

Versailles  
The French  
Luxury Trades  
and the Impact  
on America

*Wednesday October 25  
- November 1, 2000*



"Magnificent, splendid, an artistic showcase" such were the words used by Americans like Thomas Jefferson when they visited Versailles in the 18th century. Standing at the foot of the principal staircase, they would be confronted by a grandly designed and breathtaking interior. The walls were covered in marble veneer offset by lavish gilded molding. Illusionist frescoes seemed to spatially pierce walls and ceilings. Light poured through crystal skylights and gleamed on the heavily gilded doors leading to the Royal apartments. Passing through a door into the antechamber of the Royal apartments the visitors would have admired the elegant *lambris* or wood paneling, painted white and gold that lined the room. The space was made more splendid by a sculpted and gilded relief under the ceiling, depicting children at play against a mosaic background of white and gold. Here, at Versailles, was a brilliant *tour de force* of what French artisans could achieve. However, a visit to Versailles also revealed the exquisite decorative arts of France. The Louis, often influenced by their mistresses or wives, had sought out the rare and the precious. Their patronage had stimulated the arts leading to the beginnings of the French luxury trades. Visitors to 18th-century Paris eagerly sought out the best *marchands merciers* situated in Rue St Honore. They in turn kept a steady flow of raw materials and half finished goods - be these Sèvres porcelain plaques, silk from Lyon, Japanese lacquer panels, bronze mounts or Beauvais tapestries - moving between workshops all over Paris and their stores, in order to meet the ever increasing demand for French luxury goods.

This program will examine how, two hundred years later, nothing has changed. At a private day of study at Versailles, with entrée to rooms that are closed to the public we see why this palace continues to draw admiration and fascinate those who visit. Its magic will be fully captured at a candlelit black tie dinner

in one of the magnificent gilded chambers. That French artistry has maintained its finesse is demonstrated through visits to those workshops and resources known to the best decorators. We will explore select galleries that represent hard-to-find pieces from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and visit the factories of some of the most famous luxury trades. But the most pleasurable experiences are to be found in the private homes of Americans living in Paris, or of French aristocrats with American ancestors. It is here one sees what has evolved through the merging of two cultures, the melding of the freshness of the New World with the aesthetic sense of the old. Sometimes the interior is an exotic mix of styles or of period pieces offset by contemporary design. On rare occasions, the work is executed by a master such as Henri Samuel. In such cases it is so exquisite that it affords one the opportunity of stepping through the mirror into the world Thomas Jefferson must have known.

The program is to be led by Emmanuel Ducamp and Jessica Deutsch. Numbers are limited to 15.

*The fee is \$6,500 with a \$500 single supplement. An additional \$1,000 donation is required from each participant made payable as a donation to Versailles. The program fee covers seven nights at the five star Hotel Trocadero Dokban decorated by Frederic Mechiche; a black tie dinner at Versailles; almost all meals; visits to private homes; visits to private 18th and 19th century interiors; visits to the luxury trades; workshops; galleries; museums and artisans. In each case we enjoy private access and carefully guided study.*

#### Wednesday October 25th

We begin with visits to two private apartments housed in 18th century mansions on Avenue Foch. One belongs to a French aristocrat with American ancestry and the other to a part-time American resident. Dinner in an 18th century interior.

#### Thursday 26th

Emmanuel Ducamp lectures on Versailles and its impact. We explore rare examples of 18th century cabinetwork, Sèvres porcelain and silver at the Louvre. In the afternoon, participants have the choice of visiting one of two ateliers outside of Paris. Studies are in the cutting of wood and making of marquetry or the weaving of intricate *passimenterie* on old looms. Cocktails will be served in a beautifully decorated American owned apartment.

#### Friday 27th

Morning visit to Puiforcat Silver where we see the entire process involved in handcrafting the high quality silver that has made Puiforcat one of the world's most respected silver houses. Afternoon visit to two 18th century Parisian mansions, not open to the public, which have survived with magnificent interior decoration virtually intact. Visit to a number of small ateliers producing or representing luxury items exclusive to France, including tuille de Jouy. Visit to an apartment and dinner in Place de Voyages.

#### Saturday 28th

Behind the scenes study at Musée des Arts décoratifs on rare silks, tapestries and wall paper. In the afternoon we traverse Paris for a number of gallery visits. Visit to the home of a young aristocratic couple one of whom is a direct descendant of a famous American. Dinner will be hosted in the home of an American living in Paris.