Robin Miller | 18th Century French Royal Furniture

- Good morning, everyone. Good afternoon, or good evening. It is my very great pleasure to welcome a new presenter and guest, Robin Miller. And actually I just met Robin, I thought that I was meeting Robin a couple of minutes ago, only to discover that we met at a bris a few months ago where the dad fainted, and Robin and I were tending to him. So, what a small world, right, Robin?

Visuals are displayed throughout the presentation.

- [Robin] Exactly.

- Hah! Yeah, and you said that he took photographs. That was so cool. So, lovely to see you again, Robin, and it's so happy to meet you now on our Zoom academy. Robin, before I hand over to you, I just want to say a little bit about you. Robin Miller is a dealer and a consultant in fine antique furniture and decorative art since 1989. In the 1980s, she attended Christie's Fine Art Course, where Patrick Bade was one of her tutors, and then went on to work at Sotheby's in New York, and it was actually Patrick who brought Robin to us. So truly, indeed, what a small world. She managed her family's architectural woodworking, William Somerville Inc., and antique furniture restoration company D. Miller's Restorers, Inc., until early 2020. Robin was an adjunct lecturer at both Parsons School of Design, I actually went to university right opposite that as well, Robin, and she was a lecturer at NYU School of Business and Professional Studies, and has guest lectured at Christie's Education. So Robin, it is a great honour to have you with us and to be part of our Lockdown family. Welcome, and now over to you. Thanks. Looking forward.

- Thank you. Terrific. I just want to thank Wendy and Judi because they've been remarkable in helping me get sorted out, and really throughout this entire thing. So, my goal today is really to demystify French furniture. I want you to understand the progression of the Louis, many people don't understand which Louis is which, so that hopefully you can tell by the end of the class, Louis XIV, Louis XV, and Louis XVI, the different styles. And then, I just want to come across, people either love or hate French furniture, and usually it's not anything in between. And so I just, even if you don't love it, I think it's important to just appreciate the craftsmanship and the beauty, and the skill that went into it. So, I'm beginning with a view of Versailles, and Ian and Patrick have both sort of touched on the early part, but what you really have to understand about everything that flew, that kind of proceeded through France and the rest of Europe during the 18th century, it all started in the 17th century, and it was Louis XIV and Minister Colbert who really tried very hard to make France the art capital, and to have it be the envy of every kingdom.

And so, here you see this iconic portrait of Louis XIV, done around 1701 by Rigaud, Hyacinthe Rigaud, and on the left you see him as Apollo. And it really just reflects his opulence, his majesty, and subsequent portraits have always sort of been modelled after this one. And on the

left you see a portrait in Boulle work, which I know that Patrick and Ian have gone over with you, of, it's a portrait of Andre-Charles Boulle, who was really the most important cabinetmaker, and the most influential cabinetmaker, in the 18th century. And on the right you have Charles Le Brun. And he was the one who was at first appointed as the royal painter, but then, in the end, he wound up running the entire show. So he was taking care of Versailles, and all of the kind of attempts to make Versailles, all of the different arts come together so that there was a homogenous feeling to it. So, I show you now, this is one of a series of 14 tapestries, and this particular one shows you Louis XIV visiting the Gobelins, which was the factory that in fact Le Brun was in charge of. And it's amazing when you think that this is about the series of the history of his life, that in this instance, you know, that they chose to choose a day visiting the Gobelins for one of the key moments in his life.

But what's nice about it is, you get to see some of the major furniture pieces, and silver, because, we'll get to it, but the furniture from the late 1600s is all made of silver. He has about 200 pieces made of solid silver. But here you see a cabinet by Domenico Cucci, and this is meant to be by Pierre Gole, who were cabinetmakers of the day, and I'm going to show you examples that illustrate pretty much very similar versions of these. And here we have the Hall of Mirrors, the Galerie des Glaces, and this room was really the tour de force for Versailles. You had 17 arches, about 357 panes of glass and, up until this time, only the Italians knew how to make larger panes of glass. So, the French were able to do that. And if you look on the right here, you see all the silver furniture that was eventually melted down in two waves, in 1689, and really Louis had only had the furniture for about four or five years when he had to melt it down to pay for the wars. So, I show you an example by a cabinetmaker named Pierre Gole, and he was another marqueteur and cabinetmaker who worked in the Boulle style, but precedes him.

So just so you understand, the concept of Boulle furniture isn't started by Boulle, but it becomes famous by him because he creates a pattern book that travels all around the world. So in this instance, we're looking at a piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and it's actually very precious materials, like horn and tortoise, and it's all inlaid on ivory. So obviously, whatever was done to please the king was, no expense was spared. And here I show you on the left, it's a design for the throne of Louis XIV. And you can't really make it out, but right at the top, there's a solid silver figure of Apollo, and the rest of the throne was veneered in silver. And then if you look at the right, this is meant to be a staging that Versailles did to kind of give you a sense of what it would've been like with Louis on the throne and all of these solid silver torcheres in front of him. And I show you a particular scene, this is from 1710, and you see this is a mythical throne, but it has a crown on it. But you see the Doge of Genoa visiting Louis XIV. And then I show you on the right, another image of the Galerie des Glaces where that took place, where you get a sense of how big the room was and how occupied it was by the people. So, here is an example of a rare survival of silver furniture that's actually in Denmark.

And on the left you have a design that is by Le Brun that was executed at the Gobelins. But what I want to point out was that because all of the silver from Versailles was melted, it was copied in other countries, like Sweden, and here in Denmark, so that at the end of the day, you

get a sense of what this solid silver furniture looked like. And here I show you another monumental piece, and the concept of hard stone inlay, pietra dura, is something that was popularised really by the Medicis in, and then followed up in France, and you see an Italian, Domenico Cucci, who came to France, and sort of brought this craftsmanship. And there's a pair of these monumental cabinets that are in Alnwick Castle in England. And on the right, I show you what is in fact also in the V&A, a miniature of Madame de Montespan, in a sort of fantasy fan. And you have an example over here of a cabinet, very similar. And so this dates to around 1690. Here you have what is meant to be, and is, Louis XIV's, one of his desks, and it has his cypher. And here you can see this line that goes through it.

And so this desk opens up, this top flips over sort of like a piano hinge, and it becomes a desk, and keeps his papers private. And so you see again the concept of the Boulle marquetry, where you have the brass inlaid into the tortoise. And it's earlier on, in the end of the 17th century, they felt, they didn't understand the concept of construction, so there are stretchers that kind of make it more stable. And later on you'll see that those sorts of things become, they, you know, changes. And here is the front page of Boulle's engraving book, and this really was responsible for sharing the concept of Boulle furniture around the world and popularising it. And it dates to 1708, and so, it really, of the pattern books and the engravings that took place at the time, this was really a seminal one. Here I show you an example of Boulle work. This is in the Louvre, and it's about nine feet tall, and you can see this is a detail of the corner mount, the gilt bronze, and Boulle, the cabinetmakers to the kings generally were exempt from guild regulations. So people like Boulle, Cressent, Riesener later, they could supervise that themselves. So, they would get into trouble with the guild, but at the end of the day, the royals would get them out of trouble. And here you see the god of wind, who is in each of the corners, and this sort of, these feet here. And this is premiere partie, where the tortoise is the background, and then this is contre partie, where the background is actually brass.

And here I show you another example. This was made for the Grand Trianon in 1708. A number of them were delivered, and it was... This example's in the Met, and again, so it dates to 1708, and again you see the kind of fabulous gilt bronze work. And I'm not sure if you make out how deep and how tall the marble is. And originally they actually, in the inventory they call this a desk, but eventually it becomes known as a commode. But what I want you to recognise is the power and authority and the whole idea that it's meant to intimidate. It's not meant to be warm and comfortable. And you see as the century develops how the furniture evolves and becomes more comfortable, more intimate. And here I just show you at Versailles, one of these commodes in situ. So, we come to, it's kind of a challenge, I'm trying to cover 100 and something years in an hour, or 50 minutes, so I'm moving on rather quickly. In this instance, so from the time that Louis XIV dies, in 1715, you have the regency, where his nephew, the Duc d'Orleans, becomes the regent, and you have really, here you see a portrait of Louis the, was his great-grandson, attaining the throne, and very much another iconic portrait so that you really show the grandeur of them.

And it's really under his reign, during the regency, where they moved the court to the Louvre,

and to Paris, and here you see there's a huge relaxation as opposed to the formality that we had in Louis XIV's life. So this is a painting of the oyster party, and you get a sense, it's actually, they call it the oyster lunch. It looks like they're having a pretty good time. So, and here I show you the concept of the marchand-mercier. And so, the cabinetmakers oftentimes had dealers/decorators who would represent them, or they would go to the other craftsmen to create these incredible wonders. And in this instance you have, this is actually a painted sign for Gersaint, who was a marchand-mercier, a dealer, and it's painted by Watteau, it's one of his last paintings. And if you look on the left here, you have them putting away a portrait of Louis XIV. And it's sort of giving, sort of closing up the era. And this dates to 1721, so you really have the sense that the era is over. And just to... This is also a Gersaint signboard from 1740 that's done by Boucher, and you can see the curious objects like the coral, and the Japanese lacquer cabinet, and the pagoda figure on top. These were the sorts of things that these marchand-merciers would retail. And then Patrick in his lecture showed you this Gaudreau commode in the Wallace collection, which was made for Louis XV, and is way over the top, because it kind of has a Bombay going in both directions, and then you have this gilt bronze mounts, and you can see here how the dragons have been beautifully used to kind of create the handles for these commodes.

And you can see how thick the marble top is, and how it kind of goes Bombay in one direction and then it kind of goes outward in another. So, in terms of cabinetry, it's a huge tour de force. And what's interesting is that while it was loved during Louis XV's time, when Louis XVI came to the reign, it was the first thing he had removed. So, here I show you, I felt I had to at least compete with Patrick's choice, another Gaudreau piece, and this is a bureau plat and cartonnier that was made for the Duc de Choiseul, and he was the most important minister to Louis XV, and this was a desk that he had made, and went into the Metternich collection, and now is in a private collection in Switzerland. But what's very cool about this is that you look at this snuff box, and again, this is a snuff box in a private collection that you wouldn't normally get to see, and here you see the Duc de Choiseul at his desk, and you see, even though the snuff box is from 1770, you see him at his desk, which is really, just when you think how small this is, it's like 2 1/2 inches wide. It's pretty remarkable. There was a family called the Van Blarenberghes who were master, they were very famous for doing little miniatures for snuff boxes, and so they were the ones that had done this specifically for him. But you don't, this is practically unique, there's maybe one or two others that they've done on snuff boxes of interiors.

And here I show you other views. So if you look on the left, this is the Duc de Choiseul's bedroom in the summer, and on the right is the Duc de Choiseul's bedroom in the winter. And so what you can see is that they changed the fabrics on the walls, they changed the flooring, and it's, you know, it's maybe not everybody recognises that that was a feature that would go on in the 18th century. And here we see one, another cabinetmaker to the king was a man named Charles Cressent. And again, you can see with the monkey, and the putti swinging the monkey, that kind of more playful feeling. And you have, right here is a stamp that would be put in the gilt bronze, and it's called a crowned C. And it was a tax on copper from 1745 to 1749, so that you would know that that, actually, when these mounts would date to. And interestingly there's a pair

in the Rothschild collection, and the Rothchilds had taken one, they had a single one, and then they decided they were going to recreate, this is at Waddesdon Manor, they were going to recreate the commode and recreate the mounts.

And once they'd made a copy, they took the mounts of the 18th century one and they put it on the copy, and so it's difficult to tell because it's both interspersed which was the older one and which was the newer one. And you see that happen from time to time in the 19th century, and the 20th century. And here I show you, and it's a bit cut off, it's a cabinet of metals that was done also for the king, and this is in the Gulbenkian collection in Portugal, in Lisbon, And I just want you to just take a look at that little elephant down there, and also notice right here, you have this dark and light stringing that kind of gives it a three-dimensionality. So, the woods that they're using, they're veneering mainly on walnut in the beginning and then on oak, and then here you see this wood is called a bois satine, which is, and here we see, this is a kingwood, a kind of rosewood. And then I wanted to show you how these are fabulous pieces, but they're basically the same forms that they've veneered in different precious materials.

So, here we have a commode a vantaux, which is a commode with two doors, and you see how clever it is that they've made the opening so that it's seamless. And then you see this commode, this was, it's silvered gilt mounts, so instead of gold it's silvered, and it was done as a room for the mistress, the Comtesse de Mailly, Mailly, I think is her pronunciation, and she was a mistress to Louis XV, and it took three years to do up the chateau, and by the time it was finished, the room actually was done with wallpaper that matches that pattern and in the same sort of watered, silvered silk and blue, and by the time that this was delivered, she was no longer in favour, so she actually never got to see it. And that does happen from time to time. There'll be a few other pieces that I show you where you see that. Here I show you a piece of, it's called a bureau en pente, top desk, and here they've used Japanese lacquer panels that they've taken off a Japanese cabinet, and taken it and used it as veneer for these French forms.

And what's interesting is that when you think about one of those Japanese cabinets, like the Gersaint signboard trade card, you see here, this is the remnant of the shadow that's left by the hinge that was on the cabinet, on the Japanese cabinet. And again, I just want to point out that the Rocaille has these asymmetrical forms, and is very much rock work, and very much, the French version of the Rococo is very much more controlled than say, the German or the Italian. So I think you, it's almost like a controlled stylization, for the most part. And now we come to, this is, I'm hoping you all know who this is, this is Madame de Pompadour in the 1750s, and it's a portrait of her by Boucher, and I show you here this table by Bernard van Risamburgh. And Bernard van Risamburgh was Flemish, and a lot of the early cabinetmakers are Flemish, and then, then a lot of them come from Germany and the German area. And so what I'm showing you, though, is just to give you a sense of the bright colours that the furniture was at the time, and how what we see today are, it's much more, it was much more garish then. So if you see, this is an unusual table, because it's actually painted to look like marquetry.

So that's all vernis Martin, which was a kind of lacquer imitating Japanese lacquer that a group

of, and again, it was usually families, the families of cabinetmakers, and it would stay in the families. And then here you have a Sevres plaque. Oops, sorry. And so this was a sort of work table that was typical of the time, and really you see it for, you know, it's very popular for about 20 years. And then this is another royal cabinetmaker of the time, this is Jean-Francois Oeben, and so he was again, one of Madame de Pompadour's favourite cabinetmakers. And you see this sort of trellis marquetry that Oeben, who was German, had a successor whose name was Riesener, and Riesener actually is the one that kind of makes this marquetry here famous, and Oeben is sort of more famous for this sort of floral marquetry. And what you're not seeing here really is how bright the colours would've been originally. It really, I think they really tried to have it make it seem like it was a painting. They literally called them paintings in wood. And here I just show you details so you can get a sense of the colours. And here you can see Oeben's stamp. And this example is actually in the Getty collection. But you do see the parts that haven't been exposed to light, they tend to show much more of the original colour, and it's furniture in the Regence and the Rococo period that becomes a lot lighter. You don't see as much of the black and the gold that you saw in Louis XIV's time.

So, from the Rococo, we go to really the beginning, at the same time that the Rococo is going on, you have the interest in neoclassicism. You have the discoveries of the Herculaneum and Pompeii, and here again, you have the Duc de Choiseul, and they're visiting, these are paintings by Panini, and they're of, on the left, you have, on the left you have ancient Rome, and on the right you have modern Rome, and you can see here ancient Rome showing the different sites. And what's interesting is that you really have a tug of war that's going on between people that are in favour of the Rococo, and then people that are kind of espousing the new, cleaner lines of neoclassical. And so when you have neoclassical, this is an early example that sort of corresponds in date to some of the most Rococo pieces of furniture. So this is considered the earliest neoclassical piece of furniture, it's at Chantilly, and this is a portrait on the left by Greuze of La Live de Jully, who had commissioned this furniture.

And so you can see that it's kind of harking back to Louis XIV. It's black and gilt bronze in that way, and a lot of the mounts are similar, but they're more neoclassical. So you have this Greek key motif here, and you have Vitruvian scrolls, and you have these ribbons, and you have the lion's head. So it's sort of, it really is to neoclassical, but you can see a chunkiness that gradually turns into much more refined and delicate furniture during Louis XVI's time. And here I show you Madame de Pompadour, and I'll try and get that better so you can see it. So this is thought, this is by Drouais, who is another court painter, and it's thought to have been painted in 1764, just after her death, and I think because it sort of has a bright light around her head, it's implying that she, you know, it's posthumous. But what I wanted to show you was the sumptuous in the colours of this work box, this work table next to her. And you see here the ram's head, and in the Wallace collection there's a similar sort of table where you see again that Greek key pattern and the floral marquetry that Oeben was known for. And so I just wanted you to, she was really very important in the canon of the arts.

She was very much a supporter of the Sevres Manufactory. She was a supporter of the free

design school which taught young children that were from underprivileged families how to draw and how to have careers in the arts and crafts. So she left her mark, and then she was a huge collector, so that was very important as well. And then we come to my favourite cabinetmaker. So, there's actually right now a new book on Riesener that just came out, and there was a project that was done between the Royal Collection in England and Waddesdon Manor and the Wallace collection in London where they looked at the different pieces that are in those collections. Because of the revolutions, so much of the French furniture of the day wound up going abroad, and so, this new book, which is really remarkable, and it's just, I think it's just called "Jean-Henri Riesener," I highly recommend it if you want to have a sense of neoclassical furniture, and the craftsmanship, and his achievements. And here you see him late in his career, so I think it dates around 1787, and he is shown very much as more of an architect or a designer. And you see him sitting at a table that's similar to many that he had made for Marie Antoinette. And so, it's, he took over for Jean-Francois Oeben, and he was responsible for finishing this tour de force, which is probably the most famous piece of furniture for the 18th century, which is the "Bureau du Roi."

And this was made for Louis XV, and delivered in 1769. And the, it's a remarkable clock, the clock and the whole movement of it, it all works with the turn of a key. And then, the inkwell opens at the side so that it doesn't disturb the king's papers and no one has access to the king's papers. And if you look, there's a sort of Wedgwood-looking, but it's actually Sevres, plaque on the side, and that was because during the Revolution, that they saved the piece of furniture, but they wanted to take away the cypher of the king. So that was put on by Riesener himself at the end of the 18th century. So I show you another example, this is the view from the back, and here I show you side view with the inkwell open, and here with the drawers open. And then I'm hoping this is going to work. I have a little video where you can really get close up to the piece that you couldn't necessarily get on your own. Let's see. And maybe, let's see, here it goes. And this just shows a page in the royal household currently, who's able to get very close and show you how the mechanism works, because really Oeben and Riesener, they were very famous for their mechanics, and that was really why Louis XV and Louis XVI admired them so much, as much as anything else. So here you see the trophies, which are very neoclassical.

And what's interesting about this is that the piece is, again, a transitional piece. It's sort of meant to go in a Rococo room, but the piece itself, the marquetry, those are all neoclassical, the interior's sort of neoclassical, but the outside has to go with the Rococo interior of the room. So here you see him opening up the drawers, and so all of that becomes released. And what's nice is you see the interior is really the original colours, and you see that it's a green velvet that he wrote on as opposed to leather, which is what we think about, but back in the day, it was velvet. And then here you can see the watered silk-lined drawers, padded drawers. So, it was literally with the turn of the key, and you can see the use of tulipwood, which is that brighter wood on the edge that still retains a lot of its colour. And when you see it nowadays, it's much more faded when you get to see. But this hasn't been exposed to sunlight, so it really retains its colour. So, here he just shows you the secret compartments, all these things that were meant to, to actually amuse the king, and here, hide his papers and put things away, and there you see really the

original colour of the tulipwood, how it would've looked.

So, very much, you know, perfection. So, and then he's showing you here just where the side opens up so that you can, so that the servant could actually refill his inkwell. So let me move on. Let's see. I have to figure out how to go to the next slide. Here we go. So this is really amazing. So this desk is at the Royal Collection, or Waddesdon, I'm not sure, but when it was restored, I think it's Waddesdon Manor, they skinned off this piece to restore it, and they took a photograph of the underside. So you really see the dyes and the colours that were used at the time, and how bright the colours really would've been when these things were first made. You really see that it's, you know, painting in wood. And again, with Riesener you find this remarkable quality of the mounts, and of the marquetry, and of the construction. And here at this point, you know, Parisian furniture and royal furniture, the carcasses are oak, you know, they only use very stable hardwood like oak. So now we come really from the transition to Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

And Louis XV dies in 1774. And as I said, the first thing that that goes is the commode, and this is the commode that replaces it. And what's interesting about it is, Louis XV, and you know, it's, you could say that like baroque, Rococo, neoclassical, they're all sort of like, people tend to say Louis XIV, Louis XV, Louis XVI in the same way that they say baroque, Rococo, and neoclassical, but the dates don't always correspond. So here you see something that's, this is like a neoclassical trophy, and the mounts are neoclassical, but there's a heaviness of it still that you saw, and really I think it's because it was for the king, and it had to, again, go into a Rococo interior. Here we see, this is a Sevres mounted commode that was in fact made for Madame du Barry, who was the mistress of Louis XV. And again, fabulous mounts. And really as the century progresses, the mounts get better. You find that the tools that they have to make things much more refined, the rooms get much smaller, more elegant, and privacy becomes much more, whereas in the beginning of Louis XIV's time, pretty much everybody was in his bedroom. Now things are a little more, are a lot more private, and the royals are less reachable.

So, I show you this is a maker named Carlin, Martin Carlin, and he was famous for using Sevres plaques on his furniture, and very often his name would be obliterated because the marchand-merciers did not want people to know who was actually making the furniture. And here I show you a piece from the Frick, and again, it's sort of that transition. Everything about it except for the shape is neoclassical. You even see the classical ruins in the marquetry in the panel in the centre. And it's an example of cabinetmakers being practical. They had these carcasses, they didn't want to let them go to waste, and so it's a flat front instead of a Bombay, or curved front. And so here you see like, they still used this form, even into the 1770s, because it just, they had them laying around. It wasn't necessarily, you know, it was still in, it didn't go out of fashion, particularly. And then here I show you another Carlin bureau plat, and in this instance I show you on the left, the dealer who had his paper label on the bottom, who was Daguerre, and he was one of the major marchand-merciers, and so this would've been a table that he retailed, and probably provided Carlin with the plaques so that he could make the desk.

And then here I show you another example of Louis the XVI furniture, and again, here, again, we're harking back on some level to Louis the XIV. They're repurposing, in this case, the pietra dura panels that you saw that Cucci had back during Louis XIV's time. But you can see I think from here, like looking down here, how jewel-like the mounts have become, very, very refined. And this is a drop-front secretary, and you would think, you know, and you have to kind of admire the mechanism because that pietra dura, those panels are very heavy, and so once you let that drop front down, you needed a counterweight to keep it from just falling over. So, the mechanics of this, again, was really impressive. And then I show you here a real tour de force by Riesener. It's a suite of furniture that was made for Marie Antoinette, and here you see a detail of her mounts and her cypher. And Riesener has taken Japanese lacquer panels, either from a screen or from a cabinet door, and turned them into really, you know, repurposed them and put them on these commode and this secretaire, and again, this was another suite of furniture, and a model that he used repeatedly, the trapezoidal shape.

So there's a pair in wood marquetry at the Frick, and what's interesting about the one in the Frick was that those were even altered when Marie Antoinette was imprisoned, and she decided, I don't think she had a clue of what was maybe coming her way because she was having things remodelled. But what's really important is that you recognise the jewel-like quality of this, and also to tell the difference between say, like the Japanese lacquer as opposed to say the French imitation, the vernis Martin, because the Japanese lacquer tends to be much more sparse, whereas when they were trying to imitate it, it didn't have that kind of refinement. And here we come to probably, this is a rare piece of furniture that was made for the Duchesse de Mazarin, and it's another example, it's around 1781, it's in the Frick, and it's another example of a piece that never, the owner never saw it. She died before it was finished. And so, the mounts in this instance are by Gouthiere, and he was another fabulous maker, and also there's a monograph on him from an exhibition at the Frick that was fabulous, a few years ago. And I just show you details.

So, the drawing on the bottom is by Dugourc, and he was a designer of the day, and so it sort of shows you the design for the table originally. And on the left you see just a close-up of the vines and the grapes that go across the apron of the console. So I just want you to understand, and generally also speaking, and I'm not, you can't really tell here, but very much the gilt bronze would often be toned. So they would take agate, and then, so some parts of it might be very, very shiny, and some parts of it would be matte. And so it's interesting that sometimes over the years that's lost because things have been replated, but then other times you can see, if they're carefully cleaned, you can go back and see the kind of depth of trouble they went to, the extremes they went to to make it really, you know, perfection. And then just to give you an idea of some of the other materials that Riesener used, in this instance, it's mother of pearl, and this was for a boudoir, and again, just to show you the kind of more elegant, smaller rooms. This is at Fontainebleau, and it was a suite of furniture that he had made for her, for Marie Antoinette at Fontainebleau. And if you see, this is the room that it was made for.

And here you see another table that was made with that mother of pearl, and I just want to give

you the sense of sort of the revival of the grotesques that maybe you would think of like Raphael from the Renaissance. And again, there's really nothing new under the sun. They just sort of keep having these revivals, and repurposing. So, but it's really, it's worth a trip to Fontainebleau just to see that in situ. And then this is interesting, this is a desk that came from the Hamilton Palace sale, and so there was a major collection that took place over 17 days, and this piece brought 6,000 pounds at the time, and I think you get a sense of how jewel-like the mounts are here. And it sold to the Wertheimers, Jewish family, for 6,000 pounds, which, I did a conversion, and I find it hard to believe, but basically that 6,000 pounds in 1882, which is when the sale was, was the equivalent of about 780,000 pounds. So, I, remarkable. A million dollar piece of furniture, even in the 19th century. So, here we go, this was the catalogue entry, and let's see if I can show you, here, there's like a little bit of this that shows like the sum of, you know, 6,000 pounds, and Wertheimer's name.

And then Marie Antoinette actually had her own inventory, and her own inventory label, and here you see, this is like a heated stamp that was like punched, it was literally stamped into the wood to create that so that no one could mess with her mark. And most marks are like that, they're sort of ingrained like that. It's not a pencil mark, it's usually a stamp, a metal, heavy iron stamp. And again, so when we're coming to the 1780s, you see that mahogany is really the wood of choice, and things become much more refined. And this is a table where the wood is known to have come from St. Lucia. And this whole room was one of the only rooms of Versailles that Louis XVI had actually converted into more neoclassical suite of room, of this one room, because of his library. And you do get the, it's a much more restrained, but obviously royal interior, and it's really from the 1780s on for the most part that you see this mahogany furniture. And then, hey, this is another fun group. On the right is the royal, is, jewel cabinet, and that was made for the Comtesse de Provence, and on the left is a wax model, if you could believe, it's about 19 inches small. It's at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, and it was a model that was made, designed by Dugourc, I believe, and it was made as a sample.

There was a contest to see who would make Marie Antoinette's, and this lost, and the, it was just, the one on the right is one that was made 10 years later or so, but I just wanted you to get a sense of what they went through, like even for the "Bureau du Roi," they made these wax models for the king or for the queen to approve before they would continue on as they did their work. And then here I show you one more cabinetmaker, who's really exceptional and that was David Roentgen. And again, from a family of cabinetmakers. His father was Abraham Roentgen, and he was cabinetmaker to Catherine the Great, but he also managed to ensnare Marie Antoinette as a customer as well, and I'm going to end with the piece that in fact she, that he gives to her as a way of promoting his business. But, here you can see that this desk is a, it's called a table a Tronchin, and Tronchin was a surgeon, a doctor, in Switzerland in the 18th century, and he had come up with the idea, which is very relevant today, that we sit too much at our desks, and that one should stand, and so it's called the table a Tronchin because he's the one that popularised the idea.

And so again, you can see the quality of the mounts, the beauty of the mahogany, and it's just

so much more restrained, and that is more typical of Louis XVI's furniture as opposed to sort of all the ornate grandeur, the opulence of Louis XIV and the sort of Rococo curviness of Louis XV. And so here I show you three different examples, so it's your exam. On the top left, hopefully you'll recognise that's Andre Charles Boulle, and that's Louis XIV, or the baroque. Below that a really remarkable example by Gaudreau of the Rococo and Louis XV. And then on the right, Louis XVI with the tapering legs. So if you've come away with knowing that, I think that's special. And I leave you now this video of, this was the gift that was made, an automaton, for Marie Antoinette, by Roentgen. So I think you get a sense from all this that basically, you know, he, again, he continues with his mahogany and gilt bronze, and I hope you've enjoyed my talk.

- [Host] Thank you. Robin, would you like to just go over some of the Q and A?

- Sure. Sure.

- [Host] Can you see them at the bottom? There's about 17 if you could-

- I see.

- [Host] If you could read out if there's a question and then answer them if you don't mind.

Q&A and Comments:

Sure. "Where were all the silver mines for Louis XIV's furniture coming from? Was it smelted and fashioned into the pieces of furniture?" I can't answer that for sure, so we'll skip that.

Q: "Why was it melted?"

A: So they melted it really because they needed to pay for Louis XIV's wars. While he was remarkable in terms of his ability to promote the arts, he was also remarkable in his ability to go to war and kill people.

Somebody said, "Fabulous feet on the commode. Would love to hear some of your thoughts on the pieces in the Wallace collection." Okay.

Q: "Could you define Bombay vs. serpentine?"

A: So Bombay is coming outward, like a pregnancy, and serpentine is more like a snake going across. So they're not the same exactly, but I could see how you, they, it's confusing.

So, somebody said, let's see, "They changed the wallpaper hangings in England too." "What date is the Louis XV metal cabinet?" I have to look that up, but I'll let you know, Tessa.

Q: Let's see. I have a very sensitive mouse. Let's see. Tessa. "Lacquer was toxic. Did some

furniture makers die young?"

A: Interestingly, not so much the furniture makers. It was really the gilt bronze makers that died, because they were using mercury, and like the tradition of mad hatters in England, they used mercury, and so they became crazy from the mercury poisoning, and really all they did was sort of work with the wind going downstream to kind of avoid it. So, but not so much the lacquer people.

Q: "Where did cabinetmakers learn the skill? Was there a school of marquetry?"

A: So there was a, there were journeymen that, so basically to become a cabinetmaker, it was long years and years of arduous work, and you learnt it on the job, and usually you were lucky to, the only way you usually got in was to be the son of a cabinetmaker, or to come from that family. So they literally learned on the job.

Q: "And did the royal family also value old to them furniture, or did they always prefer new and innovative?"

A: So, you have both. So for example, the desk that I showed you with the beautiful original colour from the skinning of it, that desk was produced sort of in an old fashioned way, but for an older member of the family. So they did value both, I mean, but basically, the younger they were, the newer they wanted it.

Q: "How much Paris-made furniture was exported during the 18th century pre-Revolution?"

A: That's a good question as well. I think it was somewhat popular. In America it was very popular amongst Washington and Jefferson and the diplomats, and so a lot of it really came and was exported through the diplomatic trade. So, but I wouldn't say it was in vast quantities, but you certainly saw a lot. But then when you had the sales in the 1790s in Paris to sell off the royal furniture, that's really when it first left for England and the United States. So the difference between marquetry and parquetry. Basically it's the same concept, but with parquetry, geometric, and with marquetry, it's pictorial. So it's really, it's different, but the same. And then,

Q: "Robin, was the lost-wax technique used to cast the metal decorative mounts on the furniture shown, or were they handwrought? What of the silver furniture, was that made by silversmiths?"

A: So yes, the silver furniture was made by silversmiths, and it was the lost-wax technique, it wasn't, but again, it was chiselers, people that did this, that like, once it was cast in these moulds, it was then a chiseler who would then, you know, go back to it and do it again, and there's an example actually in the Frick of a commode where they actually gilded twice, the commode for Louis XV's daughter. So that's that one. So, the, I want to say it was like six or seven years to be an apprentice before you got anywhere. So, I think that's it!

Q: "How much did survive the French Revolution?"

A: A fair amount. You just have to go around the world and see them in all the different museums and private collections.

- Thank you. Thanks, Robin, that was outstanding. Absolutely fabulous.

- Thank you. It was fun.

- Yeah, it was great. Thank you, and we look forward to welcoming you back.

- And I'm honoured to be a part of the group.

- Oh no, we are absolutely thrilled, and I cannot wait to tell Dorothy. What a small world! I wonder if she's listening today. I'm going to call her.

- Thank Gary.

- Very, very good. Thank you everybody, thanks for joining us, and we see you tomorrow. Looking forward. Thanks a lot, bye!