Mansart became the Superintendent of the King's Buildings in 1699. With creations such as the grandiose Hall of Mirrors and Grand Trianon at Versailles, he moved Classicism in a more fanciful direction which strongly influenced the 18th century. For the Trianon he developed a new approach to interiors, with sculpted wood painted in light colours. He trained the decorators Jean Bérain and Pierre Le Pautre.



Jean-François Daigre (1936–1992) and Valerian Rybar (1919–1990)

They numbered Antenor and Beatriz Patino, Pierre and Sao Schlumberger, and Christina Onassis among their clients. Their interiors boldly mixed mother-of-pearl, hard stone, Perspex, brushed metal, mirrors and vinyl. Their imagination made them the great orchestrators of many a legendary party, notably for Marie-Hélène de Rothschild. Féau has interiors from their house in Rue du Bac: the mirror room and the 'Chamber of War', inspired by ancient military tents.



Robert Carlhian (1910–2001)

Robert Carlhian directed one of the biggest Parisian decoration firms of the twentieth century. A sizeable part of his outstanding collection of projects, documents and maquettes of interiors is now held in the Féau archives. Carlhian specialised in the 18th and 19th centuries and organised the restoration of several Parisian mansions. The last of these was the Hôtel Saint-Florentin, in partnership with the interior architect Fabrice Ouziel.



Georges Hoentschel (1855–1915)

This French architect, decorator and ceramist shaped the taste of many great collectors of the early 20th century. In decorating Luton Hoo, an 18th-century manor in Bedfordshire owned by the diamond magnate Julius Wernher, he demonstrated his mastery of French interiors of that period. He was a friend of the American banker John Pierpont Morgan, to whom he sold the bulk of his collection. This now constitutes the core of the French 18th century collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Claude-Nicolas Ledoux
(1736–1806)

Ledoux's career as an architect followed the aesthetic and intellectual meanders of pre-revolutionary France. In Paris he built colossal mansions inspired by Classical and Palladian models, while the interiors that he designed reconcile sometimes extravagant ornament with perfect order. A utopian, he conceived an ideal city for the royal salt works at Arc-et-Senans, which has remained a model even for contemporary urban planners.



Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann
(1879–1933)

The son of a silverer, Ruhlmann set up his own company in 1919. Directing its cabinetmaking, lacquer, painting and upholstery workshops, Ruhlmann designed furniture and oversaw its production. Such was the success of his style, with its mixture of simplicity and luxury, that he had his own pavilion at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs in 1925. He was in demand with Europe's smartest clients, and designed interiors and furniture for the Elysée.



Armand Albert Rateau
(1882–1938)

A draughtsman, decorator and architect, Rateau was an unusual figure in the Art Deco movement. Having long been condemned for precisely the same thing, today he is praised for his historical references, his poetry and his almost precious refinement. Trained at the École Boulle, he began his career with Robert Carlhian, designing the furniture and interiors for Jeanne Lanvin's mansion (they are now in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs) in Rue Barbet-de-Jouy and went on to work for countless wealthy and blue-blooded Europeans.



Charles Percier (1764–1838)
and Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine (1762–1853)

These architects and decorators were the creators of what is known as the Empire style, whose decorative splendour was meant to symbolise the return to political stability. Under the Consulate they designed the facades on Rue de Rivoli. Much appreciated by the Emperor Napoleon, at his behest they modernised the Château de Malmaison and did decoration and transformation work in the châteaux of Compiègne, Saint-Cloud and Fontainebleau.



Emilio Terry (1890–1969)

Architect, draughtsman and landscape designer, the Cuban Emilio Terry was much marked by his memories of the Château de Chenonceau, which his parents bought in 1891. For him, the aim of architecture was to make dreams come true. Influenced by Ledoux and Palladio, he invented the 'Louis XVII' style favoured by the café society of the 1950s. He decorated the Château de Groussay for the millionaire Charles de Beistegui and worked for Stavros Niarchos and Rainier de Monaco.

Practical guide



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Cover: detail of Regency
woodwork in sculpted
oak with gilding, Société
des Bâtiments du Roi
(director, Jules Degoullons),
Paris, circa 1722.

P. 2–3: detail of erotic
decoration on two double
doors. Parisian workshop,
circa 1780–85.

Back cover: detail of
Empire-style woodwork
in red and black with
'Etruscan' motifs
attributed to Charles
Percier and Pierre
Fontaine.

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