

Widener Room

During the reign of Louis XV (1723–1774) a light and playful style became popular especially for the more intimate and informal interiors that had become fashionable. Straight lines gave way to graceful curves (as in the legs of chairs) and rectangles were softened with sinuous scrolls (as in the divisions of the paneling). Furniture of *bombé* (literally “blown out”) shape was favored, as were irregular outlines (here seen in the frames of the overdoor paintings). As ornament, flowers and vines mingled with scrolls and sometimes with shells and other marine elements (*rocaille*), from which this style was later called *rococo*.



PANELING AND PAINTINGS FROM THE SALON OF THE CHÂTEAU OF LA NORVILLE

NICOLAS PINEAU
French, 1684–1754

Wall Paneling (*boiseries*)

c. 1740
oak with gilding
Gift of George D. Widener and Eleanor
Widener Dixon 1957.7.7

ATTRIBUTED TO CHRISTOPHE HUET
French, 1700–1759

Six Singeries: The Concert, the Dance, the Fishermen, the Picnic, the Painter, the Sculptor

c. 1740
oil on canvas
Gift of George D. Widener and Eleanor
Widener Dixon 1957.7.1–6

One of the leading designers of architectural decorations, Nicolas Pineau was commissioned to create this paneling about 1739 for the salon of the Château of La Norville, which lies about

twenty miles south of Paris. Few decorative ensembles in this provincial style survive today, and this one, with its light and delicately carved tendril designs, is a particularly fine example. The six paintings over the doors and mirrors, attributed to Christophe Huet, are original to the decoration. Huet was a leading painter of this type of subject, known as *singerie*, in which monkeys take over the activities of humans with comical and sometimes satirical results. This type of wooden floor, known as *parquet de Versailles* because of its prevalence at that palace, is also eighteenth century.

The dimensions of the room and relationship of the paneling to the position of the doors and mirrors are not original. The paneling’s present unpainted state reflects its condition as installed in Mrs. A. Hamilton Rice’s dining room in New York in 1923. Mrs. Rice was the widow of George D. Widener, who had died in the Titanic disaster in 1912. In the eighteenth century, the paneling was probably painted a light pastel or gray color, with the moldings picked out in darker shades of the same hue.

FRENCH

Chandelier (*lustre*)

partly mid-18th century
silvered brass, rock crystal, cut and
molded glass
Gift of George D. Widener and Eleanor
Widener Dixon 1957.7.22

A 1759 inventory of the salon of the Château of La Norville indicates that the furnishings included a gilt-bronze chandelier with eight arms. The present, more elaborate, crystal- and silver-gilt example bears Paris tax marks from 1745 to 1749.

FRENCH

Four Pairs of Wall-Lights (*bras de lumière*)

c. 1740/1745, and 19th–20th century
gilt bronze
Gift of George D. Widener and Eleanor
Widener Dixon 1957.7.13–20

FRENCH

Chimneypiece (*cheminée*)

possibly c. 1750
rouge royal marble with cast-iron
interior fittings
Gift of George D. Widener and Eleanor
Widener Dixon 1957.7.10

The fine cast-iron interior fittings of the carved fireplace are probably not original to it, though they are of the period. The relief on the back panel represents Orpheus pleading with Hades, the god of the underworld, for the release of Eurydice. This scene, appropriately, takes place in the fiery underworld cavern where Hades dwells.

JACQUES-FRANÇOIS-JOSEPH SALY
French, 1717–1776

Bust of a Little Girl

model 1744, cast probably 1750/1753
bronze
Widener Collection 1942.9.128

ATTRIBUTED TO JACQUES CAFFIÉRI
French, 1678–1755

Pair of Andirons (*chenets*): Hounds Attacking a Boar and a Wolf

probably 1750/1755
gilt bronze and cast iron
Gift of George D. Widener and Eleanor
Widener Dixon 1957.7.11–12

These andirons may have been commissioned for a hunting lodge since they represent dogs fighting a boar and a wolf who have both already killed one hound. The subjects create puns on the English and French terms “fire-dog” and “*chenet*.” The lively sculpture groups are probably the work of Jacques Caffiéri, a leading Parisian sculptor and bronze-caster of Italian descent, whose patrons included Louis XV and Madame de Pompadour.



QING DYNASTY
Chinese, 1644–1911
with French mounts

Pair of Vases in the Form of a Carp, Mounted as an Ewer

Yongzheng period, 1723/1735 (vases);
c. 1730–1735 (mounts)
porcelain with blue celadon glaze, in gilt-
bronze mount
Widener Collection 1942.9.443–444

QING DYNASTY
Chinese, 1644–1911
with French mounts

Pair of Vases Mounted as Ewers

mid-18th century (vases);
c. 1780–1785 (mounts)
porcelain with light green celadon glaze
and underglaze decoration in white slip,
in gilt-bronze mount
Widener Collection 1942.9.441–442

Some of the more exquisite examples of porcelain that were being imported from China in the eighteenth century were encased in gilt-bronze mounts. The practice protected the fragile porcelains from damage, but altered their appearance as well as their function. The two pairs of ewers on the chimney were vases before they were mounted. Paradoxically, the alteration served no functional purpose because the ewers were not intended to be used. The exuberant, rococo-style mounts of the carp vases contrast with the more compact, though equally lavish, neoclassical mounts of the larger vases.



FRENCH OR BRITISH CHAIRMAKER
with Gobelins Tapestry after cartoons
by Maurice Jacques
French, 1712–1784

Sofa, Armchairs, and a Firescreen

probably c. 1830/1850
gilded beech frames with silk and
cotton tapestry
Widener Collection 1942.9.428–437

The 1759 inventory of the salon of the Château of La Norville also lists a large sofa and eight chairs upholstered with Gobelins tapestries, which would have been similar to the present suite. In this case, the furniture frames were apparently created in the nineteenth century and later fitted with these eighteenth-century tapestries.

Gobelins was the Paris suburb where Louis XIV founded a new factory in 1662 to produce the furnishings, mirrors, and tapestries for Versailles and his other palaces. Because Gobelins could work only on orders from the court, another factory was established in 1664 at the northern French city of Beauvais to supply the nobility, bourgeoisie, and foreigners. Beauvais work may be seen in the tapestry *The Dream of Rinaldo* (in an adjoining gallery), which was designed by the painter François Boucher.

TIBERIO TINELLI
Venetian, 1586–1638

Lodovico Widmann

probably 1637
oil on canvas
Gift of Samuel L. Fuller 1946.6.1

JEAN-MATHIEU CHEVALLIER
French, 1696–1768

Chest of Drawers (commode)

mid-18th century, possibly 1743/1744
wood veneered on oak stained black,
gilt-bronze mounts, breccia marble top
Widener Collection 1942.9.414

As with the Chinese porcelains and the furniture with Japanese lacquer displayed in the adjoining gallery, this two-drawer commode is evidence of a new fascination with things Oriental in eighteenth-century Europe that followed an increase of trade with the Far East.

The lively gilt-bronze mounts include cat-tails as well as Chinese men holding dragons, parrots, and parasols. The pinks and greens of the peonies and leaves in the veneer were stained into the woods with dyes. Although very faded now, these colors would originally have been much brighter. Jean-Mathieu Chevallier, who stamped this piece, was a furniture dealer as well as a cabinetmaker specializing in complex, colored veneers.



JOSEPH BAUMHAUER
German, active in France c. 1749–1772

Two Chests of Drawers (commode)

probably 1767–1772
wood veneered on oak, gilt-bronze mounts,
breccia marble top
Widener Collection 1942.9.411–412

At first sight, these two commodes appear alike, but they are not a pair. They differ slightly in the veneered designs, most notably in the legs, which are inlaid with pale tulipwood in one and with dark purple wood in the other. The dimensions and construction are also slightly different, indicating that the two chests were manufactured by different craftsmen in the workshop of Joseph Baumhauer, a cabinetmaker of German birth who was among the most prolific and versatile of rococo cabinetmakers.

During the eighteenth century, chests of drawers were commonly placed in reception rooms under mirrors, as here. The 1759 inventory of the salon of the Château of La Norville indicates that a pair of commodes more restrained in style was in the room. The inventory states that the chests were painted like the paneling.



JOHANN JOACHIM KÄNDLER
German, c. 1706–1775

with French mounts

*Pair of Candelabra (girandoles):
Swans among Rushes*

c. 1750
gilt bronze and porcelain
Gift of George D. Widener 1972.20.1–2

In the eighteenth century, candelabra were commonly placed in front of wall mirrors to produce more light. Kändler, the artist who made the models for the remarkably lively swans, was the chief sculptor at the Meissen porcelain factory in Germany. In Europe the method for producing hard-paste porcelain was invented at Meissen in 1709, though it had been known for centuries in China. The very fine gilt-bronze mounts were produced in France; they frame and protect the precious birds while serving as candleholders. Each bronze candelabra consists of twenty-five separately cast pieces.

CHARLES CRESSENT
French, 1685–1768

Writing Table (bureau plat)

c. 1735/1745
wood veneered on oak and pine,
gilt-bronze mounts
Widener Collection 1942.9.423

Cressent was one of the greatest French cabinetmakers (*ébénistes*) of the eighteenth century. He was trained as a sculptor by his father, became master in 1708, and gained the title *Ébéniste du Régent* in 1719. Cressent's elegantly proportioned furniture is characterized by superb gilt-bronze mounts, such as the female busts at the four corners of this table. In violation of guild rules, he is known to have modeled and cast such mounts himself.



CLAUDE MICHEL, CALLED CLODION
French, 1738–1814

Silenus Crowned by Nymphs

1765
terracotta
Pepita Milmore Memorial Fund 1977.59.1