THE NEO-RENAISSANCE STYLE AND THE VICTORIAN INTERIOR:
THE EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY IN THE LIBRARY AT CHATEAU-SUR-MER, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

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In its original incarnation, Seth Bradford’s Chateau-sur-Mer in Newport, Rhode Island was an imposing symbol of the great financial power held by the Wetmore family, the successful China trade and banking clan of New York. Built in 1852, most architectural historians consider it the first of the grand cottages built by the country’s wealthiest families as a summer retreat in Newport, Rhode Island. Little changed to the interior or exterior until 1869, when George Peabody Wetmore began a decade of extensive changes to the property. He enlisted celebrated architect and Newport favorite Richard Morris Hunt to raise and alter the profile of the roofline in keeping with the fashionable European style. Hunt also went to work on the inside, undertaking an ambitious remodeling campaign in accordance with the Aesthetic taste which was so popular with the social
elite of Victorian America and Europe.¹ Determined and bold, Hunt was already recognized as one of the leaders in American architecture. But he was not the only visionary at work at Chateau-sur-Mer. Indeed, one of the most compelling pieces of the revitalized Chateau was Luigi Frullini’s library, a Neo-Renaissance masterpiece in carved wood.

FIGURE 2: EXTERIOR, CHATEAU-SUR-MER, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND, COURTESY OF THE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF NEWPORT COUNTY, GAVIN ASHWORTH PHOTOGRAPHY.

² Rosanna Pavoni, “Introduction”, Reviving the Renaissance: The Use and Abuse of the Past in Nineteenth-Century
The library was the product of converging trends on opposite sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, a new class of wealthy industrialists and merchants were able to indulge the growing national infatuation with interior design. Antebellum interiors tended towards simplicity; even the upper-class holiday cottages in Newport were noteworthy for being understated. Not so for the Gilded Age mansions, whose owners waged protracted battles to see who could commission the most elaborate dining halls and parlors. In Italy, meanwhile, a new class of artists sought to capture the patriotic spirit that accompanied the triumph of the Risorgimento, the decades-long struggle for national unification that ended in 1871. Painters, architects, and sculptors used the symbols of the Renaissance to celebrate the Risorgimento, both in Italy and in their work abroad. The most successful artists became national celebrities.
Luigi Frullini was one of them. His career was already on the upswing when he was commissioned to complete the dining room and library at Chateau-sur-Mer, but his work in Newport would set him apart from other Italian artists. He used his skill to transform the interior of Chateau-sur-Mer, and he used his celebrity to win back Italy’s reputation as the world’s center for woodcarving and master craftsmanship.

INTERIOR DESIGN IN VICTORIAN AMERICA

Victorians used home decor to speak to each other. They set aside certain rooms as public spaces, and their decoration conveyed many things about the owner and his family. Furnishings in the Renaissance style indicated virtue and family values. The use of Classical or Renaissance motifs indicated to the visitor that the owner was educated or widely traveled (or both), and could easily recognize the motifs employed by the architect or decorator. Moreover, the home was both an expression of the genteel and cosmopolitan values of the American upper class. Claudio Paolini, in his examination of the nineteenth century Anglo-American interest in the works of Florentine artisans states: “[The wealthy American elite] regarded the Renaissance style as a dignifying style capable of expressing social affirmation, cultured depth, knowledge, and beauty.” This interest aligned perfectly with the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements, which also reflected the


importance of craftsmanship, the search for the ideal in art and beauty, and an interest in the exotic and foreign.\textsuperscript{5} Besides a general expression of family values and culture, each space in the home had a gender identity. The sitting room or parlor was a purely feminine space, while the dining room and library were masculine, and their decoration communicated the power and prestige of the family.\textsuperscript{6} Indeed, C.W. Elliot's confirmed their importance in 1876, when he dedicated two of the four chapters of his path-breaking book *Household Art* to those rooms alone.

Interior design said something about the 19\textsuperscript{th} century family. It was also a vehicle for national identity. The Americans of the nineteenth century, as Richard Guy Wilson has shown, sought out the Renaissance as the inspiration for their style while denying their own heritage.\textsuperscript{7} As A.J. Bloor declared in 1879, “Our major merchants, industrialists, mine owners, railway magnates, and financiers are more inclined to emulate the vast expenditures of the Medici of the ancient Italian republics than to conform to the frugal habits of their own ancestors.”\textsuperscript{8} Lacking an aristocratic system, Americans created their own “heraldic display” via the decoration of their houses – and they spared no expense. This “aristocracy of dollars,” as Edgar Allen Poe put it, waged an intense internecine competition for the best and the biggest the world had to offer. Under these


\textsuperscript{7} Wilson, 69-87.

\textsuperscript{8} Quoted in Claudio Paolini, “American Renaissance”, *MCM*, no. 57, (September 2002), 29.
conditions, it is not at all surprising that elaborate and expensive Renaissance furnishings became the first choice for the American elite.

The home and its decoration was a subject of great interest to nineteenth century society, sparking a firestorm of books and news articles on the subject. Decoration manuals flooded the bookshelves, from Eastlake’s *Hints on Household Decoration* in 1868 to Jacob von Falke’s *Art in the House* ten years later. Unsurprisingly, the trends started in Europe, which housed the leading design firms of the era. However the United States would take up the European standard as its own in the period Richard Guy Wilson calls the American Renaissance (1876-1917). Spotting a voracious consumer market, many authors mimicked Eastlake and von Falke’s decorating manuals. As much as these manuals fed the consumer’s appetite, the purpose of the manuals were to promote a healthy diet of sanctified decoration, amongst which was the application of the Renaissance style in the interior. For those working in the furniture trade, these manuals also sparked a flurry of artistic journals across Europe and especially in Italy.

There was also a public fascination in the decorating trends of the social elite. From the 1883-84 limited print edition of *Artistic Houses*\(^9\) to the local gossip column in the *New York Times*,


\(^{10}\) *Artistic Houses, Being a Series of Interior Views of a number of the Most Beautiful and Celebrated Homes in the United States with A Description of the Art Treasures contained therein*, was a subscription-based publication limited to 500 copies. It was published by D. Appleton and Company of New York over the course of two years, 1883 and 1884. Each of the two volumes contained two parts that described in both text and photograph the interiors of the most fashionable houses of the period. For a concise history of the publication see the preface in Arnold Lewis, James
the subject of building and decorating was widely covered in the mass media. While the expense of the renovations or building was almost always mentioned, it was not often the center of attention. Instead, the decorative scheme or uniqueness of the project was the highlight of reports. This is particularly true in *Artistic Houses*, where the designer, decorators, and artists employed on the projects were mentioned in the brief descriptions of the interiors. This is also true of C.W. Elliot's *Household Art*. After all, the decoration of the house was a medium in itself, a communicator of the family's largess and their place in society.

By 1870, Newport had become the favored resort location of New York City’s most elite families. Where previously modest houses and hotels made up the resort community, larger houses became the vogue in the 1870s. Chateau-sur-Mer was already the largest and grandest home in Newport by the time Richard Morris Hunt began renovations in 1869. His changes would

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be significant, marking a tone of European refinement that future families would emulate on an even larger scale later in the century. Sadly, the historical record in regards to the changes made at Chateau-sur-Mer is incomplete.\textsuperscript{11} While the Veeder Inventory at the Preservation Society of Newport County contains a handful of drawings for the property and proposed changes, there is little existing correspondence between the architect and the client or the architect and the designers employed to complete the interior scheme of the library and dining room.\textsuperscript{12} One complete synthesis of the changes to the property exists in Winslow Ames's thorough investigation of the Veeder Inventory. In his 1970 article, “The Transformation of Chateau-sur-Mer”, Ames chronicles the changes made to the structure, with a particular focus on the structural changes made by Hunt. The changes took place in two phases, with the renovations and re-fitting of the interiors primarily belonging to the second phase of the project.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} It is believed that at the time of Richard Morris Hunt's death in 1895, many of the firm's drawings were destroyed so as to protect the still living client's privacy. Courtesy of a telephone conversation with Sherry Birk, Director, The Octagon Museum and Collections, American Architectural Foundation, Washington, D.C.

A group of eleven diazotypes depicting the work at Chateau-sur-Mer exist in the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division holdings. Paul Veeder II donated the drawings in 1970. Many thanks to Jonathan Aeker at the Library of Congress for his assistance with these architectural drawings. [Architectural drawings of Chateau-Sur-Mer, Newport, Rhode Island], ca. 1871 and ca. 1890, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{12} In Winslow Ames' article, he cites two drawings dated 1876 in the Veeder Inventory for a library table and dining table respectively, numbered 19.2 and 19.3. Unfortunately, Ames does not indicate who the author of the drawings might be. Moreover, according to the \textit{New York Times} time line, the rooms would be nearly complete by this time, though, they could have been unfurnished.

These drawings do not appear in the Preservation Society of Newport County archives. Paul Veeder II may have donated them to a separate institution. Inquiries to the Avery Architectural Library, Library of Congress, the Cooper-Hewitt, and the Rhode Island Historical Society—�institutions which received donations by Veeder or the Wetmores—did not locate the drawings. Many thanks to Erin Schreiner at Columbia University, and Jacquellann Killian at the Cooper-Hewitt for their assistance with this research.

\textsuperscript{13} Ames, 292 and 299. Ames cites Catherine Howland Hunt's memoir, which gives 1869-1873 as the termini dates for the project.
Monkhouse also divide the renovations in two phases, the first phase from 1870 to 1873, and the second phase between 1874 and 1880.\textsuperscript{14} Ames suggests that the interior decoration may have been complete by 1876, arguing that Wetmore had to “finish payment in 1876 of a decorating bill which was said...to run to $120,000.”\textsuperscript{15} If the majority of the restoration budget was completed by 1876, then Richard Morris Hunt probably did not oversee the decoration of the library and dining room. In the period between 1873 and 1876, Hunt was busily at work on several commissions including two large buildings in New York City, the Coal & Iron Exchange and the Tribune Building.\textsuperscript{16} In fact, the eleven diazotypes in the collection of the Library of Congress bear a stamp with the address “73 Coal and Iron Exchange” suggesting Hunt was engaged in the skyscraper project while working on Chateau-sur-Mer. Drawings by Hunt in the collection of the Preservation Society detailed the dimensions for various parts of the dining-room like the chimney-piece and the sideboard. Presumably these drawings were supplied to Wetmore who would have forwarded them on to Frullini.


\textsuperscript{15} Ames, 292.

In order to pin down the chronology of the renovations, the reports given by the local correspondents are an invaluable resource. In May of 1873, a New York Times correspondent reported that in the fall of 1872, interior work had commenced on Chateau-sur-Mer, including the construction of a new billiard room, the enlargement of the dining room, and changes to the hall by local builders Simmons and Wilbour. However, the report makes no mention of changes to the library. From the tone of the article, the exterior renovations were complete, but the changes to the interior rendered the property uninhabitable, forcing George Peabody Wetmore to consider


In the same article, the correspondent reports that Linden Gate, the summer home of Henry G. Marquand, is complete. Some historians have suggested that Linden Gate was perhaps the first instance where Hunt and Frullini collaborated and thus, the inspiration for the rooms at Chateau-sur-Mer. This may not be the case. It is suggested in the HABS No. RI-335 report on Linden Gate that the carved Frullini panels in the Reception Room were installed during a renovation of the house carried out by Hunt some ten years later, in 1883. “At the right end of the long rectangular panel above the mantel is a carved rendering of the house [Linden Gate] dating after the addition to the service wing. This detail suggests that the decoration of the reception room dates from the remodelling (sic) by Hunt in 1883.” HABS Report RI-335, no. 7. The second volume of Artistic Houses (1884) illustrates the Frullini rooms at Linden Gate and Chateau-sur-Mer. Given that the extent of the Frullini contribution at Linden Gate is much less involved than at Chateau-sur-Mer, it is entirely possible the reception room panels were installed in 1883 just before the author visited the property. See Figure 8.
“hiring 'a cottage!’” for the season. An article from the following May offered more detail about the evolving interior. The report explained that the dining room “will not be finished this season, owing that... the material...Italian walnut, has not arrived from Florence”. Again, the correspondent did not make mention of the library. Frullini had been involved in the project since 1872, however, which indicates that his first commission was for work in the dining room. The New York Times did not mention the library until May 1876, when it reported the completion of Hunt’s renovations. According to the article, the library and dining rooms were finished at a cost of $60,000 apiece, and each took a year to install. The stylistic differences between the two rooms are consistent with the evolution of the carver's style.

**FRULLINI COMES TO NEWPORT**

One of the great questions of the library at Chateau-sur-Mer is exactly how a Florentine artisan, Luigi Frullini, was chosen to design a room for a wealthy American politico, George Peabody Wetmore. While scholars have suggested many possibilities, there is no paper trail, no

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18 “Newport, Preparations for the Coming Summer Season-the New Cottages and their Owners”, New York Times, May 3, 1873, 2. Interestingly, the reporter also notes that due to the Vienna Exposition, fewer visitors will make their way to Newport. Frullini would achieve his greatest success at the Vienna Exposition, winning the gold medal.


20 New York Times articles reporting from Newport in 1871 and 1872 make no mention of changes to the cottages, simply reporting of their owners’ arrivals and activities, including George Peabody Wetmore amongst them. The library’s fall front desk is dated 1873, perhaps indicating the overall commission start date.

21 “Newport Changes, New Houses and Improvements” New York Times, May 5, 1876, 5. A report from 1875 mentions new construction in the city and the Wetmore’s as being in residence but does not indicate any building at Chateau-sur-Mer “Newport Notes, the Season Fairly Opened”, New York Times, June 28, 1875, 2.

22 One could easily be misled as to the date of the dining room given that the French ceramic plaques, painted by E. Gluck for Theodore Deck are dated 1876. Based on an 1875 Fratelli Alinari photograph in the archives of the Preservation Society, the sideboard supplied by Frullini did not include the plaques. Either Wetmore presumably supplied these or the decorators charged with installing the room.
diary, or correspondence providing a certain answer. The archives of Frullini and Hunt are woefully incomplete, and what we do know comes largely from contemporary secondary sources. It is clear, however, that Frullini was well known in elite circles by 1873. Thanks to the large ex-patriot collector community in Florence, or “pellegrini apassionati” as Paolini calls them, the young sculptor had opportunities to connect with wealthy families in Europe and beyond. Furthermore, he was an excellent self-promoter, participating in the major international exhibitions before the installment of the two rooms at Chateau-sur-Mer. The exhibitions would have made him known to leading designers and architects like Leon Marcotte, Herter Brothers, Richard Morris Hunt, and others. Moreover, his mastery of the Renaissance style fit well with the aesthetic and social ideals of the nineteenth century American elite, making him an attractive choice for the well-to-do holidaymakers in Newport.

The New York Times and other newspapers shed some light on those involved in the actual installation of the rooms. It is widely believed that Frullini sent members of his workshop to install the interiors designed for Chateau-sur-Mer. However, given the popularity of the artist and his constant flow of commissions by the middle of the decade, it is unlikely that he could have spared his own personnel. Instead, Frullini probably provided finished pieces and designs and left the installation to local firms. In May 1876, The New York Times reported that Americans (“the best

23 Wayne Craven, Gilded Mansions: Grand Architecture and High Society. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2009, 157. Craven also notes that Frullini visited the United States on the occasion of the Centennial Exposition. He may have made a trip to meet with Wetmore and perhaps this is where the drawings mentioned in the Veeder Inventory originate.
workmen in the country”) were engaged in the installation. On the other hand, James Yarnall, in his book Newport Through Its Architecture, notes that a Newport source indicated that the French installed the rooms.

For the past two or three years extensive improvements have been made to the villa of George Peabody Wetmore of New York, on Bellevue Avenue. The whole outlay will not be far from $300,000, and the estate is now one of the finest in the country. For a year past skilled workmen from France have been finishing the library and dining-room, the finish for which has been prepared in Florence, Italy. It is of Italian walnut, polished and carved into every conceivable shape, from the finest vines and flowers to large heads of men and beasts. The floors are composed of thousands of pieces of the choicest wood, and the bookcases and writing desk in the library are a wonder in themselves. The cost of both rooms completed will be $120,000. There is only one Summer estate here that is worth as much as these two rooms will cost.

The French workmen may have been from the Parisian decorator firm, Jules Allard et Fils, often used by Hunt in his interior schemes, but it more likely refers to the firm L. Marcotte and Co. John Cherol's investigation of Chateau-sur-Mer indicates the Wetmore family engaged the Marcotte firm directly in 1869, a claim also supported by Nina Gray in her 1994 article on the Marcotte firm. It is therefore plausible that the Wetmores may have re-engaged the firm to complete the decorative

24 “Newport Changes, New Houses and Improvements” New York Times, May 5, 1876, 5. These local workmen may have been tradesmen from Simmons and Wilbour who the Times alternately referred to as “carpenters” or “builders” on the project.


scheme on the interior once Hunt had completed the structural renovations. Other Marcotte clients connected to the Wetmores included George Peabody Wetmore's father, William Shepard Wetmore, his father-in-law, Eugene Keteltas, and Henry G. Marquand.27

Routine contacts between the small circle of prominent Newport families and top decorator firms suggest a number of possible connections between the Wetmores and Frullini. For example, Herter Brothers furniture known to be original to Chateau-sur-Mer also provides a possible entry point. Despite being primarily known for their Japonesque and Artistic Furniture designs, Herter Brothers accommodated the tastes of their clientele, and thus would have kept current on the latest trends.28 Indeed, the firm was well aware of Frullini's work, both by their attendance or participation in the international exhibitions and as evidenced by an 1888 catalog of the fourth exhibition of the Architectural League of New York where the firm lent a panel by the artist.29

The interiors of Chateau-sur-Mer incorporate work from a variety of designers/artisans, which might suggest a coordinating presence, be it Marcotte, Hunt, Herter Brothers, or Wetmore


himself. However, the process may have been more organic in nature. The existence of drawings for the faux tapestry of the stairwell by French designer Charles Salagnad suggest that Hunt recruited the artist, while the use of Morris wallpaper and Minton tiles in the library and elsewhere suggest the involvement of full service decorator firms like Herter Brothers or Marcotte. Some suggestions may have come through acquaintances, while other may have come from the artists already engaged on the project. For example, Annibale Gatti, a contemporary Italian painter and friend of Frullini, created the painted ceiling decoration for the dining room. According to an 1889 letter to Frullini, Wetmore appeared to have forgotten the name of the artist, which therefore indicates he was not directly involved in choosing the artist at the time of the commission. On the other hand, letters to the St. Pancras Ironworks in London dated 1873 and another to Louis Kragel in 1884, show that Wetmore was involved in the process of choosing the artisans and firms engaged on the project, even if he was occasionally absent-minded about the details.

30 While the competitive fervor that spurred the idea of “dining room wars” was a large part of the building boom of the last quarter of the nineteenth-century, there was also a spirit of sharing amongst the elite. For example, in the letter dated March 27, 1889, Luigi Frullini writes to Wetmore to thank him for the introduction to Anson Phelps Stokes. Letter from Luigi Frullini to George Peabody Wetmore, March 27, 1889, Curatorial Archives of the Preservation Society of Newport County. See the Appendix for a transcript of this letter.

31 In April 1889, Wetmore corresponds with Frullini about the prospect of enlarging the dining room. The content of the letter sheds light on Wetmore’s attention to detail. Rather than inquiring solely on the cost of the project, the patron is concerned instead with the color of the wood and whether, due to time passed new work would stand out in stark contrast to the original fittings. Letter from George Peabody Wetmore to Luigi Frullini, April 4, 1889, Curatorial Archives of the Preservation Society of Newport County. See the Appendix for a transcript of this letter.

32 These letters ranging from 1873 to 1874 discuss a proposal for stables. The project was not initiated. George Peabody Wetmore Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, MSS 798, Box 2.

33 Letter to George Peabody Wetmore from Louis Kragel, September 17, 1884, Curatorial Archives of the Preservation Society of Newport County. See the Appendix for a transcript of this letter.
There are other possible explanations. Frullini was well known to wealthy nineteenth century English and American collectors, who spent considerable time and money on the Continent. Foreigners flocked to Florence, where they commissioned high-quality Renaissance Revival works from the leading artisans of the city and collected antique works of art from dealers.  

As early as the late 1860s Frullini was working with the important English ex-patriot art dealer William Blundell Spence. Spence was at the center of art dealing in Risorgimento Italy and

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35 John Fleming, “Art Dealing in the Risorgimento III”, *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 121, no. 918, (August-September 1979), 568-580. This article is the last installment of three articles that shed great light on the activity of English collectors in Italy during the Risorgimento period in the North of Italy and in Florence.
employed Frullini and other craftsmen to both restore and recreate frames and cassone in the Renaissance style for his own collection and for his clients.\footnote{ibid., 571 and 575, and Ellen Callmann, “William Blundell Spence and the Transformation of Renaissance Cassoni”, \textit{The Burlington Magazine}, Vol. 141, No. 1155 (June 1999), 338-348.} Spence was the champion of carvers and other craftsmen, whom he argued were equal to painters, sculptors, and architects.\footnote{William Blundell Spence, \textit{The ‘Lions’ of Florence and its Environs, or the Stranger Conducted through its Principal Studios, Churches, Palaces, and Galleries by an Artist}, Florence, 1852, quoted in Paolini, “Oggetti”, 148-149.} In 1869-1870 he introduced Frullini to London collector and antiquarian, William Richard Drake, FSA. Frullini provided Drake with various examples of carved furniture for his library, which is depicted in a painting and etching of the connoisseur.\footnote{Fleming, “Art Dealing in the Risorgimento III”, 571. According to Fleming’s research of Spence’s diary, Frullini provided a cabinet, a stand for a terra cotta, a table, a sofa, a portfolio stand, and perhaps other objects such as frames for Drake between 1870 and 1872. Interestingly, near the end of 1872, Drake writes to Spence to engage an Italian carver for a cassone stand to replace the feet on a new purchase, but requests Spence not engage Frullini as his work was too “expensive” for the job.} Drake had an interest in contemporary Italian artists as well as Old Masters, Martin Brothers and antique ceramics,\footnote{Fleming, “Art Dealing in the Risorgimento III”, 571.} and the etchings of Francis Seymour Haden.\footnote{Drake compiled a catalogue raisonné of the artist titled, \textit{A Descriptive Catalogue of the Etched Work of Francis Seymour Haden}, London: Macmillan and Co., 1880.} Moreover, Drake was the chairman of the Burlington Fine Arts Club as well as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Given that the Wetmores were residing in Europe during this time, they might have had occasion to see the Frullini’s work \textit{in situ}. However, it does not appear from the historical record that the Wetmores spent a great deal of time in London,\footnote{In a conversation with Preservation Society of Newport County curator Paul Miller, it was suggested that the Wetmores lived in the area of Prince’s Gate in London, near the J.S. and J.P. Morgan residence. However, the Wetmores are not listed in any court guides or post office directories for the entirety of the decade that leads to the conclusion that the family did not establish a permanent residence in London. William Richard Drake resided at 12 Prince’s Gardens, according to various court guides for London for the period between 1870 and 1880. Prince’s Gate and Prince’s Gardens are perpendicular to one other in South Kensington, surrounding the location of the present day} preferring the
Continent and, in particular, the Anglo-American colony at Pau, France. Nevertheless, they did have a fondness for English decorative arts as evidenced by their purchase of bedroom furniture from Gregory & Co., and the use of Walter Crane designed Minton tiles, William Morris designed wallpaper, and William Burges designed woodwork in various locations throughout Chateau-sur-Mer.

Having similar interests in the arts, Wetmore and Drake may have known each other socially. While it is true that the social elite of the nineteenth century often competed with one another when it came to building and decorating, they also shared and recommended resources

Victoria and Albert Museum. Therefore, the Morgans and the Drakes were neighbors and may have paved the way of introduction to the Wetmores.


42 Ames, 300.
and often emulated one another. For example, in a previously noted letter from Frullini to George Peabody Wetmore, the artist thanks his patron for introducing him to Anson Phelps Stokes, for whom Frullini provided a mantelpiece.\(^{43}\) Furthermore, if the Frullini panels in the Henry G. Marquand residence at Linden Gate date from the original construction of 1872, it would stand to reason, the Wetmores might have been introduced to Frullini’s work via Marquand. Spence, Drake, and Marquand are all plausible intermediaries between Frullini and Wetmore, given the insular nature of wealthy patrons and artisans in the Victorian era.

![Figure 8: Frullini Mantelpiece from Linden Gate, Newport Rhode Island, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS RI-335, No. 11.](image)

\(^{43}\) Letter from Luigi Frullini to George Peabody Wetmore, March 27, 1889, Curatorial Archives Preservation Society of Newport County. See the Appendix for a transcript of this letter. Winslow Ames discusses the Stokes commission and Stokes’ disappointment that the carved work by Frullini was incomplete on the occasion of Stokes’ daughter’s wedding almost a year later in February of 1890. See Ames, 300.
The Wetmores may also have come across Frullini at one of several international exhibitions in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Popular history suggests that the Wetmores encountered Frullini’s work in Florence during their honeymoon. Frullini was highly regarded in 1870, the year he received the title Cavaliere della Corona d’Italia from Vittorio Emmanuelle II.\textsuperscript{44} Alternatively, the young George Peabody Wetmore might have known of Frullini earlier through his attendance at the international exhibitions. It is likely George Peabody Wetmore attended the Paris exhibition of 1867, as evidenced by letters to his sister Annie where he mentions his stay in France during the summer of that year. In a letter dated October 27, 1867, he wrote to his sister from London and mentions having been at the Longchamps races where he saw Emperor Napoleon III and the Emperor of Austria.\textsuperscript{45} The \textit{New York Times} reports that the two monarchs met in June of 1867, which coincides with the Universal Exposition at Paris, where Frullini was one of the top craftsmen representing Italy.\textsuperscript{46} Richard Morris Hunt also attended the exposition, acting as juror and commissioner of the Committee of Fine Arts for the fair.\textsuperscript{47} It is also possible the Wetmores encountered Frullini’s work at the International Exposition in Vienna in 1873, though this may be too late when considering the time line of construction at Chateau-sur-Mer. The \textit{New York Times’}
Newport correspondent made specific mention of the Viennese exhibition, noting that many regular Newport residents would be attending the exhibition and therefore, the summer season at the resort would be sparsely populated. The Wetmores were on the Continent at the time of the exposition, just after the birth of their second child.\textsuperscript{48} Another distinct possibility is that Richard Morris Hunt was solely responsible for the introduction of Frullini’s Neo-Renaissance interiors for Chateau-sur-Mer.\textsuperscript{49} Whether or not two men had recently worked together at Henry Marquand's Newport residence, Linden Gate, Hunt would absolutely have known of Frullini from the international exhibitions.

**FRULLINI COMES INTO HIS OWN**

Modern historians have criticized the Victorian penchant for historicism, arguing that decorating different rooms according to different historical styles removed any sense of authenticity from the home. To be sure, historical inaccuracies in the designs of some Victorian firms led to gross errors, and transformed some homes into unsettling anachronistic muddles. While, Luigi Frullini created thematic room designs, his mastery of woodcarving and whimsical originality have largely spared his work from the modern critics. What Frullini sought to achieve in his carving was a sense of genuineness, be it in his use of naturalism or his application of Renaissance sources. He also sought to bring together the antique and the modern in an expression of identity. His intent was to reclaim Florence’s position as artistic center during a period when Florence was the political center of the newly formed Italian state.

\textsuperscript{48} Collins, 23. Maude Alice Keteltas was born in Paris in February of 1873.

\textsuperscript{49} Baker, 241.
Frullini was born in 1837 in Florence, Italy.\(^{50}\) The son of a wood carver, the Frullini exhibited a natural talent for carving at a young age. He attended the *Accademia dei Belli Arti* in Florence where he studied ornamental design and decoration as well as painting, sculpture, and architecture.\(^ {51}\) Although he was a trained sculptor following in the traditions of the Old Masters, he applied classical techniques to wood instead of marble. He made a study of the works of Florence’s master sculptors: Giambologna, Cellini, Michelangelo, Ghiberti, Donatello, Maiano, and others. No doubt, painting also served as inspiration, particularly the frescoes of Domenichino Ghirlandaio in Santa Maria Novella, the works of Raphael, and the works of Andrea del Sarto. He saw many of these works first hand in various public collections and churches in Florence and throughout Italy.\(^{52}\)

Shortly after his father’s death in 1856, Frullini began his apprenticeship in the Angiolo Barbetti workshop in Florence.\(^ {53}\) His experience there would be extremely important to the future development of his own *atelier*. Barbetti’s workshop was one of the most successful in Siena and

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\(^{50}\) There is a discrepancy in the literature related to this artist’s birth date. Simone Chiarugi, author of *Botteghe di Mobilieri in Toscana*, cites a birth date of 1837 while Claudio Paolini, Florentine scholar and author, cites a birth date of March 25, 1839 in his article “Luigi Frullini Intagliatore” *MCM*, no. 7, (September 1988), 19-23.

\(^{51}\) Chiarugi, *Botteghe di Mobilieri in Toscana*, v. II, Firenze: SPES, 1994, 474. Frullini’s first exhibited works, two bas-relief in gesso, were amongst those exhibited by the Accademia in 1854, when he was only fifteen years old. Paolini, “Luigi Frullini Intagliatore”, 20.

\(^{52}\) Florence, Italy was unique in its accessibility of its private collections. The 1737 *Patto di Famiglia* of Anna Ludovica de’ Medici provided that all the assets and effects of the Medici — furniture, fine arts, libraries, and religious artifacts — be bequeathed to the city for its ornamentation and the use of its citizens and visitors. For more information on the subject, see Cristina DeBenedictus, *Per la Storia del Collezionismo Italiano*, Firenze: Ponte alle Grazie, 1995. So too, the Bargello Museum, when it opened in 1865 would have been a place of great interest and inspiration to the young artist.

\(^{53}\) Some sources, especially contemporary ones, refer to the eldest Barbetti as Angelo, not Angiolo. This is true of a signed frame in the collection of the National Gallery London, see Nicholas Penny, “The study and Imitation of Old Picture Frames, *The Burlington Magazine*, v. 140, no. 1143 (June 1998), 377 and DeGubernatis’ *Dizionario degli Artisti Italiani Viventi: Pittori, Scultori ed Architetti* of 1892.
Florence, providing interiors for some of the richest clients in Europe. Frullini would emulate the Barbetti model by securing influential foreign clients and executing single pieces of furniture along with complete decorative schemes. Furthermore, during his term with the Barbettis, Frullini learned the importance of the international exhibitions. The Barbetti carvers had been extremely successful at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, winning two medals for furniture and sculpture on a small scale.

Luigi Frullini’s first major exhibition took place in 1861 at the *Esposizione Italiana* in Florence. At the time, Florence was capital of Italy and the pride of the nation was apparent in its civic reconstruction programs and campaigns. It is here that we see Frullini first expressing his patriotism as well as his art. His submission to the exposition consisted of two bas-reliefs in pear and tulip wood, the subjects of which were taken from two contemporary paintings depicting episodes from Florentine history: The Pazzi Conspiracy and the Meeting of Pier Capponi and the King Charles VIII of France. Interestingly, according to the official catalog, his fellow carvers

54 DeGubernatis, *Dizionario degli Artisti Italiani Viventi: Pittori, Scultori ed Architetti*, 1892, 33-34. According to DeGubernatis, the Barbetti workshop provided commissions for Anatole Demidoff and other Russians, the Rothschilds, and other wealthy Europeans. This is confirmed by Claudio Paolini’s article entitled, “Angiolo Barbetti ‘Arredatore’”, MCM (September 1985), 46-50.


56 Pier Capponi was an able statesman originally in the Medici regime. After the expulsion of the powerful family, Capponi became chief of the Florentine Republic. The second bas-relief depicted the Pazzi conspiracy, the attempt in 1478 to assassinate brothers, Giuliano and Lorenzo de Medici. The episode of the Pazzi Conspiracy was likely taken from a painting by Cesare Mussini that was completed in 1861 for apartments in the Palazzo Pitti. Chiarugi, *Botteghe*, 474.

Depending on the configuration of the design, this medallion may exalt the attempts of the conspirators against a corrupt oligarchy or display the triumph of Lorenzo over his treacherous competitors. Regardless, both communicate
preferred religious subject matter or copies after the antique.\textsuperscript{57} No doubt, Frullini’s choice of subject, in addition to the skill of his carving, caught the eye of the judges and resulted in a medal.\textsuperscript{58}

After five years in the Barbetti workshop and his successful showing at the Italian national exposition, Frullini set out on his own, establishing a workshop where he took on commissions from private collectors as well as dealers like William Blundell Spence and Frederick Stibbert.\textsuperscript{59} The workshop, located in via Santa Caterina, was small, consisting of ten workers, five gilders and fifteen or so joiners and cabinetmakers.\textsuperscript{60} The workshop took on various commissions, primarily smaller works of art at the beginning: bas-reliefs, jewel boxes, inkwells, frames for Old Master paintings, \textit{cassone}, and so forth. Many of these commissions came to Frullini via ex-patriot collectors and art dealers like William Blundell Spence.

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\textsuperscript{57} Chiarugi, \textit{Botteghe}, 475.

\textsuperscript{58} Chiarugi, \textit{Botteghe}, 475.

\textsuperscript{59} ibid.; Fleming, “Risorgimento III”, 571 and 575; and Callmann, 340. See also Claudio Paolini, “‘Stile’ per Frederick Stibbert”, \textit{MCM}, no. 4, (March 1987), 42-43.

\textsuperscript{60} Paolini, “Luigi Frullini Intagliatore”, 20.
Understanding the importance of the international stage, Frullini participated frequently in juried exhibitions. As Rosanna Pavoni puts it poignantly in her introduction to *Reviving the Renaissance*, the exhibitions were essentially a “shop window” for Italian craftsmanship. In his first solo showing at the 1862 London exhibition, Frullini showed the same bas-reliefs exhibited the year prior in Florence. He also entered small works, such as whimsically carved animal heads for use on consoles, a small box carved with amorini, a walnut and tulip wood portrait of Vittorio Emmanuelle II, and confirming his study of the antique, a walnut copy of Giambologna’s so-called *Diavolino*. According to the jury’s report, he also submitted a “walnut wood escritoire, in the style of the 14th century”. His pieces were praised and received attention in *Building News*, which reported “the wood carvings of M. Frullini are rather works of fine art than of industry—his small

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61 Pavoni, 10.

62 Chiarugi, *Botteghe*, 474-5. The Diavolino might have been shown amongst other Giambologna bronzes at the Bargello, which was in the process of becoming Florence’s version of the South Kensington Museum or France’s *Musee des Arts Decoratifs* in the 1860s. The sculpture is now in the collection of the Museo Stefano Bardini, Florence. It was originally located on the facade of the Palazzo Vecchietti in Florence. Courtesy of the Museum Stefano Bardini website: http://www.rinascimento.it/museobardini/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49&Itemid=69

bas-reliefs are very remarkably executed and are distinguished equally for excellence of work, marked elegance of design, and correctness of drawing.\textsuperscript{64} The works sold immediately after the exhibition.\textsuperscript{65}

Frullini's success marked the beginning of a long and flourishing exhibition career. After the sale of his works in London, Frullini continued to garner favor with foreign collectors. He exhibited frequently, described often as a “sculptor” or “sculptor in wood”. In Dublin in 1865, he was awarded a medal “for [a] carved walnut wood chest ornamented with infants and group representing a boar hunt—cinque cento stile—[and] two ornamental gilt consoles, modern style.”\textsuperscript{66}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig10}
\caption{TWO PANELS OF CARVED CHERUBS BY LUIGI FRULLINI, PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ALINARI ARCHIVES.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{64} The Building News, London, vol. 9, (November 7, 1862), 360.
\textsuperscript{65} Chiarugi, Botteghe, 475.
\textsuperscript{66} --, Dublin International Exhibition Kingdom of Italy Official Catalogue, 2nd edition, Turin: Royal Italian Commission, 1865, 4.
Both examples were described as “original designs”. In Paris in 1867, specifically two reporters to the British commission, John Pollen and Matthew Digby Wyatt, mention Frullini. Pollen wrote in his report of “Fancy Furniture” that “Frullini...besides portrait bas-reliefs exhibits carved furniture or pieces of furniture in soft woods full of grace and delicacy.” Wyatt, in his report on “Decorative Work”, noted that:

“[a]mongst the 'frames' there is a general average excellence in the production of gilt frames amongst the leading nations of Europe...Italy had it, I consider, 'all her own way'. The frame carved in walnut wood from designs by Giusti, of Sienna, and some smaller specimens by Frullini and others were admirable, and in all respects constituted commendable works of art.”

It was reported that Frullini's works sold completely and quickly. Among the buyers was the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), which acquired one of the exhibited items, a portrait medallion of Princess Maria Pia. In Vienna in 1873, Frullini received his highest

67 ibid.
70 --, List of the Objects Obtained During the Paris Exhibition of 1867 by Gift, Loan, or Purchase, Now Exhibited in the South Kensington Museum, London: HMSO, 1868, 23, under Purchases: “Portrait of the Princess Maria Pia. In carved boxwood. L 8 in.; W. 71/4 in. Bought of L. Frullini, Italian Department, price 300 francs (290.)” In today’s dollars, the object cost a little over 100 dollars. Interestingly, there were very few purchases of Italian works in comparison with those purchased of France and Japan and other countries, thus adding to the weight of the recognition of the young master as a worthy investment. This panel remains in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, acc. no. 807-1869.
achievement, the gold medal for his exhibition of carved frames, panels, furniture, a mantelpiece, and the display case for the Italian State.\textsuperscript{71}

FIGURE 11: CARVED PANEL TITLED "ALLEGORY OF SPRING" BY LUIGI FRULLINI. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ALINARI ARCHIVES.

As reported by N. M. Lowe:

Italy excelled in [wood carving], as in many other departments of art. Luigi Frullini of Florence and Cav Gio Bat Gatti of Rome received the highest award for their exhibited works. The exhibits of these manufacturers were the most beautiful of their kind; the


Frullini won medals at nearly all of the exhibitions with his medal in Vienna being the top prize. He also received two state honors: Cavaliere della Corona from Italy and the Legion d'Honneur from France. In several accounts of the craftsman, it is reported he won the Legion d'Honneur. Billungs and DeGubernatis as well as several posthumous biographies report this. In the article, "Groups of Children" in Paul N. Hasluck, ed. \textit{Manual of Traditional Wood Carving}, New York: Dover Publications, 1977, reprint of Cassell's \textit{Wood Carving}, London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1911, 10-11 and 15-16, the author mentions that Frullini won the title in Paris in the year that he exhibited \textit{Dance of the Hours}, which, according to exhibition guides, Frullini exhibited in Dublin in 1865. In volume XXII of \textit{Magazine of Art} in 1898, Miss Helen Zimmern also confirms Frullini received the title in Paris, but not as specifically in the year \textit{Dance of the Hours} was exhibited. Thus, since the artist was known to exhibit works more than once, it is assumed he won the Legion D'Honneur in 1867.
scenes and figures represented were of the highest style of art. An Italian pear wood tablet representing “Spring” was bought for the Museum of Edinburgh, Scotland for 5,000 francs.\(^{72}\)

After the successes of the 1860s and early 1870s, Luigi Frullini’s workshop grew to include around forty dependents in order to accommodate the flood of new commissions.\(^{73}\) Besides the two rooms for Chateau-sur-Mer and the Drake commission, Frullini provided objects and furnishings for a variety of clients, including a lamp for the Borghese palace in Rome, various works for the daughter of Queen Victoria,\(^{74}\) a medallion portrait of the late Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna of Russia,\(^{75}\) a garniture for the Rothschild family,\(^{76}\) an extensive suite of furnishings for the apartments of the


\(^{73}\) Chiarugi, 475.

\(^{74}\) Ibid. According to Tito’s review of Frullini’s work in April 1873, one commission by the daughter of Victoria was a “colors box”, presumably a small box for watercolors. Tito, “Intaglio: Esposizione di Luigi Frullini”, \textit{Il Giornale Artistico}, anno 1, no. 3, (April 1873), 21. The on-line Catalogue of Royal Collections does not list any works by Frullini. It is uncertain which daughter of Victoria commissioned the works. However, a search of the royal collections inventory reveals that the Princess Royal, Victoria (1840–1901), was an accomplished artist. Only one other daughter, Princess Louise (1848–1939), is listed as the artist of an object in the Royal Collections inventory.

\(^{75}\) Chiarugi, 475 and Tito, “Francesco Morini” \textit{Giornale Artistico}, anno 1, no. 5, (May 1, 1873), 37. The art critic Tito, the pseudonym used by Enrico Cecioni, was constantly berating wood sculptors like Frullini for perverting the antique and for the nonsensical use of design and form in furniture, discussed further below. In an article on the subject of Francesco Morini however, he makes particular mention of the portrait as being very well done:

...trovai che oltre ad essere studiato con amore e diligenza, v’era una certa morbidezza nelle carni, e leghierezza di pieghe da renderlo piacevole a chiunque lo esaminasse./I found that other than being studied with love and diligence, there was a true softness in the flesh, and lightness in the folds to render it pleasing to anyone who examined it.”

Herman Billungs also discusses this particular portrait and it would appear according to his translation the portrait is of the “late Grand Duchess Helen of St. Petersburg” not the “daughter of” as reported by several other historians. Therefore, the portrait was of Princess Charlotte of Württemberg (1807 – 1873) who also held the title Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna of Russia. See Hermann Billungs, “La Sculpture sur Bois a Florence”, \textit{Arts Decoratifs}, 1881-1882, 147.

\(^{76}\) Billungs, 147.
Ginori Family in Florence,\textsuperscript{77} and a bedroom suite and other furnishings for English ex-patriot John Temple Leader's Fiesole estate Castello Vincigliata.\textsuperscript{78} These prestigious commissions enhanced the carver’s reputation, but the Wetmore commission was by far his largest. Thanks to his experience with the Barbetti workshop, Frullini was able to complete larger scale interiors including ceilings, parquet floors, leather wall hangings, and decorative paintings for overdoors and ceilings just as the Sienese masters did.\textsuperscript{79} Frullini was not intellectually encumbered by his apprenticeship. Rather, his operation was heavily influenced by the Renaissance workshop, for example, where he crafted his own tools and worked from pattern books. Barbetti was known to use steam power in his workshop, but is unclear if Frullini also employed the technology.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{77} Frullini provided furnishings for the Palazzo Ginori on at least two occasions. In 1874 he provided furniture and interior fittings for the dining room and in 1875 he provided bedroom furniture for the Marchese Ginori including a large bed, cupboard, priedieu, mirror and toilet table. Leonardo Ginori Lisci, “The Nineteenth Century in a Sixteenth Century Florentine Palace”, Apollo, vol. 117, no. 255, (May 1983), 392 and 394.

\textsuperscript{78} For Temple Leader, Frullini supplied a toilet table and mirror, bedstead, and two carved priedieu, all for the bedchamber. Leader Scott, Vincigliata and Maiano, Florence G. Barberi, 1891, 103 and 104. It is interesting to note that the descriptions of the bedchamber furniture for the above and that supplied to the Ginori family in 1875 are similar. It is unclear however who preceded whom.

John Temple Leader and William Richard Drake were friends, as evidenced by a 1872 letter from Drake to Spence regarding the commission of a carved stand for a cassone where Drake references having seen one at John Temple Leader’s house, presumably Vincigliata. Noted in Fleming, “Art Dealing and the Risorgimento III”, 571.

\textsuperscript{79} Paolini, “Angiolo Barbetti”, 46.

\textsuperscript{80} ibid.
By the end of the 1870s, however, critics expressed disenchantment with Italian woodcarving. At the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, the judges deeming the collective group as “curiosities rather than works of art” roundly criticized Italian sculpture. While as a group the submissions by Italy were considered “frivolous and unimpressive”, the judges report singled out Frullini’s work as “exhibiting great beauty of design and very subtile (sic) skill in execution.” No other Italian wood sculptor was mentioned in the judges’ report. Two years later, at the 1878 Exhibition Universelles in Paris, the Belgian reviewer concluded that Italy failed to recapture the brilliance of industrial arts in the Renaissance, and that the Italian artisans lacked artistic direction. He stated that the furniture presented by Italy was ill designed, although he conceded that Frullini’s

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82 ibid.
carved panels were “masterpieces.” The Belgian reporter went on to criticize the master carver in his execution of furniture, in particular the dimensions and heaviness of the forms.\textsuperscript{83}

Despite these critiques, the Renaissance Revival style remained popular in decorating manuals like von Falke's \textit{Art in the House}, which was translated for the American market in 1879. Von Falke appears to have been familiar with the rising criticism, and warned designers against overwrought ornamentation. It was likewise reported that Frullini’s carvings exhibited in 1878 “attracted much attention...and [were] sold very early in the season”.\textsuperscript{84} But he also concluded that the Renaissance style remained particularly well suited for furniture.\textsuperscript{85} This advice resonated with American consumers, who continued to regard the opulent furnishings as ideal vehicles for the communication of their social status.\textsuperscript{86}

\textbf{NATIONALISM AND THE RENAISSANCE REVIVAL}


“A l’exemple des principales nations européennes, l’Italie cherche aussi à faire refleurir les arts industriels. Elle est cependant encore bien éloignée de ces brillantes traditions de la Renaissance. Cela se voit surtout dans le mobilier en bois sculpté, avec mosaïques ou incrustations, qui la plupart du temps est maigre et maniére et où l’on ne sait pas mettre de mesure dans l’ornementation. Le manque d’une bonne direction artistique y est évidente Certes, comme exécution, comme détails de sculpture sur bois, il y’a là des morceaux qui témoignent d’une habileté consommée et sous ce rapport il y’a deux panneaux isolés de Frullini, de Florence qui sont des chefs d’œuvre et que le musée de Kensington s’est empressé d’acheter. Mais, pour la perfection d’un meuble, il faut plus que cette habileté de détail, et la preuve la plus frappante en étaient les meubles exposés par ce même Frullini. L’ornementation pleine de brio manque de mesure, et l’ensemble est mal compris.”


\textsuperscript{86} Paolini, “American Renaissance”, 27.
Americans used Neo-Renaissance design as vehicle to show off their newfound wealth and status. Italians had much more ambitious goals, preferring the Rococo Revival style for their homes. They sought to export the Renaissance Revival style throughout Europe and the United States in order to promote Italy's development and national identity.\footnote{Pavoni, 2.} American architects sought to reinterpret the Renaissance; Italians wanted to use it to reclaim their position as a cultural and artistic mecca.

Not all Italians agreed that revising the Renaissance was the path to national glory, however. In fact, a great debate had been taking place on the issue throughout the 1860s and 1870s. On one hand, the rise in popularity of the Renaissance Revival style signified a renewal of the Italian national spirit, or Italianita. It was held up as a national style, even by political and philosophical figures like Carlo Cattaneo, who first expressed the idea of “il bello trovato” or beauty discovered. Cattaneo believed the Renaissance forms and their reuse in the decorative arts expressed the political and cultural identity of the consolidated Italian city-states and served well as a “unifying principle of the Risorgimento.”\footnote{Zanni, 134. For his complete discussion of beauty in the arts, see Carlo Cattaneo, \textit{Alcuni scritti}, vol. 1. Milano: Borroni e Scotti, 1846, 104-114.} “When Florence became the capital city of Italy in 1865,” Annalisa Zanni writes, “the Neo-Renaissance joined and harmoniously blended with the Risorgimento, exactly where it had been born and reached its summit of achievement, namely Tuscany.”\footnote{Zanni, 142.} Moreover, Conte Demetrio Carlo Finocchietti, a municipal servant for the new government—and supporter of wood carving and Frullini in particular—not only saw the
Renaissance as a unifying style but viewed wood carving in particular as “arte italiana”, the quintessentially Italian art. After all, woodcarving and furniture production was one of the most prosperous fields in Italy and figured heavily in the nation’s economic success. Very few of Frullini’s works actually remained in Italy; the important point for nationalists was to export Italian culture to America and the rest of Europe. Art critic Marco Viscola believed that any Italian, just by crossing the very threshold of Frullini’s workshop, swelled with a sense of national pride. Luigi Frullini provided a celebrity role on the international art stage and was became a face for the Italian political cause. Confirming his role as patriot, King Vittorio Emmanuelle II knighted Frullini in 1870 as Cavaliere dell'Ordine della Corona d'Italia, an honor given to those Italians and foreigners who advanced the Italian national cause.

The importance of Frullini's work was a matter of Italian patrimony throughout his career. He exhibited at the national exhibitions in Turin in 1880 and 1884 where he received accolades from reporters. “Frullini is supreme. Whatever thing this man models he achieves a fineness and a most scholarly grace. One rests for hours to contemplate his ferns, his convolvulus, his goldfinches,

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90 Finocchietti authored two books regarding the applied arts including the one cited here and served as a juror for at least two of the international exhibitions: Paris in 1867 and Vienna in 1873. Demetrio Carlo Finocchietti, Della scultura e tarsia in legno dagli antichi tempi ad oggi: notizie storico-monografiche. Firenze: G. Barbèra, 1873, 2.


92 Marco Viscola, “Scultura e Mobili in Legno, Piazza S. Caterina, n. 8,” Firenze Artistica, a. 1 no. 19, (1 April 1873), 4 as quoted in Chiarugi, 476.

and all the infinite varieties in the world of vegetation and animals. There also appears to have been a movement to document the craftsman's work. The Alinari Brothers, a photography firm, documented several examples of Frullini's work—including the furnishings for Wetmore's Chateau-sur-Mer and Temple-Leader's Vincigliata. It is interesting to note that the firm, which was primarily engaged in photographing monuments and cultural heritage, documented examples Italy's contemporary industry as well as its historical legacy.

On the other hand, some critics saw the reliance on Renaissance forms as displaying a lack of originality. The most vocal of these critics was Enrico Cecioni, known to the readers of the Italian periodical Giornale Artistico as “Tito” and as the brother of the journal's editor, the contemporary artist and writer Adriano Cecioni. In 1873 and 1874, Tito reported on the various exhibitions of Florence's most famous “sculptors in wood”: Rinaldo Barbetti, Francesco Moroni, and Frullini. His opinions were strong, and while he had some regard for the eldest son of Angiolo Barbetti, he had little love for Luigi Frullini. Tito visited and reviewed the work of Frullini in April of 1873 and again in July of 1874, after the craftsman had won the diploma d'onore at the Viennese international exhibition. The first review was scathing. Tito lamented the general lack of an original style for the age and the redundant and inauthentic repetition of the Cinquecento style by all carvers of the period. Though he admitted that the works of Frullini “sparkle of a beautiful execution” and offered

\begin{itemize}
\item The Alinari firm also photographed work by Frullini's contemporaries such as Egisto Gaiani—in some cases mixing up the two carvers. Examples include negatives 14456 and 14458 both on the appendix of the Alinari Catalogue for 1881 of a “Libreria” and a “Letto (una spalliera)” both are incorrectly attributed to Gaiani.
\end{itemize}
a comparison to the seventeenth-century Venetian master carver Andrea Brustolon, Tito remained dissatisfied with the overall lack of artistic concept in Frullini's works. Like other reviewers, he described Frullini's furniture as clumsy and heavy. He argued that the use of symbols and decorative elements from the past were misapplied, citing the example of a library chair decorated with small portrait medallions of Michelangelo, Raphael, Dante, and other illustrious men encircling a carved bas-relief of Raphael's *Madonna della Seggiola*. Tito asserted that the decoration of the chair was not suited for a library, but rather for an archbishop and that portrait elements, especially those of Dante and Michelangelo, had become repetitive in Frullini's work. Viewing the use of mythical animals as vulgar, Tito urged Frullini to turn to nature—especially given the advent of the “historical museum”, where one might find any number of “strange” animals. He continued to lambast the carver’s lack of respect for the truth and described Frullini's carving as overwrought, flaccid, and sluggish.96 In the second review, over a year later and after Frullini's successful showing at the international exhibition in Vienna, Tito made clear that he held wood-carvers to the same standards as other artists. He continued to advocate that all artists must contemplate more and in particular study from nature directly instead of “thoughtlessly” copying from the antique.97 His criticisms stemmed from his own aesthetic philosophy, related to the Macciaoli movement in Italy,

a school that revolted against the academic style and was a proto-Impressionist movement interested in painting directly from nature.\textsuperscript{98}

Demetrio Finocchietti's opinion of wood sculpture was dramatically different from Tito's view. In his popular manual and history of wood carving, published the same year as the Tito's first review of Frullini, Finocchietti wrote: "It is therefore better to know how to imitate works of our great masters well [than to] recklessly waste one's talent on works of invention."\textsuperscript{99} These opposing views were aired in the artistic journals, providing a critical background for the open debate over the use of art in the service of nationalism.

Notwithstanding Tito's criticism, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a palpable shift from pattern books depicting a variety of styles to a concentrated attention and elevation of the Renaissance Revival style and the craft of the bottega.\textsuperscript{100} A large number of artistic journals explored the Renaissance in Italy, including Poesia dell'Artigiano, L'Italia, Nuova Anthologia, and Arte Italiana Decorativa e Industriale. Guida per le Arti e Mestieri, which started in 1869 but was re-published as a new series in 1872, dedicated four issues of its 1872 volume specifically to the ornamentation of Renaissance Italy. These journals focused on the works of the great masters with specific focus on the decorative arts, like Ghiberti's moldings and festoons on the Baptisry doors, Brunelleschi's coffered ceiling in Santa Maria del Fiore and Raphael's grotesques

\textsuperscript{99} Finocchietti, 214 and Pavoni, 7.
\textsuperscript{100} Selvafolta, 20-21.
and arabesques at the Villa Madama and the Vatican. Books soon appeared as well, notably DeCesare's *Dello Stile Architettonico Própio Italiano* in 1883.

![Figure 13: Luigi Frullini, Carved Inkstand in Jujube and Ebony, C.1868. Photo courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.](image)

In addition to discussing the antique, many journals reported on the work of contemporary artists working in the Renaissance Revival style. The journals compared authentic Renaissance objects with those contemporary objects produced by the nation's leading craftsmen. One example in *Ricordi di Architettura* compared a mantle piece by Frullini with Renaissance examples in the Palazzo Strozzi and the Ducal Palace of Urbino. Other journals published news related to large commissions or the international exhibitions and the progress of the Italian craftsmen on the international stage. *L'Arte in Italia* published illustrations of the carved bellows and the ebony and jujube inkstand (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum), which Frullini sent to three international exhibitions: London (1862) and Paris (1867 and 1878). In 1885, *L'Italia* published a free phototype, or printed photograph, of a Frullini candelabra to subscribers. The candelabrum had been exhibited in London, Paris, Vienna, and Philadelphia and was to be donated to the Museo Artistico Industriale

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101 Selvafolta, 22.
102 Selvafolta, 30.
in Rome by the artist. And in 1890, *Ricordi di Architettura* published photographs of a mantelpiece by Frullini described as being “executed for a salon in New York”, presumably the mantelpiece destined for Anson Phelps Stoke's Madison Avenue home. While most of these journals began by examining contemporary works in a critical sense or discussing Renaissance sources in a didactic manner, by the late 1880s most journals had moved toward illustrations and reports rather than criticism.¹⁰³

FIGURE 14: 'CHIMNEYPIECE CARVED IN WOOD BY LUIGI FRULLINI FOR A DININGROOM IN NEW YORK', IN RICORDI DI ARCHITETTURA, SERIES II, VOL. 1, 1890, PLATE 35, SOCIETA DI ARCHITETTI, FLORENCE, REPRINTED BY ORNELLA SELVAFOLTA IN REVIVING THE RENAISSANCE.

Tito appears to have been an outlier in his harsh treatment of Frullini, given the favorable accounts in these journals. Indeed, the voluminous praise suggests that for many observers, the carver was a “national treasure”. Nevertheless, it also appears that Frullini took Tito's criticisms to heart and evidence of this is present in the rooms at Chateau-sur-Mer. In the 1874 review, for

¹⁰³ Selvafolta, 40-43.
example, Tito referred to dining room and library furniture in the artist's workshop. One
description in particular most certainly referred to the Wetmore library. Tito describes:

One bas-relief, carved in the small door of a desk-bookcase, depicts the interior of a library
with a quantity of bookshelves filled with books and placed in perspective with well-done
illusion: in the middle of the vast room a seated figure near a table, and here and there a
hall chair. In the room, the viewer's eye moves well, and if Frullini had not taken such a high
point of view, he would have obtained an even better illusion.  

This description perfectly matches the design of the fall front desk in the library at Chateau-sur-
Mer. Here, Frullini chose a theme, inspired by the many examples of trompe l'oeil and bas-relief
carvings of the Renaissance, fitting for use in a library. Looking at other elements in the library, the
pilasters and friezes of the wall coverings and the bookcases conform to Tito's idea of looking
authentically at nature, while the incorporation of the fantastic bat-winged lion masks in the
mantelpiece and allusions to illustrious figures like Dante, appear to be hold-overs from his early
work. The dining room however, falls into the “early work” category of Frullini's portfolio. The
oversized mantle and sideboard, with their lumbering forms and inconsistent themes, suggest that
the room was completed before the library and perhaps even before the first of Tito's reviews.  


“Un bassorilievo, intagliato in uno sportello d'una libreria, rappresentante l'interno d'une biblioteca, con una
quantità di scaffali pieni di libri messi tutti in prospettiva con buona illusione: nel mezzo della vasta sala una
figura seduta vicino ad una tavola, più in la uno sgabello. Nell'ambiente l'occhio dell'osservatore ci spazia bene
e se il punto di vista il Frullini non lo avesse tenuto tanto alto ne avrebbe in quel bassorilievo ottenuta una
illusione anche migliore.”

105 This would also fit into the timeline provided by the New York Times reports discussed earlier in this paper.
Tito's influence on Frullini's work appears elsewhere. In one review of Frullini's career, written shortly after his death, the artist is said to have been so observant of nature that he carved from real life exclusively. So attentive to the natural world, the author reported, Frullini would only compose a design that included various flowers in bloom, so long as they also did so in nature.\textsuperscript{106} As his career came to a close, Frullini increasingly turned towards nature. On his country estate he cultivated to his own grapevines,\textsuperscript{107} often sculpting the various species in wood. Examples of these studies can be seen in several books published by the artist in the 1890s, including an undated Italian publication titled \textit{Scultora Ornementale},\textsuperscript{108} and one published for the American market, \textit{A Collection of Ornamental Carvings from Nature}, published in Boston in 1896.

\textsuperscript{106} Miss Helen Zimmern, “On Luigi Frullini”, \textit{Magazine of Art}, XXII, Mar 1898, 276-279.

\textsuperscript{107} DeGubernatis, 210.

\textsuperscript{108} In this particular publication, many of the naturalistic panels are noted as having been taken directly from life. Of those depicting grapes, many times the variety of grape is noted.
Despite his importance to Italian nationalists, Frullini garnered the most praise from those who were physically engaged in the industrial arts. His work was illustrated in the periodical *Industrial Arts* and *Knight's New Mechanical Dictionary*. Frullini’s book, *Ornamental Carvings from Nature*, was considered an important reference book and could not be taken out of the library by Industrial Arts students. Trade publications like the *Furniture Gazette* lauded the Florentine carvers, including Frullini, as late as 1889, noting their “delicacy of feeling and accuracy of design”

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and concluding that the “workmanship is...suited to modern requirements”.\textsuperscript{112} Meanwhile, museums continued to acquire his work from the exhibitions. In 1878, the South Kensington Museum purchased two pilaster panels from the artist, providing more evidence of Frullini’s preeminent carving skill.\textsuperscript{113} Isaac Edwards Clarke, an education official for the United States government, reported on Frullini’s work after a visit to the Drexel Institute of Art, Science, and Industry in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1892:

Some very beautiful examples of both mediaeval [sic] and modern art work, which had just been received from Europe and were not yet placed in the cases were shown me by the President...with these, also, were shown three or four pieces of modern Italian wood carving by the artist Frullini, as if in proof that the gift of artistic genius, and the mastery of art technique, have in no wise departed from that glowing land where mediaeval [sic] art first woke to life at sight of the long buried and forgotten glories of the Greeks. These examples of wood carving--some of which are graceful designs of plant forms, flowers and ferns, very realistic and in low relief; while others are groups of charming child cherubs, full of poetry and in very high relief--are marvellous [sic] in their qualities of technical skill and poetic treatment; combining in grace, freedom, and vigor, the arts of Painter and Sculptor. These sculptured groups, whose airy lightness recalls the ethereal grace of the cherub groups of Correggio and Raphael, seem almost the very apotheosis of the skill of the wood carver, whose work has, heretofore commonly been reckoned rather as a craft than an art.\textsuperscript{114}

Bequests of the carvers work appeared in museums throughout his career and into the twentieth century. Frullini’s work was regularly exhibited at museums and galleries as an example of

\textsuperscript{112} -, “Cabinet-making and Wood-carving in Italy”, \textit{Furniture Gazette}, no. 677 vol. XXVII, (November 1889), 333-334.

\textsuperscript{113} Victoria and Albert Museum, acc. nos. 691-1878 and 690-1878. According to the collection notes the latter was “purchased for £47 9s 9d” in 1878. That would be the equivalent of £2,294.12 today, courtesy of the National Archives currency converter, available on-line at: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/default0.asp#mid.

European virtuosity in carving. Furniture and carved panels appeared consistently at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1879, 1882, 1883, 1887, and 1888. These works were often displayed with antique or Renaissance examples, further connecting Frullini to the carvers of the past.

In 1887, the Ohio millionaire John W. Bookwalter arranged for over 4,000 works from his collection to be held on permanent loan to the Cincinnati Art Museum. Of the 4,000 objects, ten items of furniture by Frullini were amongst them. The exhibition of the collection opened in 1893 with a complete catalog of the works exhibited. Another similar donation took place in 1911, to the Philadelphia Museum of Art from the estate of Francis T. Sully Darley, which included several examples of European decorative arts, antique and modern, including “…two carved wood chairs, by Frulini [sic] of Florence”.


117 Cincinnati Museum Association, Catalogue of Objects Loaned by Mr. John W. Bookwalter to the Cincinnati Museum Association. Cincinnati: C.F. Bradley Co, 1893, 85-86. The author extends many thanks to Amy Miller Dehan for investigating whether or not any of the Frullini furniture from the Bookwalter bequest still exists in the museum’s collection. Sadly, it was not part of the final bequest in 1919.

Critics often compared Frullini to Old Master sculptors, not the least because he adopted their carving methods. Like Michelangelo, it was said he did not sketch out his sculptures, and like the Renaissance workshop, he forged his own tools that were designed for a specific purpose in carving.\footnote{Zimmern, 276-279.} That is not to say his methods were entirely archaic. While there is no evidence that he utilized steam power like the Barbettis, Frullini did maintain a large inventory of work. As Paolini points out in his article, “Luigi Frullini 'Intagliatore’”, the carver had stocks of panels ready-made to be attached to the skeleton of the commissioned object, be it a credenza, bookcase, or cabinet, with no regard for the object's use.\footnote{Paolini, “Luigi Frullini 'Intagliatore’”, 21.} This method of furniture production using stock panels is confirmed by primary source material. A letter from Frullini to Allan Marquand (son of Henry G. Marquand, owner of Linden Gate) illustrates the artist's relationship with clients.\footnote{Allan Marquand Papers, 1858-1951 (bulk 1878-1950): C0269, Frullini, Luigi, 1894, Box 13, Folder 31, Princeton University. A transcript of this letter follows in the Appendix. I am very grateful to the staff of Princeton University for assisting me with obtaining the content of this letter, in particular Ben Primer, Charles Greene, and the Photoduplication Section.} It was both personal and industrial. Describing a suite of furniture, two of the items, both panels, are identified by model or inventory numbers. Specifically, Frullini refers to a panel with “three figures and Christ, etc” as “number 10293”, which is identified in a photograph presumably sent to the artist by the patron. This suggests that Frullini may have had a catalog or that the work might have been reproduced in a magazine or journal.

While his admirers claimed that Frullini did not draw before setting his chisel to the wood, it is possible he used photographs to assist him in the workshop, a routine practice among craftsmen.
For example, an Alinari photograph of a detail from a chimneypiece in the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino was overlaid with grid lines to enable artists to reproduce the decoration. Nevertheless, the carved panels were probably part of an existing inventory in his Santa Caterina workshop. Moreover, the particular panel mentioned in the letter to Marquand, was more costly than the panel originally chosen by the patron because it included carved figures. It is also interesting to note that the artist offered the patron a choice of woods (at varying prices) including oak, walnut, or mahogany, indicating a willingness to tailor the commission to the patron’s aesthetic or financial needs. Frullini, was instrumental in the founding of a cooperative industrial establishment which fixed prices based on composition and content. The decision to offer fixed prices based on content and material is another take-away from Tito's criticisms.

Furthermore, Frullini was active civically in the formation of a school for woodcarvers and cabinet-makers as well as cultural and business groups. Now known as the *Istituto Statale d’Arte*, Luigi Frullini and several other carvers including Gaiani started the *Scuola di intagliatori in legno, Ebanisti e Legnaiuoli* in 1869, where he also taught. In 1880, the school broadened its curriculum and student body to include the decorative arts in general and was renamed the *Scuola professionale di Arti Decorative e Industriali*. In his lifetime he served as Vice Presidente del

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122 Mauro Cozzi and Luigi Zangheri, “Architecture, Ornament, the Neo-Renaissance, and Photography”, in *Reviving the Renaissance*, 118-119.
125 Istituto Statale website: http://www.isa.firenze.it/storia
Circolo degli Artisti di Firenze, Camera di Commercio, Vice Presidente dell'Associazione Commerciale.  

By the late 1880s, Frullini had become a household name, his workshop appearing in Italian guidebooks for foreign tourists as a recommended source for carved wood items.  

It was also around this time Frullini began publishing illustrated books of his work for the foreign market, including one published by George Polley of Boston specifically for American consumers. Perhaps it was this very popularity that diluted his aura of prestige in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Though he continued to exhibit frequently until his death in 1897, his status as “sculptor” or “artist” waned; his work relegated to the status of “artistic furniture” or “household art.” In the later years of his career, Frullini retreated to his Fabiolle villa outside of Florence where he opted to sculpt in bronze. Typically these works were on a small scale such as medals or bas- 

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127 Karl Baedeker, *Italie: Manuel de Voyaguer*, 12th edition, Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1889, 340. Frullini does not make earlier editions of the same guide in 1868 or 1874, despite his accolades at the expositions in the years prior to each of those editions publication. This suggests that his popularity with the wealthier classes furthered his popularity with a wider audience later in the 1880s.
129 The *Catalogue of Paintings, Engravings, Sculpture and Household Art in the Seventh Cincinnati Industrial Exposition 1879*, page 96, lists item “152. Carved Owl by Frullini of Florence/Bracket carved by Henry L. Fry/ Mrs. F.G. Pluntington” in the category of household art and not sculpture.
relief panels. However, alongside these small works, there is a report of a commission “destined for Boston” of a pair three life-size figures in bronze.\textsuperscript{131}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{FIGURE 17: PLATE 3 FROM \textit{SCULTURA ORNAMENTALE} DEPICTING A BRONZE BAS RELIEF OF A PEASANT DANCE IN VENDEMMIA. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.}
\end{figure}

Luigi Frullini's reputation, as well as his connection to Newport, was built at international exhibitions throughout Europe. Perhaps fittingly, he died in July 1897, shortly after the installation of his work at the Brussels International Exposition.\textsuperscript{132}

\section*{FRULLINI IN HIS ELEMENT: THE MOTIFS IN CHATEAU-SUR-MER}

In the library at Chateau-sur-Mer, Frullini incorporated diverse designs inspired from antiquity, Renaissance and Mannerist forms, and modern twists of whimsy. The room is based on a

\textsuperscript{131} DeGubernatis, 209-210. I have found no evidence of any life-size works by the artist in bronze in museum collections or on the art market.

\textsuperscript{132} Guido Carocci, ed. “Cav. Prof. Luigi Frullini” \textit{Arte e Storia}, vol. XVI, no. 13 (July 15, 1897), 104.
Renaissance interior and a loose interpretation of the classical Composite order. The walls are separated into equal and symmetrical parts divided vertically by pilasters, low and tall built-in bookcases, a chimneypiece, and a fall-front built-in bureau bookcase. The dado level is covered completely in wood while the upper section contains wallpapered panels between the dividing pilasters or case furniture, except in the window bay, which is also wood paneled.

Frullini’s close observation of Classical and Renaissance forms manifests itself in the decoration of the library at Chateau-sur-Mer. Given his close proximity to many examples of carved architectural elements, their influence is undoubtedly apparent in his execution. His decorative compositions are not however, exact replicas of previous works, but they incorporate the elements typical of a Renaissance style setting while also adding personal flourishes. In the library at Chateau-sur-Mer, Frullini achieved a balance between the respect of ancient forms and modern ingenuity.
The room itself is laid out symmetrically. The chimney-piece and tall bookcases on the north wall mirror the bureau bookcase and single doors on the south wall; the double-door opening on the west wall mimics the opening to the bay on the east side of the room. While the pilasters do not mirror each other across the room, they are independently symmetrical from wall to wall. Frullini emphasized the underlying structure by using a single repeating ceiling border of vases and vines interrupted by stylized anthemion blocks. These conceits give the room a foundational stability, allowing for more originality in the individual parts of the decorative scheme. Frullini's
room division appears to be inspired directly from an instructive article in *Guida per le Arti e Mestieri* published in 1871. The article provided a recipe for decorators by suggesting the division of the room into horizontal bands, the use of patterns of ornament copied from antiquity and the Renaissance, as well as the use of symbols to illustrate the status, deeds, and virtues of the family or patron for whom the room was designed.\(^{133}\)

133 Selvafolta, 53.
To avoid monotony and to make his own stamp on the revival style, Frullini varied the individual pilaster panels within a basic framework. The moldings that support, surround, and separate the upper and lower panels repeat, using basket-weave, egg-and-dart, bead, coin, guilloche, Vitruvian scroll, water-leaf, rope, and semi-floral motifs. In the dado level, he used a fish-scale pattern in the smaller areas between the panels, while in the larger areas the panels remain uncarved, showing off the deep veins of the Circassian walnut. Each of the pilasters is capped with a composite capital with a motif in the center. These motifs range from the Florentine giglio to harpies, palmettes, helmets, torches, sea monsters, shells, anthemion, lion masks, gargoyles, and ram's heads. The pilasters in particular exemplify Frullini’s great understanding of the antique and the Renaissance; no two pilasters are exactly the same. They vary also in the type of decoration — some are grotesques while others are arabesques. The grotesque panels feature harpies, herms, mascherons, and dragons, in addition to various types of ornament such as buccranium, shields, pelmets, trophies, and the giglio.

This variety in ornament appears to be a deliberate attempt to emulate the grotesques of Raphael, who was considered the master of decoration by contemporary journals like *Guida per le Arti e Mestieri*, as well as major decorating manuals.¹³⁴ In the highly influential manual *Art in the House*, Jacob von Falke wrote:

...Raphael's arabesques in the Loggie, those lovely creations of the imagination, in which all manner of subjects, boughs and leafage, flowers and fruit, elegant vases, instruments of art, implements of peace and war, garlands and ribbons, medallions and miniatures, are charmingly combined with living creatures, such as fruit pecking birds, floating butterflies, leaping squirrels, and with masks caricatures and fanciful figures of every description.¹³⁵

While Raphael's *Loggia* undoubtedly popularized the use of grotesques in both the Renaissance and nineteenth century, Frullini leaned on inspirations closer to home. Take for example Vasari’s

¹³⁴ Selvafolta, 22.
¹³⁵ Von Falke, 105-106.
columns in the Palazzo Vecchio, the surrounds of the Baptistry doors, the central portal of the Cathedral of Pisa, or the chorale stalls in the Basilica of St. Peter in Perugia. Other inspirations might have included photographs by the Alinari firm or books and journals of the period. Furthermore, he may have made longer trips to Venice or Naples in search of fine examples of carving like the Portal of the Ospedale Civile, formerly the Scuola Grande di San Marco in Venice, or the Sepulcher of Francesco Carafa in the Naples Cathedral.

The arabesque panels, which are entirely naturalistic in composition, are an expression of Frullini’s particular artistic vision. In these panels the artist's observation of nature are displayed in the hyper-realistic carvings. Though not strictly arabesques, most of these panels incorporate birds, butterflies, dragonflies, and lizards amongst the ferns, asters, and grapevines. Nature was a principle element in Renaissance decoration ranging from the realistic to the fantastic. In fact, a number of articles appeared in the journals directed toward practitioners in the decorative arts. These included articles entitled “La Natura dell'Arte Ornamentale”, “La figura de Leone nell'Arte”, and “I 'rabeschi italiani nell'epoca del Rinascimento,” all published in Guida per le Arti e Mestieri between 1871 and 1875.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Selvafolta, 34.
The incorporation of labeled panels with the names of notable Italian and American personalities is not an unusual feature in a library. In fact, the inclusion of “Illustrious Men” in personal/private architecture appears beginning in the Renaissance. Subtly nodding to the studiolo di Gubbio of Federico da Montefeltro, the private study of the culturally enlightened fifteenth-century Duke of Urbino, Frullini makes a connection between the legacy of Italy in the Renaissance and Enlightenment with the America’s emerging global identity. Ten panels bear the names of illustrious men from Italian and Anglo-American culture. They are: Shakespeare, Washington, Colombo, Rafaello, Michelangelo, Dante, Galvani, Amerigo, Volta, and Lincoln.
Representing literature, politics, art, science, and exploration, these figures embody the Renaissance man, and reveal the aspirations of both the wealthy patron as well as the artist. In addition, they link Italy’s cultural heritage with the emerging American identity: beginning with the earliest figure, Dante Alighieri (c.1265-1321) and closing with the most contemporary figure, Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865). The two contemporary Italian explorers Christopher Columbus (c.1451-1506) and Amerigo Vespucci (1454-1512), both of whom lived during the Renaissance
period, logically pass on the culture of the Italian Renaissance to the New World. The inclusion of explorers, who in practice were also merchants or traders, also nods specifically to the legacy of the Wetmore family, whose fortune was founded through the shipping trade and merchant banking. The two political figures, Abraham Lincoln and George Washington (1732-1799), both American, are obvious references to George Peabody Wetmore's political aspirations, meant to both inspire the patron and alert visitors to his grandeur. The literary figures Dante and Shakespeare (1564-1616) represent the best in literature from each culture's language, while the artists Michelangelo (1475-1564) and Raphael (1483-1520) are Italian, perhaps pointing out the area of growth that the Anglo-American world has yet to achieve. The last pairing of scientists, Luigi Galvani (1737-1798) and Alessandro Volta (1745-1827), Italian contemporaries and rivals, made significant contributions to the uses of electricity, and therefore are symbolic harbingers of the modern era. Notably absent are any other national figures, the ten focusing specifically on figures from Florence, elsewhere in Italy, and the English-speaking world.

Two other references to illustrious figures appear in the library in cameo form. Frullini was particularly adept at carving portraits, primarily in the form of cameos or medallions and incorporated them frequently on his designs. Both examples are found on the engaged columns flanking the mantelpiece. The first is an older turbaned bearded man, very likely Leonardo da Vinci, the quintessential Renaissance man. The second, on the opposite column, is a portrait of a woman, likely a nod to the Classical muses. However, without her props, it is difficult to identify the particular Muse being depicted. The incorporation of a muse figure in a place of study and writing
is both appropriate and suggestive of the patron's education and cultured status. Moreover, it is again a fusion of antiquity and the Renaissance.

Frullini's built-in bureau bookcase or *escritoire* is the *tour-de-force* of the case furniture in the room. The fall-front design is both functional and decorative. The escritoire incorporates all the hallmarks of the Frullini style: fantasy/grotesque elements, bas-relief, and naturalism.

![Frullini's bureau bookcase](image)

**FIGURE 24: LUIGI FRULLINI FALL-FRONT BUREAU BOOKCASE IN THE LIBRARY AT CHATEAU-SUR-MER.**

The bureau bookcase is of typical form with the bookcase above, writing surface below and braced by two massive griffon-form supports. These fantastic creatures, loosely based on the typical griffon-form, which has the head of an eagle and the body of a lion, sit on pillows and clutch
an orb in their rear talons. Each griffon wears a pendant necklace bearing the carved head of a putto. It is clear that these creatures are not ferocious monsters but rather majestic or god-like in nature. Besides their impressive presence, the griffons act as symbols of great power, the zoomorphic combination of both symbolic heads of the animal and bird kingdoms. Furthermore, the griffon is considered a protector of treasure: in this case, the correspondence and personal papers of the library's owner.\textsuperscript{137}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{griffon Figures Supporting Bureau Bookcase in The Library at Chateau-Sur-Mer.jpg}
\caption{Detail of the griffon figures supporting the bureau bookcase in the library at Chateau-Sur-Mer. Photo courtesy of the author.}
\end{figure}

Frullini was not the first to use such forms as a support for case furniture. A Roman example of a table base is in the collection of the National Archeological Museum at Naples; a Gothic example by Andrea Pisano which serves as the base for a pulpit in the church of San Andrea in

Pistoia; and the so-called “Sea Dog” table at Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, England is an Elizabethan example. In the early nineteenth century, British designer Thomas Hope used the griffon as a support for furniture for his Duchess Street residence as did American cabinet-maker, Duncan Phyfe, and his main competitor in New York, French émigré ebeniste, Charles-Honore Lannuier.\textsuperscript{138} The griffons employed by Frullini bear a particular resemblance to an early Renaissance thirteenth century stone sculpture outside the Duomo in Ferrara, Italy.

The bas-relief panel, which makes up the fall front of the desk, provides another example of Luigi Frullini’s mastery of craftsmanship and symbolism. Here again, Frullini invokes the studiolo of the Federico da Montefeltro, which uses perspective panels of \textit{intarsia}, or inlays of colored wood in wood to create a picture, instead of bas-relief to illustrate the devices of knowledge. Similar \textit{intarsia} panels can also be found in the choral stalls of the Abbey of Monte Oliveto in Siena. Both examples use perspective to achieve a \textit{trompe l’oeil} effect. The panel depicts a Renaissance scholar in his study; a large room furnished with packed bookshelves, a bureau bookcase, a library table, and two \textit{sgabelli}, or Italian armless hall chairs. The tiles of the floor, interrupted cleverly by the slightly askew chairs and books, delineate the perspective of the space. The scene set by Frullini

\textsuperscript{138} Decorative arts scholars have been reassessing works by Lannuier and Phyfe who were contemporaries in New York in the early 19th century. Because Phyfe did not habitually label, stamp, or sign his work many examples have been ascribed to Lannuier. In 2003, a group of furniture implementing griffon-forms was reattributed to Phyfe. Peter Kenny and Matthew Thurlow. "Duncan Phyfe (1768–1854) and Charles-Honoré Lannuier (1779–1819)". In HEILBRUNN TIMELINE OF ART HISTORY. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/phla/hd_phla.htm (October 2004) and Beach, Laura. “‘Recession Proof’ Winter Show Attracts Buyers in Numbers”, \textit{The Arts and Antiques Weekly}, Jan 28th, 2003. Accessed on-line: http://antiquesandthearts.com/Antiques/TradeTalk/2003-01-28__12-18-52.html
does not leave the viewer guessing at its meaning. The bas-relief symbols refer to a standard iconography of learning and knowledge. The use of the books, inkwell, globe, hourglass, and astrolabe, an astronomer or navigator’s positioning instrument, are all icons of the purpose of the library or study. The figure in the Chateau-sur-Mer panel could represent any generic scholar, but may refer to Galileo Galilei who is notably absent from the allusions to great philosophers in the room. The incorporation of the globe and astrolabe suggest the figure might be an astronomer, although the use of these symbols is not exclusive to the iconography of the astronomy.

![Figure 26: Detail of the fall-front writing surface of the bureau bookcase in the library at Chateau-sur-Mer. Photo courtesy of the author.](image)

Traditionally, Renaissance images of figures in studies depicted Saint Jerome or Saint Augustine, seen in two frescoes of the Renaissance period at Ognissanti in Florence by Sandro Botticelli and Domenichino Ghirlandaio, as well as a bronze relief by Ghiberti on Florence's...
baptistry doors. Frullini's inspiration for this scene may have come from other sources, however.

Two in particular bear a resemblance to the composition of his scene: *St. Jerome in his study*, c.1475 (oil on panel), by Antonello da Messina (1430-79), now in the National Gallery, London and *Vision of St. Augustine*, 1502-08 (oil on canvas), by Vittore Carpaccio, (c.1460/5-1523/6) in the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Venice, Italy. It is plausible Frullini saw the Carpaccio first-hand while he may have seen the Antonello in print form. The Carpaccio particularly echoes the composition of Frullini, especially the two symmetrical doors at the rear of the room. While works like those of Messina and Carpaccio inspired Frullini, he was no mere copyist. He took the most compelling elements of their work — and the era in general — and incorporated them into a single unique composition.

The case surrounding the bas-relief fall front and the bookcase section above incorporates Classical and Renaissance-inspired grotesques and arabesques with whimsical examples of naturalism. In the chamfered corner stiles in the lower section, the artist uses margents of fruits

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and flowers including clusters of pear, pinecone, pomegranate, lemon, passion fruit, and persimmon interspersed with roses, asters, and tulip. Although the composition of the two margents is the same, the contents for the floral and fruit clusters differ slightly. The raffle leaf arabesque side panels, joining the desk to the wall on either side, are identical. The frieze separating the upper and lower sections of the bureau bookcase is carved with scallop coquillage, sea-monster rinceau, and palmettes, interrupted at the canted corners with slightly different blocks depicting a bird in flight. Each bird clutches a branch: on the left an olive branch, symbol of peace; and on the right, a myrtle branch, symbol of love. In the upper section Frullini uses trophies and labels in the chamfered stile panels. Each begin similarly with a vase on a rocky base sprouting into wreathed cultural trophies and grotesques: on the left a trophy of a scroll and quills, symbol of literature and letters; on the right, a horn and lyre, symbols of music. The panels also contain labels commemorating the place and date of manufacture: Frullini carved “FIRENZE” on the left and the date “MDCCCLXXIII” on the right. Mirroring the pilasters framing the room, the chamfered pilaster stiles are capped with a composite capital. Instead of closing off the sides of the bookcase, Frullini left the shelves open for extra storage, a feature repeated in the tall bookcases on the opposite wall. Like the lower separating frieze, the upper frieze is a consistent design of bead festooned Capricorn rinceau flanking a Roman lamp interrupted at the corners by owl carved blocks. Capricorns were widely used in Roman grotesques but here may refer to the Florentine

140 The use of labels is typical of Frullini, though not exclusive to his works.
political figure Cosimo I de Medici, who used it as his personal emblem. The lamp and owl are widely recognized symbols of knowledge and wisdom. The whole case is topped with a molded cornice of dentil, egg-and-dart, Vitruvian scroll, and waterleaf carving, which repeats elements of the moldings used in the surrounding wall pilasters and panels.

![Figure 27: Three details from the bureau bookcase of the library at Château-sur-Mer. Photos courtesy of the author.](image)

To provide light for the working surface, two half-height engaged carved and fluted columns flank the desk. The mantelpiece on the opposite wall mirrors some of the elements of the bookcase. Supported on either side by half height engaged columns, the focal point of the mantle is the monstrous dragonhead that makes up the frieze. This beast, with a lion's head, horns, bat's wings, and insect wing whiskers is an interesting depiction of the creature, resembling Asian examples
more so than Western examples. An early 16th century drawing of a dragon by Leonardo da Vinci intended for use at festivities held at the French court also reflects a Chinese influence. Although it is unlikely Frullini would have seen da Vinci’s drawing first hand, he may have seen examples of Asian art at the exhibitions in London and Paris or in the collections of the various dilettantes in Florence proper. Nevertheless, Frullini may also have drawn from Italian inspirations. Most examples of dragons appear in religious depictions of Saint George and Archangel Michael, but they also appear in the decorative arts. A strikingly similar example to Frullini’s beast can be found in the decoration of a doorway in Venice. Other examples include a window surround on the facade of the Certosa di Pavia.

![Figure 28: Detail of the Carving on the Mantelpiece in the Library at Chateau-sur-Mer. Photo courtesy of the author.](image)

The remaining bookcases incorporate elements similar to those used in the fall-front desk and bookcase: naturalism and fantasy. Like the escritoire, the low bookcases include blocks of birds clutching branches at the tops of the central and canted corner pilasters. Each bird clutches a

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141 Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), A design for a costume of an imaginary beast, c.1517-18, black chalk and pen and ink, 18.8 x 27.1 cm. Charles II acquired this drawing in the 17th century. [http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/egallery/object.asp?searchText=vinci+dragon&x=0&y=0&object=912369&row=4&detail=about](http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/egallery/object.asp?searchText=vinci+dragon&x=0&y=0&object=912369&row=4&detail=about)
different species of branch including oak, holly, laurel, and olive. To either side of the central block are identical friezes featuring a crowned winged lion head with horns amongst rinceau. Like in the mantelpiece this creature is a fantasy, having no formal symbolic meaning. The lion's head however was widely used in antiquity such as at the Temple of Jove, in the ancient city of Heliopolis, now Baalbek, Lebanon. The larger bookcases display several more examples of the “Frullini style”; instead of birds, Frullini uses the heads of putti in the blocks supporting the frieze and cornice of the case. The use of putti is a signature element of Frullini’s work that garnered great acclaim by critics. Writers described Frullini’s carvings of children as “babies that might have come from Donatello’s chisel” and “every curve of the plump limbs reveals the acute student, a true artist, and a clever craftsman.”

142 It is without a doubt that the works of Donatello and Luca della Robbia for the choir lofts of Santa Maria del Fiore were of great inspiration to the artist. In the pilaster stiles of the large bookcases, Frullini displays a level of naturalistic bravado unsurpassed by his contemporaries. The panels are made up of entirely naturalistic scenes with foliage sprouting from the ground with snakes, lizards, birds, and insects populating various parts of the composition. Here the inspiration is from life, antiquity, and possibly some Asian influence. Both set of cases are completed with the use of moldings that repeat the pattern of the wall pilasters.

In the library at Chateau-sur-Mer, Frullini achieved a perfect balance of the antique and the modern. It is clear by the time the room was to be installed Frullini had completely developed his *maniera*. His use of Classical and Renaissance forms combined with his own modern approach to naturalism achieved a level of sophistication befitting his celebrity and the status of his patron. While the scholarship on Frullini is far from complete, the two rooms at Chateau-sur-Mer may be considered the most important commissions completed by the artist in the Western hemisphere.

**CONCLUSION**

In his report on the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, Ralph Nicholson Wornum concluded:
The best understood style is that which we have been obliged to designate the mixed Cinquecento or Renaissance: the apparently most able designers of Italy, France, Austria, Belgium and England, have selected the style of the Exhibition of their skill: if therefore the Exhibition can be considered as a test to the favorite style of the day, it is evidently the Cinquecento Renaissance.\textsuperscript{143}

Wornum was right. Not only was the Renaissance Revival style immensely popular from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, but it also became a standard of good taste and gentility among the established upper classes and the nouveau riche. George Peabody Wetmore understood this trend and was prepared to spare no expense to communicate his aspiration as the head of one of the nation’s leading families. It is therefore fitting that the library at Chateau-sur-Mer should be executed in this style. So too, it is fitting that George Peabody Wetmore should choose the work of the most celebrated Italian wood carver, Luigi Frullini. A sculptor in wood, Frullini would use the opportunity to link the United States and Italy through the use of symbols and motifs in the woodwork of an extraordinary room. Set in Richard Morris Hunt’s aggrandized cottage, the library at Chateau-sur-Mer a symbol of great promise and prowess for three individuals: Wetmore the politician; Hunt the visionary; and Frullini the nationalist.

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APPENDICES: CORRESPONDENCE


via Sa Caterina 8.

Firenze the 11th March 1884

Most Honourable Mr. Professor Marquand,

Having reviewed the photographs chosen—I saw that for the Chest of drawers there is the [number] 10293.—that is 3 figures with Christ etc.—this subject being figures and superior to that which we spoke the last time for which I asked L.500. Instead this bas-relief as interesting as it is, I could not still build for this price. I have also thought that it would be best for feet underneath [to be] Lion’s paws. Therefore I think that this chest of drawers will cost 900 lire.

I thought it was my duty to advise you of it. If You desire to have major discussions I can come to you, if you advise me to do so. I am all day in the studio.

For your records, I believe of that which we established last night that the prices would be:

1 Bed with double capitals
1 Chest of drawers with Christ
2 panels tripartite (10.278.)
4 Chairs

The whole in walnut L. 3000
\texttt{“ “ in oak L.3100}
\texttt{“ “ in mahogany L. 3300}

Leaving to you each decision, your being a person of great intelligence, I say with regards.

Your Most Devoted,

Prof. Luigi Frullini
Appendix 2: Letter from Louis Kragel to George P. Wetmore, Curatorial Archives of the Preservation Society of Newport County, Newport, RI.

New York September 17th 1884

G. P. Wetmore, Esq.
Newport, R.I.

Sir:

In regards to taking down woodwork, Ceiling and taking up floor of your Dining room, it can be done without much injury, by being very careful, so as to use again for another room.

If you wish me to do your work please let me know in time and oblige yours

very respectfully

Louis Kragel
104 East 28th Street
New York
Appendix 3: Letter from Luigi Frullini to George Peabody Wetmore, Curatorial Archives of the Preservation Society of Newport County, Newport, RI.

8 via S. Caterina

March 27th 1889.

To Mr. Peabody Wetmore.

Dear Sir-

This to offer you my sincere thanks for the great kindness you have done me in sending Mr. Phelps Stokes to me.

It pleases me much to feel that you have kept me in remembrance, & I shall always feel most grateful to you.

Pray accept this confession of my gratitude & believe me

Yr. truly,

Prof L. Frullini
Professor Luigi Frullini,

Florence, Italy.

Dear Sir,

Your letter of March 27th reached me shortly before my departure from Cannes and I am glad to see by it that Mr. Phelps Stokes has proudly entrusted you with work for his house. I have sometimes thought of building another and a larger dining room & would like to know, should I ever conclude to do so, whether you would be able to enlarge and add to the existing work, formerly made by you and have the new equal in quality and in execution to that which I already have? Would the difference in time in which the old and the new work was executed make a difference in its appearance? The additional work would probably involved the enlargement of the ceiling and the wainscots and additional door & window trimmings, & parquet flooring also another large sideboard and mantel, also two more small end sideboards.

Would the cost of the work be the same as formerly for similar parts?

Do you intend to exhibit in the coming French Exhibition & if so will you be in Paris yourself?
I have always forgotten to ask you the name of the painter to whom you entrusted the execution of 
the painted part of the Dining room ceiling. I fancy you gave me his name at the time but, if so have 
mislaid your letter. Let me have his name & also as is his reputation as an artist.

Yours truly,

Geo. Peabody Wetmore
To George Peabody Wetmore Esq.

Dear Sir,

I received your letter of the 4th hest & and have great pleasure in answering without delay.

I can very easily enlarge the ceiling, wainscoting, & parquet flooring & also make an extra door & window trimmings, & there will be no difference between the colour of the old & the new wood. If it had been in mahogany or oak it would have been more difficult to make additions on this account.

I still have some of the very fine walnut remaining over, from that used for your original order.

I can make the large sideboard 2 small end sideboards, & mantelpiece as you may decide upon, & all will be done as well if not better after so many years further experience & study of my art.

The prices will be the same as you have paid for my work before.

I shall not send anything to Paris, for although I am a Cav. De Legion d'honneur; it seems wiser not to send any of my works of art,—of which I have a good number—on account of the present political feeling between France and Italy.
Therefore I shall have no occasion to go to Paris But if it would be convenient to [meet] to speak to me in person about the enlarging of [the] dining room—I would have much pleasure in making the journey there...for that purpose...

The painter who did the painting in distemper for the dining room is

Prof. Cav. Annibale Gatti

but he is the oldest man who does this style of painting, tho' he was the best in those days.

At present there are younger & more capable men & I can thoroughly recommend Prof. Andreotti as the first & best artist of this sort, & if I has your commission to give now I would have given it to him instead of to Gatti.

I remain

yours faithfully,

L. Frullini
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