



Gardner's Antiques

Exterior and interior views of a Louis XV ladies writing desk with marquetry inlay; c. 1800

de Pompadour had a common interest in architecture. Madame de Pompadour's brother was appointed director of the King's buildings and he, the King and Madame de Pompadour planned and built a number of costly palaces, pavilions and summer houses.

Small, intimate rooms were planned, decorated and furnished to satisfy the contemporary taste for informality. In the neighborhood of the royal palaces, small châteaux increased in number. The new concept of informal living in intimate surroundings gave rise to an astonishing increase in the variety and importance of furniture. Fashion demands included paneled walls, which craftsmen mirrored in the furniture, and upholstered chairs, day beds and sofas reflected an increasing emphasis on comfort. Canopy beds intensified the intimacy.

Some say that thanks to—others say in spite of—the guild system, French furni-

ture in the 18th century achieved such a state of perfection that it was sought after throughout Europe and, ultimately, the world. While the furniture may have attained perfection, the same cannot be said for Madame de Pompadour.

Learning and Beauty

Yes, Madame de Pompadour was witty, intelligent and gracious—not unlike the Louis XV style. And, yes, she was an icon of court culture who owed her success mainly to her intelligence and capabilities, and simultaneously represented sexuality and intellect and the woman's role in the highly saturated feminist atmosphere of the time. More than a mere love object, she was a smart and creative career woman, shrewdly ambitious, clever and creative. Admirable traits, perhaps, but she was not without flaw. She may have been a patron of the arts, but she wasn't always a saint.

By means of a skillful use of palace intrigue manipulated from behind the

Pair of bisque statues of a man and woman of the period; c. 1880



scenes, she became a force to be reckoned with. Acting in many ways as executive secretary and advisor to His Majesty, she heavily influenced important affairs of state (though to what degree is still debated), and no one was appointed to office without her consent. She acted as an intermediary between the ministers and the King, was capable of removing her enemies from office and enabling her friends to come into the government. She became a French nationalist and believer in the myth of French supremacy.

With such power and passion, she could hardly be ignored in French politics, and when France was on the verge of war with England, she played a major role in influencing the Diplomatic Revolution, the treaty that allied France with its former enemy, Austria. The treaty was signed on May 1, 1756, and eventually led to the Seven Years' War, which proved disastrous to France.

Louis XV bombé chest of drawers with rouge marble top; c. 1890

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Three-piece clock set of doré bronze and rouge marble signed by A. Beurdeley; c. 1890.



On top of that, she was instrumental in confining to the Bastille and other prisons many of those who questioned her right to the enormous drafts on the public treasury made by the King. She was ultimately blamed for all the misfortunes that fell upon France.

Yet even imperfect gems sparkle and bring delight to our lives. Throughout her influential twenty years at court, she rose far above the traditional roles assigned to women. Madame de Pompadour brought love, fashion and more to the life of her king and the style that bears his name. ♥

