Introduction

With the 1877 demise of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877), America’s richest man and majority owner of the New York Central Railroad, unrivalled prosperity seemed assured for his posterity. Almost ninety million of his approximately one hundred million dollar fortune was bequeathed to his favourite business partner and eldest son, William Henry Vanderbilt (1821-1885).¹ The Vanderbilt family name enters the realm of art history with this wealthy second generation’s rapid compilation of what was widely hailed as ‘the most complete collection of works in the world representing the best modern artists of France’ housed in one of New York’s first palatial mansions.² The third generation is remembered as builders of progressively more opulent family homes. ‘What with the six or seven great New York houses of the Vanderbilt family, and their still larger number of country estates, it could be plausibly argued that among them they have invested as much money in the erection of dwellings as any of the royal families of Europe, the Bourbons excepted.’³

That today the name of Vanderbilt survives not through association with any fine or decorative arts collection but almost solely through the architectural vestiges of these family homes, bears witness to lost

² A. Croffut, The Vanderbilts and Their Fortune, New York, 1886, p. 163.
opportunities rather than to a lack of zeal in collecting. Whereas other contemporary American millionaires⁴ were to found or endow cultural institutions that immortalized their name, no such museum, despite enormous potential, was successfully created by a Vanderbilt family male. That is not to say however that one was not envisioned. Both Cornelius Vanderbilt II and his brother William K. Vanderbilt made significant bequests to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (in 1899 and 1920 respectively) and the latter’s gift of French paintings and furniture remained in the top ten list, in valuation, until 1926.⁵

The second generation’s vision of collecting was myopic in its almost exclusive emphasis on contemporary French Salon painting. A turning point in the Vanderbilt aesthetic appears to have been the family’s exposure to the nineteenth century’s great name sales: the auction of the Demidoff collection in Florence in 1880 and the 1882 sale of the twelfth duke of Hamilton’s collections at Hamilton Palace.⁶

Spurred on by an aggressive third generation wife with international social aspirations, the Vanderbilts in short order, amassed major holdings of eighteenth-century French decorative arts. Collections of Gothic and Renaissance art were also formed generally en bloc to coincide with major building campaigns and exhibited in custom-designed period room settings inspired by French contemporaries.⁷ These acquisitions were made through the intermediary of art advisors who exercised a powerful role in forming the Vanderbilt family’s artistic aesthetic.

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⁴ Collectors such as William C. Corcoran, William T. Walters, J. Pierpont Morgan, Isabella Stewart Gardnet, Henry E. Huntington, Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick.
⁵ ‘Largest Gift’ Time Magazine, Monday, January 11, 1926.
In collaboration with the French-trained architect Richard Morris Hunt, the third generation Vanderbilts created contextual period rooms as a backdrop to reflect art acquisitions and connoisseurship. It would primarily fall to the two senior of four brothers, Cornelius II and William Kissam, to lead this patronage. To insure the accuracy of these brothers’ architectural interiors, Hunt and the Vanderbilts turned to an experienced Paris cabinetmaker, decorator and art dealer, Jules Allard. Their collaboration resulted in historically informed, if not historically accurate, Louis XV and Louis XVI rooms that came to represent a defining and constant element of the Vanderbilt homes. These interiors caused a stylistic sensation in their interpretation of eighteenth-century decoration, and in their functionality, that soon demanded imitation. Biographers and scholars of the family have focused, to date, almost exclusively on the prevalence of Hunt as architect, on the ambitions of his architecture and its social use. Bruno Pons was the first to sense the internationalism of Vanderbilt interiors both in their references to eighteenth-century French prototypes and in the quality of their execution. The evidence suggests that the model of the William K. Vanderbilt 1883 salon is not only a characteristic symbol of the Belle Époque, but for America it represents how the nation historically came to imagine a ‘French’ interior. Hundreds of white and gold paneled Louis XV salons were erected in the ensuing century but they have never strayed far from the principles that this room launched: classically proportioned ornament adorning slightly over-scaled but

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8 The younger brothers, Frederick W. (1856-1938) and George W. (1862-1914), followed their senior brothers’ lead and general aesthetic in building. Frederick erected ‘Rough Point’ in Newport (1889), ‘Hyde Park in the Hudson River Valley (1899) and George consumed his inheritance on the construction of ‘Biltmore’ (1895) in Asheville, North Carolina.

9 ‘Allard & Sons do the Vanderbilt & Goelet work so if I can work in with these people it may be the best thing that could happen.’ March 11, 1894 letter to Aunt from Frederick H. DuBois Stone, DuBois-Stone Papers, Greene County Historical Society Archives, Coxsackie, New York.


11 Ibid, p. 98.
historically positioned paneling, cornice and mantel. When the Cornelius Vanderbilt II residence was demolished in 1927, its Allard paneled reception rooms were acquired by Twentieth Century Fox Studios and served Hollywood as iconic period backdrops for historic dramas.\textsuperscript{12} In Fox’s 1947 film \textit{The Razor’s Edge}, Vanderbilt paneled rooms are reassembled as a stylish setting representing the Paris residence of an upper class American family.\textsuperscript{13} As for the W.K. Vanderbilt salon, it was sold at auction in 1921, five years before the demolition of 660 Fifth Avenue, as ‘Régence Period’, for the disappointing sum of $1,400.00, to the Lawrence Curiosity Shop.\textsuperscript{14}

The criteria that created a specific Vanderbilt aesthetic, although short-lived, exercised considerable influence on the American elite of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. If this chapter is simply referred to sociologically as the phenomenon of the ‘Vanderbilt houses’, it might be more aptly and meaningfully summarized as the ‘goût Vanderbilt’ triumphant.

\textsuperscript{12} Crowthers of Syon Lodge, London Sales Pamphlet, 1989; elements of the Vanderbilt ballroom paneling remain for sale with at Crowthers.
\textsuperscript{13} Other contemporary Allard salons were reinstalled in American museums where they were frequently identified, within thirty years of manufacture, as authentic period rooms by the early twentieth century. Examples are the Bishop Room, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Salomon Room, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Astor Rooms, Ringling Museum, Sarasota; the Salon Doré at the Corcoran, Washington, D.C.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{The Costly Antique and Modern Furnishings, Interior Decorations and Embellishments of a New York City Palatial Mansion}, auction catalogue, American Art Galleries, New York, October 17-19, 1921, lot number 231.
Chapter 1: Cultural Awakening

Head of the second generation Vanderbilts, William Henry’s late life foray into collecting focused on fashionable contemporary European oil paintings. Oils were in the 1870s the medium by which the press, the owners and one’s peers judged the importance of an American art collection. W.H. Vanderbilt began to actively collect after receiving his father’s inheritance and sought to acquire modern French narrative paintings with either strong or cheerful subjects, appealing to the imagination of the ordinary individual.\(^{15}\) He was happiest with themes evoking a European past rather than those documenting an industrial American present. Jean-Louis Gérôme’s \textit{Reception of the Prince of Condé by Louis XIV}\(^ {16}\) provided Vanderbilt with a favourite narrative, for tours of his collection.\(^ {17}\) Gérôme had written, in the hope of selling the painting to the duc d’Aumale for Chantilly, historic seat of the Condés, a description of the event, personages and setting that W.H. Vanderbilt ended up using for the enjoyment of his guests.\(^ {18}\)

An idiosyncratic collector, W.H. Vanderbilt wished to give the impression of avoiding paintings dealers, according to his official biographer Croffut.\(^ {19}\) He indulged in the thrill of contacting and even visiting artists on frequent trips to Paris. In 1878 he commissioned four works directly from the painters Ernest Meissonier, Gérôme (the \textit{Reception of Condé}), Edouard Détaille and Rosa Bonheur.\(^ {20}\) Although

\(^{15}\) A. Croffut, \textit{The Vanderbilts and Their Fortune}, New York, 1886, p. 166.
\(^{16}\) Acquired from a private collection in 1998 by the Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
\(^{17}\) A. Croffut, \textit{The Vanderbilts and Their Fortune}, New York, 1886, p. 166.
\(^{18}\) Ibid, p. 173.
\(^{19}\) Ibid, p. 169.
\(^{20}\) Ibid, p. 166.
he took pride in circumventing dealers, it became well known that a friendly connoisseur in art was whispering in his ear and guiding art excursions. The art collector Charles M. Kurtz alleged that: ‘His pictures were all bought for him by the best connoisseur probably in America, - Mr. S.P. Avery.’

Samuel Putnam Avery (1822-1904), print-publisher, collector and founding member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1872) had served as Art Commissioner for the United States at the Paris International Exhibition of 1867 and established links with the leading Paris artists of the day. He made annual buying trips to the Continent and astutely invited Mr. Vanderbilt along. It was likely Avery who first commissioned paintings from the artists and who acted abroad as guide, consultant, interpreter and shipper for William Henry. S.P. Avery functioned as one of America’s first commercial art dealers.

Having begun to buy art because he enjoyed it and because it was the fashionable thing to do, W.H. Vanderbilt appears to have become increasingly absorbed and ultimately transformed by this contact. At the time of his death, the value of the collection was estimated at $1.5 million and contained over two hundred canvases displayed, in separate oil and watercolor galleries, one above the other in a fashionable salon hanging. No American had ever spent so much on art. The picture gallery’s then only rivals in New York were the Alexander T. Stewart and August Belmont collections. Abroad it was compared to the Secretan collection in

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21 Archives of American Art, Charles M. Kurtz Papers, AAA reel 4804, frame 1295, December 25, 1883. (Letter of the art collector C.M. Kurtz (1855-1909) to Julia Stephenson)
24 A. Croffut, The Vanderbilts and Their Fortune, New York, 1886, p. 163.
Paris and Sir Richard Wallace’s collection in London.\textsuperscript{25} Hearing this asserted, Mr. Vanderbilt may have decided to use his collection for public education. During the winters of 1883 and 1884, the Vanderbilt art gallery was opened to the public on varying days of every week. Unfortunately visitors began to help themselves to flowers from the nearby conservatory and to wander into the private apartments; visitation was curtailed as a result.\textsuperscript{26} The intended democratic art experience became restricted. Thinking of how then to share his legacy, William Henry included a provision in his 1885 will which would ‘forever continue’ the gallery and the house he erected around it in the possession of a male descendant bearing the name of Vanderbilt.\textsuperscript{27} This may bear evidence of W.H. Vanderbilt’s frustrated dream to give New Yorkers, despite their occasional lapse in decorum, the museum that the Metropolitan had not quite yet become.\textsuperscript{28}

‘I always had tremendous respect and great appreciation for the Medici family. They originated as apothecaries. Later their great wealth was used to encourage art of every kind. … So I felt about the Vanderbilt fortune, and I preached this doctrine at home and to William H. Vanderbilt, my father-in-law, who was a great friend of mine, … I was very anxious for him to put up a great monument in New York City and he was only too willing to do so.’\textsuperscript{29} This Medici parallel was expressed tirelessly

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, p. 306.
\textsuperscript{28} Founded in 1872, the Metropolitan Museum of Art was born in a private house on lower Fifth Avenue, moved to a second converted townhouse on Fourteenth Street and settled into a Gothic Revival purpose-built structure on its present site in 1880.
by Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt (née Alva Erskine Smith, 1853-1933), married in 1875 to the second of William Henry’s four sons.\textsuperscript{30}

Any comparison of the Vanderbilts to the Medici must be viewed through nineteenth-century perceptions of the Florentine dynasty. William Henry Vanderbilt, like the Medici, patronized artists of his day. The Medici were however more comprehensive in their support of the decorative as well as the fine arts and were inseparable from a position of political power. Vanderbilt, as a conspicuous public figure, may have believed he had a private moral obligation towards philanthropic goals similar to that of the princely Renaissance merchant princes; a sense of moral duty to elevate public taste, to teach the public what was ‘good.’\textsuperscript{31} Alva Vanderbilt confirmed this train of thought in addressing the subject of the Vanderbilt homes: ‘They were the means of expression in outward and visible terms of the importance of the Vanderbilt family. They represented not only wealth but knowledge and culture, desirable elements for wealth to encourage, and the public accepted them in that way.’\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30} Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan, \textit{The Glitter and the Gold}, William Heinemann, Ltd., London, 1953, p. 5. ‘Preaching’ appears to have been her forte in the family and its mission was to jolt the Vanderbilts into realizing their full social and artistic potential. An accomplished woman of the world, having lived through her Southern family’s declining post-Civil War fortunes, an adolesence in Paris on the fringes of the court of Napoleon III and in socially correct but reduced circumstances in New York, the unconventional and highly self-assured Alva Vanderbilt persevered, landing a Vanderbilt heir in marriage on the force of her sarcastic wit and quick repartee. She instinctively became William Henry’s favourite in-law and crusaded tirelessly first for the family’s social ascension and then for its legacy as artistic patrons.


\textsuperscript{32} The William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, unpublished \textit{Memoirs} of Alva Vanderbilt Belmont; in the Matilda Young Papers, circa 1928, p. 111
The great monument envisioned for New York was to be ‘like the British Museum.’ Thanks to his daughter-in-law’s insistence, Vanderbilt undertook the project to build and endow, with a $5,000,000 reserve, a museum of major scale on the largely empty block opposite his residence at 640 Fifth Avenue, adjacent to St. Patrick’s Cathedral. At the time, this represented a far greater endowment than any museum in the world and the institution would have possessed considerable purchasing power. What delayed and eventually destroyed the vision was the impossibility of obtaining the land.

This frustration with ennobling the family name in a temple to the fine arts may explain why W.H. Vanderbilt focused on the construction of a new home instead, a brownstone neo-Renaissance palazzo, and why his sons may have followed this lead in prioritizing a domestic architecture that quickly became inseparable from the adjective ‘palatial’. It may also explain why in 1884 Vanderbilt published and distributed, to fellow collectors, a lavish catalogue devoted to both house and collection. The introduction to ‘Mr. Vanderbilt’s House and Collection’ by Edward Strahan, pseudonym of art critic Earl Shinn, strikes a messianic note: ‘… the image of a typical American residence, seized at the moment when the nation began to have a taste of its own, an architecture, a connoisseurship, and a choice in the appliances of luxury, society, culture.’ This statement borrows from John Ruskin’s tenet in The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849) that all good architecture is the expression of...

33 A. Croffut, The Vanderbilts and Their Fortune, New York 1886, p. 246.
35 A. Croffut, The Vanderbilts and Their Fortune, New York, 1886, p. 247. The parcel belonged to the city but was leased for $1.00 a year to the Roman Catholic Diocese for the operation of an orphanage. The orphanage would not relinquish its lease and the city was helpless.
national life and character.\textsuperscript{38} The introduction concludes: ‘The hope of creating a new regimen of aesthetics lies less in her fullness of instruction about the sixteen Louis, than in an independent creation of new and inventive belongings.’ The unrestricted opulent and inventive splendor of 640 Fifth Avenue cost $800,000 in interior decoration from the New York cabinetmaking and decorating firm of Herter Brothers (active, New York, 1865-1905).\textsuperscript{39} This proved to be the Herters’ most prestigious commission. Known for their Anglo-Japanesque, E.W.Godwin-inspired furniture, the unprecedented Vanderbilt project provided the opportunity to craft extravagant gilt and mother-of-pearl inlaid works borrowed from eclectic sources.\textsuperscript{40} The setting was anathema to Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman who likely had it in mind in their introduction to The Decoration of Houses: ‘a piling up of heterogeneous ornament, a multiplication of incongruous effects; … a maison bourgeoise enlarged’.\textsuperscript{41} The critics Harry Desmond and Herbert Croly felt that the manifest intention of the decorators was ‘to give Mr. Vanderbilt his full money’s worth in the way of gorgeous trappings.’\textsuperscript{42} And more crucially the fourth generation Vanderbilt heirs of the house characterized it as the ‘black hole of Calcutta.’\textsuperscript{43}

The integrity of the interior architecture in its craftsmen ideology, accented by Christian Herter’s blend of Oriental and Classical forms, was diluted however by being riddled with such neo-Baroque compositions as Pierre Victor Galland’s (1822-

\textsuperscript{38} George Allen, The Seven Lamps of Architecture, (2\textsuperscript{nd} ed.), Sunnyside, Orpington, Kent, 1880, pp. 20-2.
\textsuperscript{40} In Pursuit of Beauty, Americans and the Aesthetic Movement, exhibition catalogue, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, p. 439. See for example the Herter Bros. library table (inventory # 1972.47) from 640 Fifth Avenue in the museum’s collection.
\textsuperscript{41} Ogden Codman, Jr. and Edith Wharton, The Decoration of Houses, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1897, reprinted 1978, p. II.
\textsuperscript{42} Herbert Croly and Harry W. Desmond, Stately Homes in America, New York, 1903, p. 256.
1892) Tiepolo-inspired mural painting of a Procession (1881) decorating the drawing room ceiling and Jules Lefebvre’s (1836-1912) Awakening of Aurora, a ceiling painting for Mrs. Vanderbilt’s room. Galland was hired both for having been Christian Herter’s art teacher in Paris and for his international reputation as the nineteenth century ‘French Tiepolo’. His academic work, so popular with the banking elite in Paris (hôtel Jacquemart André) and London (Dartmouth House for Charles Baring, Lord Revelstoke), was in New York, with Lefebvre’s, at best problematic in an arts and crafts décor. Had the Herter Brothers attempted a more restrained and cohesive design at 640 Fifth Avenue, the resultant architectural interiors may have proven more enduring. The firm’s specialty in well carved, creatively inlaid natural wood surfaces might have held sway over Orientalist excess. The architect Stanford White would later recall Herter’s woodwork: ‘…we found that in this character of hard woodwork his selection of wood and his finish is better than Allard’s.’

William Henry Vanderbilt’s reported reluctance to collecting period European decorative arts for his new residence has been related with emphasis by the official family biographer W.A. Croffut: ‘a French nobleman wrote to him that he had many articles of vertu which he wished to sell … Mr. Vanderbilt went … When he returned, he said: ‘There are those who are supposed to know all about these things

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46 As was to be the Family curse, 640 Fifth Avenue proved short-lived; the interiors were gutted and the furnishings dispersed in 1915 when the fourth generation engaged Paris decorator Lucien Alavoine, under the supervision of architect Horace Trumbauer, to redesign the residence in the French classical style. The house was sold to Lord Astor of Cliveden in 1940 and demolished for commercial expansion in 1945. The art gallery’s paintings, intact from William Henry’s period, were sold at Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, April 18-19, 1945.
47 Archives of the New York Historical Society, New York, Stanford White Papers, #89.
and their intrinsic value, and of the associations connected with them. Well I do not know all that, and I am too old to learn. … It would be mere affectation for me to buy such things.  

William Henry was being mildly self-deprecating with his biographer. When noble association and international competition, a narrative unto itself, combined as motivating factors, Vanderbilt bought aggressively.

William Henry appears to have previously bought Austrian porcelain and several pictures from the partial sale of the Demidoff collection offered by Anatole Demidoff from the palazzo San Donato outside Florence in February, 1870.  The fourth marquess of Hertford (1800-1870) made his last purchases at this sale which included a pair of Corinthian columns veneered with malachite (c.1850). A decade later, in May of 1880, when Anatole’s nephew Paul Demidoff held exhaustive sales of the Florentine villa’s collections, Vanderbilt agents were present. John Crosby and James Jackson Jarves (himself a collector), United States consul and vice-consul in Florence, were present to bid, perhaps on the advice of Avery, for both William Henry and his eldest son Cornelius II. In addition to quantities of textiles, tapestries and altar frontals, they also purchased the Demidoff Vase. Adorning the palazzo San Donato antechamber, or gallery of Canova, the vase (dated 1819) was carved of malachite, from Demidoff family mines, and set with ormolu mounts by Pierre Philippe Thomire; its mate was said to be in the Imperial Palace in St. Petersburg.  

Once in New York, William Henry placed the vase in the centre of his two-story

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49 Edward Strahan, Mr. Vanderbilt’s House and Collection, 4 vols, G. Barrie, Boston, New York and Philadelphia, 1883-4, vol. 1, p. 16
51 In 1944 the vase was purchased from Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt III by the Metropolitan Museum and entered its collections. The vase thought to be a pendant was actually of a later date, circa 1842, and was made for the Council Staircase of The Hermitage, where it remains, by the Yekaterinburg Lapidary Works.
vestibule, in deference to its similar siting in Demidoff’s antechamber (Fig. 1.). At Fifth Avenue the Vanderbilt-Demidoff vase stood in a space seemingly designed after a Roman bath with mosaic floor, zenithal lighting and marble-paved walls offset with inlaid horizontal bands of verde antique marble that echoed the malachite green of the vase.52

From the San Donato sale, Vanderbilt also procured the palazzo’s gilt bronze vestibule doors, reductions by Barbedienne (1878) of Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise at the Baptistery of Florence. Placed in the Pompeian-style marble and mosaic vestibule entrance, admiration over the doors and their casting technique led to Barbedienne’s commission for additional bronze ornamental railings for the house.53 Mr. Vanderbilt’s house and collection proved an inspiration to his two senior sons. Actively involved in the administration of the family rail lines, they were also alert to their father’s artistic sensibilities; the elder, Cornelius II, in a more deferential way than his younger brother William, who guided by his wife, would delve deeply into French historicism.

53 A. Croffut, The Vanderbilts and Their Fortune, New York, 1886, p. 171.
Chapter 2: In Search of Taste

William Henry Vanderbilt’s 1885 will arranged for a modified primogeniture for the third generation males. Eldest sons Cornelius Vanderbilt II (1843-1899) and William K. Vanderbilt (1849-1920) received the largest portion of the $200 million estate, each being given over $50 million each. The equal distribution of wealth between the elder brothers was recognized as being a reward for the junior daughter-in-law, Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt’s successful campaign to launch the family into the select inner circle of New York society. Key to this perception was her motivating role in the construction of the elder brothers’ own Fifth Avenue residences, contemporary with their father’s, and built between 1878 and 1883 with the fruits of the Commodore, their grandfather’s, bequest. These highly visible townhouses quickly realized Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt’s Medicean prophecy. By 1892 the economist George Gunton claimed that the Vanderbilt mansions led to a new direction of devoting American wealth to the uplifting of the national standard of taste and social distinction. Gunton beheld in such ostentation the promise for America of entering upon the threshold of the ‘leisured phase of its societary development’.  

William and Alva Vanderbilt were first to answer the call by erecting, at 660 Fifth Avenue, a then unique in America, urban, limestone-clad, château de la Loire, designed by the socially prominent gentleman-architect Richard Morris Hunt (1827-

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54 Four daughters (Margaret, Emily, Florence and Eliza) and two younger sons (Frederick and George) received the houses they lived in, $5 million each and one-eighth of the annual income on an additional $40 million in trust for life.  
56 Ibid, p. 23.
1895). The new head of the House of Vanderbilt, Cornelius II and his wife Alice (née Alice Claypoole Gwynne 1845-1934) built, in turn, at 1 West 57th Street and Fifth Avenue, a similarly-inspired brick and limestone château with the architect George Browne Post (1837-1913). Alva and William’s 660 Fifth Avenue borrowed heavily from the château de Blois, particularly its Renaissance Louis XII wing, and the hôtel Jacques Coeur (1453) in Bourges. One West 57th Street looked at Blois but as revisited in the form of the contemporary hôtel Gaillard (1880-1882), by the architect Victor-Jules Février, then nearing completion on the Place Malesherbes in Paris, and home to the banker Emile Gaillard.\(^57\)

The Vanderbilts’ francophile architects were both graduates of the École des Beaux Arts and familiar with the work of the architect Jacques-Félix Duban (1797-1870), particularly his much debated restoration (1843) of the Louis XII wing at Blois.\(^58\) With the contemporary restorations at Blois, Amboise and Chambord, the latter, home of the légitimiste comte de Chambord, and the subsequent work of Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), the neo-Renaissance hôtel had become the architectural preference of both monarchists and international financiers;\(^59\) a client profile of vast appeal to the Vanderbilt family, based on the aristocratic and banking family names cited by Alva Vanderbilt Belmont and Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan as acquaintances in their Memoirs.


These neo-Renaissance model houses were also considered to be ‘modern French’. Hunt had worked in this vein under his mentor Hector Lefuel in Paris and together they admired the rational structural system of the Gothic and Renaissance as interpreted by Viollet-le-Duc.60 Hunt’s love of French Renaissance prototypes manifested itself in his student sketchbooks61 and in his work, under Lefuel, on the Pavillon de la Bibliothèque (1855) at the palais du Louvre, where Hunt was asked to reproduce the character of Philibert Delorme’s fifteenth-century architectural detailing.62 Such exposure taught Hunt an archaeological approach to and appreciation of detail which would mark his career. This devotion to form was lauded by contemporary critics as one of the advantages of the École training that Hunt personified and he was credited with having launched a native school of carvers (Ellin, Kitson & Company, New York) with the ornamental demands of his buildings.63 Upon the construction of 660 Fifth Avenue, the largest houses of the next twenty years, in both city and country, followed the domestic style of the French Renaissance, considered the most acceptable model for a ‘palatial’ dwelling.64

Organized around a central hall plan, the interiors of these ‘châteaux’ were never intended to be stylistically pure. Allowing for efficient distribution, the interior plan favored by Hunt was effectively launched by Joseph Paxton’s 1855 center hall

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61 Ibid, p. 49. The sketchbooks are preserved in the American Institute of Architects Foundation Library, Washington, D.C.
64 Ibid, p. 362. In short order Hunt would prove the greatest practitioner of the model, going on to build the ‘château-esque’ Henry G. Marquand Residence (1884); Elbridge T. Gerry (1891); William V. Lawrence Residence (1891); William B. Astor Residence (1895) in New York; the William Borden Residence in Chicago (1889); the Ogden Goelet Residence (1892) and the O.H.P. Belmont Residence (1894) in Newport; and the George W. Vanderbilt Residence in Ashville, North Carolina.
plan for baron James de Rothschild’s château de Ferrières, widely admired at the École. Circulation flowed from a great hall into surrounding historicist reception rooms.

To each historical period Victorian tastemakers assigned temperamental meaning; the Renaissance represented luxury and comfort, suited for reception rooms, whereas the domestic gravity of the Gothic style made it appropriate for the library. Smoking or billiard rooms, having no historical association with things or practices ‘French’, were considered more fertile territory for exploration or open to exotic Orientalist design. They were also male retreats and beyond the pale of the millionaires’ wives whose responsibility it was to oversee the commission of the primary interiors. The requisite post-dinner separation of the sexes, the men to the billiard room and the ladies to the drawing room largely determined the decorating emphasis of these rooms. The Victorian interior embodied an iconography of female experience. For privileged women, the well-designed interior was associated with leisured aesthetic contemplation - a stage set for both private fantasy and fashionable performance. Individualizing the interiors of great houses became the work of women like Alva Vanderbilt whose desire for a guaranteed European trademark may also explain her decorative conservatism.

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Cornelius Vanderbilt’s purchases at the San Donato sale were chosen with complementing such period interiors. Cornelius hung a Demidoff Madonna and Child, by Andrea della Robbia in his central hall near Renaissance-inspired portières by John LaFarge and Mary Tillinghast. Younger brother William K. does not appear to have made major purchases at the sale; his wife was preoccupied working with Hunt. As plans were nearing approval in 1882, she received news of the Hamilton Palace Sale.

In the relative absence of published English-language scholarship in the field of French decorative arts before Lady Dilke’s pioneering work in the late 1880s, an illustrated auction catalogue was of capital importance for knowledgeable collectors who had never seen the pieces catalogued elsewhere and for budding amateurs like the Vanderbils to whom a photograph may have provided an authoritative note of authenticity. In her Memoirs, Alva Vanderbilt-Belmont summarizes a description of the inventory of her Gothic Room in Newport, with the simple assertion: ‘A very large catalogue exists, gotten up by Gavet, the collector.’ The memory of this catalogue may hint at its role. The Gavet Collection was acquired by private sale between Emile Gavet and Alva Vanderbilt between the 1889 private publication by Emile Molinier of the collection’s catalogue raisonné and the 1890 redesign of a ‘library’ into a ‘Gothic Room’ to receive it. A cross reference of the disposition of key works illustrated in photographs of the collection in situ at Gavet’s Paris.

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68 Sold from the Estate of Countess Laszlo Széchenyi at Weschler’s Auction Galleries, Washington, D.C., February 1973, to a private collector; present location unknown.
apartment and the layout of the same works in the Gothic Room at Newport reveals that Alva Vanderbilt bought chiefly those works illustrated in the catalogue and recreated their artistic placement based on the photographs. The focal point, a Lucca della Robbia Madonna and Child relief, was placed on the same Gothic coffer as in Paris, flanked by the same fifteenth-century statues as shown in the catalogue.\textsuperscript{72}

For Alva Vanderbilt, the soon-to-be chatelaine, the Hamilton Sale was an opportunity not to be missed.\textsuperscript{73} In her Memoirs, two pieces were considered by Alva Vanderbilt as ‘of quite unequalled interest and value’.\textsuperscript{74} These were lots 1297 and 1298, a Louis XVI secrétaire and commode commissioned for Marie Antoinette.\textsuperscript{75}

The historic interest of these pieces may have outweighed aesthetic concerns on how these period furnishings might be inserted into the Renaissance chambers of 660 Fifth Avenue. The motivating factor was that she would be procuring the first acknowledged pieces of French royal furniture in an American collection. A desire that appears both strategic and symptomatic.

\textsuperscript{72} The Della Robbia was placed for sale with Joseph Duveen in 1926 together with the entirety of the Gavet-Vanderbilt collection in Newport. The relief was separated out and sold to the Kress Collection, thence given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art where it is now hung at the foot of the grand staircase; the remainder of the collection was sold largely \textit{en bloc} to John Ringling and forms the nucleus of the John and Mable Ringling Museum in Sarasota, Florida. Vintage photographs of the Gavet-Vanderbilt collection \textit{in situ} are preserved in the Mattie Hewitt Collection, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

\textsuperscript{73} In the unpublished Reminiscences of Catherine Howland Hunt (Mrs. Richard Morris Hunt) (in the Archives of the Preservation Society of Newport County), Mrs. Hunt notes that through her husband the Vanderbilts had been received and entertained by the duc d’Aumale at Chantilly and by Reginald Rothschild in England. They may have heard, as did the Paris and London antiques trade, of d’Aumale’s interest in repatriating the so-called duc de Choiseul writing table and cartonnière from the Hamilton collection and of Ferdinand de Rothschild’s interest in several eighteenth-century French commodes.


\textsuperscript{75} \textit{The Hamilton Palace Collection}, Remington & Co., London, 1882.
From the early 1880s on, the term ‘desire’ entered American discourse at all levels.\textsuperscript{76} Lester Ward defined consumption as the ‘satisfaction of desire’.\textsuperscript{77} Alva Vanderbilt was arguably the most satisfied and self-fulfilled woman of the leisure class of her period. A self-proclaimed trail-blazer she was not to be refused, and her much rewritten \textit{Memoirs} speak with single-minded purpose of a Minerva-like mission in life as dual patron of the arts and protector of women’s rights. A self-awareness of her potential role in history led Alva to produce two distinct sets of \textit{Memoirs} dictated to successive secretary-companions.\textsuperscript{78} In each, self-analysis prompts rewriting to explain her transition from socialite to suffragette. In both versions, an emphasis on her family’s contacts, while resident in Paris as a child, in the inner circles of the court of emperor Napoléon III and his empress Eugénie may explain Alva’s Eugénie-like adherence to the cult of things Marie Antoinette. The combination of the Hamilton Palace sale’s social credentials, provenance, and timing, early July 1882, on the eve of the completion of the New York house, may have served not only to satisfy Alva Vanderbilt’s desire but to formulate its evolution along new lines.

The family’s history with such intermediaries as Avery may have led the William K. Vanderbilts to inquire after the most effective bidding agent in London. They required not only an agent but a connoisseur who would assure them of the integrity of the goods. The London art dealer Samson Wertheimer may have been recommended by Avery or by an acquaintance.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{77}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78}Perkins Library version and Huntington Library version: unpublished \textit{Memoirs} of Alva Vanderbilt Belmont as dictated to Sara Bard Field, 1917; The Charles Erskine Scott Wood Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
\textsuperscript{79}Norman L. Kleeblatt (ed.), \textit{John Singer Sargent: Portraits of the Wertheimer Family}, exhibition catalogue, The Jewish Museum, New York, 1999, p. 10. Wertheimer was of German-Jewish origin, he had immigrated to Britain in 1830. Although he had arrived a modest bronze maker, Samson built a
Wertheimer was to dominate the Hamilton furniture sales; for Ferdinand de Rothschild he secured a commode and writing table by Riesener, with royal provenances, and a Cressent commode, all now at Waddesdon Manor.\footnote{Geoffrey de Bellaigue, *The James A. Rothschild Collections at Waddesdon Manor: Furniture, Clocks and Gilt Bronzes*, 2 vols. Office du Livre, Fribourg, for The National Trust (look up page and plate for Cressent at the V&A).} For a record 12,075 pounds he acquired lot 672, a Louis XIV Boulle armoire and its pendant, formerly in the William Beckford collection at Fonthill Abbey.\footnote{Ronald Freyberger, ‘Eighteenth-Century French Furniture from Hamilton Palace’, *Apollo*, December 1981, p.407. Acquired by the tenth duke from the George Watson-Tyler sale at Erlestoke Mansion in 1832.} Wertheimer was challenged though when fellow dealer Frederick Davis outbid him on lot 1297, Jean-Henri Riesener’s 1783 Japanese lacquer and ebony secrétaire à abattant (Fig.2.) with its Marie Antoinette gilt bronze cipher.\footnote{Paul Eudel, *La Vente Hamilton*, Paris, 1883, p. 60. Both pieces were bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art by William K. Vanderbilt in 1920.} This, the secrétaire coveted by Mrs. Vanderbilt, sold for 9,450 pounds, the highest recorded price obtained for a piece of furniture to that date. It had been the pièce de résistance of the Hamilton collection together with its en suite Riesener Japanese lacquer commode, both delivered to Marie Antoinette for her cabinet intérieur at St. Cloud. For the commode, offered as the next lot, #1298, Wertheimer bid more aggressively. It was secured for exactly the same sum as the secrétaire. The prices obtained marked a turning point in the history of collecting eighteenth-century French decorative arts.\footnote{Paul Eudel, *La Vente Hamilton*, Paris, 1883, p. 60. Both pieces were bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art by William K. Vanderbilt in 1920.} Wertheimer’s impetus to outbid Davis was undoubtedly an agreement with W.K. Vanderbilt. Both pieces were reunited by the dealer and immediately transferred to New York. It appears likely that a strategic list had been established between Wertheimer and the Vanderbilt
family. Lot 1296, an additional Japanese lacquer-decorated, ebony secrétaire à abattant, then similarly attributed to Riesener and with a presumed Marie Antoinette provenance, was purchased by Samson Wertheimer but for Cornelius Vanderbilt II. 84 Both branches of the family now boasted French royal furniture. 85

The celebrity of the Riesener pieces sold to the William K. Vanderbilts was of immediate acclaim. Henry Havard’s Dictionnaire de l’ameublement (1887-1889) and Lady Dilke’s French Furniture and Decoration (1901) 86 both inserted related illustrations and text in their respective surveys of eighteenth-century French furniture. Wertheimer profited from his new visibility with a rapid ascension in the hierarchy of foreign dealers supplying Americans. The foremost beneficiaries of the Hamilton sale were Jean-Henri Riesener, of whom relatively little was then known, and André-Charles Boulle. Riesener’s new fame added to his celebrity in the nineteenth-century which had been largely due to the survival of a number of beautifully marquetry case furnishings delivered to Marie Antoinette and bearing his signature. Taste for Boulle furniture was longer established; it reflected a late eighteenth-century attitude that looked both to Antiquity and to the classicism of the Grand Siècle to set aright the aberrations of early eighteenth-century Rococo. 87 The goût Boulle continued into the nineteenth century as a taste for luxurious tortoise-shell and brass marquetry casework, not only of the variety beloved by the Second Empire,

84 The secretary descended to Gladys Vanderbilt, Countess Laszlo Széchényi and was sold at the auction of ‘The Breakers’ (Newport) collection at Sotheby’s London, November 26, 1971, Lot 71, to J. Paul Getty for the Getty Museum.
85 Aesthetic concerns as to period condition do not appear of concern as no effort was made to restore the Riesener pieces. Being far more interested in their association than their intrinsic merit, all three ‘Riesener cabinets’ retained the tenth duke’s black Galway marble replacement tops until subsequent twentieth-century dispersal.
86 Emilie Frances Strong, Lady Dilke, French Furniture and Decoration of the XVIIIth Century, London, George Bell and Sons, 1901, p. 173.
87 Svend Eriksen, Early Neo-Classicism in France, 1974, pp. 36-41.
but also, more subtly, as a liking for black ebony veneered case furniture, such as that acquired at the sale by Alva Vanderbilt.  

Work on a Gothic Salon for 660 Fifth Avenue had been suspended in anticipation of the results of the Hamilton sale. When the commode and secretary arrived, by the summer of 1882, it had already become apparent that the Renaissance residence would be amended to create an appropriate backdrop for the furniture. Alva Vanderbilt appears to have asked R.M. Hunt to contact the Paris-based decorator-art dealer Jules Allard (1832-1907) to draw up plans for a more fitting French salon, together with her bedroom-boudoir. Allard (active in New York 1878-1907) had previously supplied tapestries and made furnishings for William Henry Vanderbilt’s residence and had installed Galland and Lefebvre’s decorative ceiling paintings there. Active as cabinetmakers in Paris since 1830, the Allard firm had begun to work on comprehensive architectural interiors by the 1870s. Following Jules Allard’s gold medal at the 1878 Universal Exposition and his strategic installation of the American section, contact was made with the Herter Brothers. The firm began what was to become a twenty-five year association with the Vanderbilts on the sub-contract for Mrs. W. H. Vanderbilt’s apartments. Many American architects of the period found native craftsmen to be deficient in training for the more ambitious domestic projects. Hunt may have likely appreciated the Allard firm’s familiarity with proper design

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89 The Richard Morris Hunt Papers, American Institute of Architects, Architectural Foundation Library, Prints and Drawings Collection, Washington, DC.
90 Dossiers Légion d’Honneur 1878, Archives Nationales, Paris. Allard, Jules nomination papers; Copy in the archives of the Preservation Society of Newport County.
91 Herbert Croly and Henry W. Desmond, Stately Homes in America, New York, 1903, p. 474.
scale and materials, archaeological consistency and aesthetic propriety of effect.\textsuperscript{92} Allard’s Paris workshops were noted in their day for carved paneling, architectural furnishings, plasterwork, metalwork, painting, upholstery, and the whole range of skills necessary to produce a period room.\textsuperscript{93}

The new design Alva, Hunt and Allard agreed to seemed a bit incongruous placed as it was next to a fifteenth-century-inspired dining hall with medievalist stained glass by Eugène Oudinot. It called for a fully paneled white and gold Régence salon (Fig. 3.). Executed in Paris and installed in New York by Allard’s foremen, the completed salon represented the first fully developed eighteenth-century French style paneled interior in America.\textsuperscript{94} It comprised properly scaled, ornamented and gilded architectural wall carving, an academically-designed cast cornice, bronze-mounted marble mantel and was fitted with appropriate period-inspired French lighting fixtures, door and window hardware and an oak \textit{parquet de Versailles} floor. The wall paneling consisted of tall, ivory painted panels crowned with gilt rocaille cartouches, over moulded dado panels and beneath gilt rosace-medallioned overdoors. Openings within the large bays were reserved for architecturally mounted Louis XV tapestries in the mid- eighteenth-century tradition. Believed to have been supplied by Allard,\textsuperscript{95} five Beauvais tapestries from Boucher’s \textit{Amour des Dieux} series (1750) constituted

\textsuperscript{95} The Diaries of Samuel Putnam Avery, Art Dealer 1871-1882, Arno Press, New York, 1979, entry for May 28, 1881; p 68.
the first acquisition and architectural hanging in America of a related tapestry series.\textsuperscript{96} This set was woven without heraldic arms, although Mrs. Vanderbilt thought them ‘royal’,\textsuperscript{97} and were meant to be inserted into boiseries underscoring the symbiosis of the decorative arts and the interior architecture. It is almost impossible today to imagine what the room looked like when hung with this set of the Amour des Dieux; original photographs look to the north wall where only Boreas and Orithyia and Apollo and Clytie are visible to the left and right of a central pocket door. The reunion of such a set has not yet recurred in America.\textsuperscript{98} The series was dispersed at the 1921 auction of the contents of the house.\textsuperscript{99}

Rather than a central rosette, the ceiling decoration consisted of a central roundel painting, bordered by stucco decoration. The canvas depicting The Marriage of Cupid and Psyche by Paul Baudry (1828-1886) was commissioned from the artist in Paris through the intermediary of Baudry’s old friend Richard M. Hunt.\textsuperscript{100} The commissioning of an architecturally-mounted French painting from a prominent living artist for a domestic interior serves as a reminder of William Henry Vanderbilt’s pace-setting patronage. Cornelius II ordered a ceiling canvas of Aurora, at the same time as his brother, from Baudry and these two paintings constituted the

\textsuperscript{99} The Costly Antique and Modern Furnishings, Interior Decorations and Embellishments of a New York City Palatial Mansion, auction catalogue, American Art Galleries, New York, October 17-19, 1921. In modern museum settings the tapestries from this series are generally seen one at a time, as if they were paintings, instead of in combination, covering the walls like frescoes, as intended and as displayed at 660 Fifth Avenue. \\
\textsuperscript{100} Paul Baker, Richard Morris Hunt, The MIT Press, Boston, 1980, p. 281. The ceiling was removed (c. 1919) and reinstalled in the Century Theatre on Central Park West at 62\textsuperscript{nd} Street in New York.
artist’s only commissioned works in America.\textsuperscript{101} Baudry’s oeuvre would have been known to the Vanderbilts from his recently completed decorative cycle in the foyer of the Paris Opera (1874).\textsuperscript{102}

In volume, the social function of the salon precluded a more academically-scaled period room but, at 38 feet by 33 feet, the requisite alterations allowed the architect to address all important issues of light, ventilation and circulation, accommodated by large pocket doors and bay windows.\textsuperscript{103} These contemporary touches were not thought to detract from the overall ‘period’ atmosphere; nor did the revival style furnishings.\textsuperscript{104} The spirit of French fashion and history was adapted to the modern American exigencies of comfort and function. Oversize, tapestried bergères, fauteuils and canapés by Allard jostled lion and tiger skin rugs and potted palms. Seen in original photographs against the salon boiseries, were the Riesener commode and secretary, ironically somewhat un-architectural in the interior architecture designed to promote them. The Louis XVI secrétaire breaks the low vertical alignment of the furniture about the room by surpassing the height of the Régence dado panel and projecting into the ground of the Boreas and Orithyia tapestry.

That Mrs. Vanderbilt chose a transitional Régence-Louis XV architectural backdrop rather than a neo-classical theme for her prized Marie Antoinette furniture

\textsuperscript{101} The Archives of the Preservation Society of Newport County, A letter from Paul Baudry to Cornelius Vanderbilt, II, c. 1883.
\textsuperscript{102} It may be some indication of the artist’s popularity but also perhaps of a growing respect abroad for the Vanderbilt commissions that the duc d’Aumale ordered a very similar work in scale and theme, L’Enlèvement de Psyché from Baudry in 1884 for installation at the château de Chantilly (Gérard Fontaine, L’Opéra de Charles Garnier, Paris, 2004, p. 173). The second Vanderbilt Baudry was installed in the dining room of ‘The Breakers’, Newport in 1895.
\textsuperscript{103} Bruno Pons, French Period Rooms 1650-1800, Editions Faton, Dijon, 1995, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, p. 155.
reflects the ambiguity between periods in her day. The Louis styles were frequently improved upon by combining the best or most popular elements of each. In general Régence and Louis XV were considered to be more feminine styles by composition to the rectilinear and masculine Louis XVI.\textsuperscript{105} Since the salon functioned as a ballroom, the paneling required splendor and brilliancy of effect more than studied line.\textsuperscript{106} No attempt was made to duplicate the meublant furniture placement of past historical periods. The room was an attempt to create an approximate French interior, primarily to display two non-architectural pieces of royal furniture. It recreated this period ambience without the advantage of using actual antique paneling and seat furniture, relying instead on period detail derived from acknowledged historical models. The formula worked and following the March 26, 1883 Vanderbilt Ball inaugurating the house, which Alva hosted dressed by Worth as a Venetian Renaissance princess after Cabanel, high style French interiors were to remain the conservative reference point for the reception rooms of the New York elite up until the eve of World War I.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{105} Henry Havard, \textit{L’Art dans la maison – grammaire de l’ammeublement}, Librairie Rouveyre, 1884, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{107} Paul F. Miller, \textit{Jules Allard et ses Fils}, unpublished manuscript, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2005, p. 51. From Allard’s New York books, surviving for select years in the Greene County, New York Historical Society, Miller indicates an average of thirty American commissions a year between 1883 and 1907.
Chapter 3: An Emergent Style

Cornelius Vanderbilt II, more active in the design of his residence than his brother, responded to William’s challenge by commissioning a more à propos Louis XVI petit salon (35 feet x 20 feet) (Fig. 4.) from Allard in 1882 as a setting for his Hamilton Palace secrétaire. Set amidst the Aesthetic Movement interiors of One West 57th Street, that were a conscious bow to the Reform Movement taste of his father, the neo-classical paneling struck a discordant note. The Riesener secretary was placed in a corner of the salon and appears as a lonely symbol in photographs taken at the time. In advance of any plans to alter the general ambiance of his reception rooms, Cornelius II appears to have sought to embellish them further with French decorative arts reminiscent in quality of those admired at the Hamilton Sale. This became amply feasible, for both Cornelius and William K., with the 1886 settlement of their father’s estate.

The emphasis on Boulle furniture in the collections formed by the tenth duke of Hamilton and the third and fourth marquess of Hertford, typical of the taste of British noblemen of the early nineteenth-century, may have inspired the Vanderbilt brothers. The attention surrounding the Beckford-Hamilton armoires may have specifically encouraged Cornelius Vanderbilt. The opportunities to acquire Boulle pieces of such stature not being what it had been, Cornelius Vanderbilt turned to the London trade for assistance. By 1888 Charles Davis, son of Frederick Davis, sold Vanderbilt a circa 1712 Boulle-marquetry long-case musical clock attributed to

Alexandre-Jean Oppenordt (1639-1715) from the collection of the marquess of Exeter at Burghley House.\textsuperscript{109} Consisting of a contre partie veneered musical clock case decorated with gilt bronze corner mounts representing the Continents and a pedestal housing the weights and pendulum, the clock is one of a group of five known as the pendule aux quatre parties du monde.\textsuperscript{110} At One West 57\textsuperscript{th} Street the clock dominated the north interior wall of the library where its melody may have been most effective.\textsuperscript{111} The embellishment of the clock case with nineteenth century bronze rams head and pinecone feet may have been undertaken by the trade in London or it may have been requested of Allard who similarly embellished an Empire piano by Beckers, Paris for Mrs. Vanderbilt in approximately the same years.\textsuperscript{112} Another Boulle clock, a circa 1720 régulateur, was also purchased by Cornelius Vanderbilt in London. The clock’s original French works have been replaced by Archard of Audley Street and the clock is mounted with a nineteenth-century gilt bronze infant boy with a Gallic cock. This mount, symbolizing the French State, is an adornment meant to provide the illusion of a ‘royal’ provenance.\textsuperscript{113} A case for Allard reworking the clock in London or New York for the family may be made by comparing it to an identical mount adorning the timepiece of the ‘duc de Choiseul’ bureau plat et cartonnier. The cartonnier is described in the Hamilton Palace catalogue as being topped with: ‘a


\textsuperscript{111} The clock was moved to The Breakers, Newport prior to the 1927 demolition of 1 West 57\textsuperscript{th} Street; by descent to Laszlo Széchényi and sold in 1971 by her estate; purchased from French & Company, New York by J. Paul Getty, 1972. Getty Inventory number 72.DB.40.

\textsuperscript{112} Beckers piano in The Breakers Music Room, Newport. Loan of the Gilbert Trust, Los Angeles.

\textsuperscript{113} ‘French National Emblem, The Cock’ *Oxford Journals, Notes and Queries*, 1919, S12-V, p. 131. Generally used in the French medieval period as a religious symbol of hope and faith, the cock became attached to the idea of French nationhood during the Renaissance. Under the Valois and the Bourbons it appears on coins with royal effigies and although a minor emblem it appears in the decoration of Versailles. The Revolution makes it a representation of national identity, reinforced by Louis Philippe and Napoléon III. To a Frenchman of the Third Republic the cock would have represented a not explicitly royalist symbol but one symbolizing the permanency and might of the French state.
clock by Allard, in finely chased ormolu, surmounted by the allegorical figure of a boy with a cock’; it is possible that the twelfth duke may have ordered a ‘restoration’ from Allard that entailed supporting the stately associations of his family desk with the addition of the bronze. The Vanderbilt clock was eventually installed by a mirror bay in the remodeled ballroom of West 57th Street where it was dwarfed by the scale but in harmony stylistically with the paneled décor (Fig. 5.). A later Boulle acquisition seems to have been intended for the Newport summer cottage ‘The Breakers’ (1895).

In this case it is unlikely that the piece came from an English source for the Boulle bureau plat is stamped ‘Beurdeley’ and perfectly matches a reproduction Boulle desk, veneered in Indian tortoise shell with Boulle cast mounts, offered as lot 284 in the 6-9 May, 1895 sale of furnishings from the workshop of Alfred Beurdeley sold at the Galerie Georges Petit in Paris. It was prominently placed in the centre of the summer villa’s great hall and additional Boulle style furnishings may have been destined for the house. An 1894 water colour rendering for Mr. Vanderbilt’s bedroom at ‘The Breakers’ by the architect Ogden Codman depicts a Boulle armoire; the project was realized as drawn with the exception of the armoire.

The acquisition of the Vanderbilt Boulle collection from the London trade becomes more apparent in the most comprehensive Louis XIV architectural setting designed by a member of the family, Alva Vanderbilt’s ‘Marble House’ (1888-1892), in Newport. Insisting on being given title to the proposed summer villa outright, as a

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115 Objets d’Art et de Riche Ameublement exécutés dans les Ateliers et sous la Direction de M.A. Beurdeley, auction catalogue, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 6-9 mai, 1895.
further reward for services to the family, Alva set about creating, with Hunt and
Allard, a personalized cliff-side version of ‘Versailles improved’. The resultant
grand salon, functioning again as a ballroom, is a compendium of the owner’s ‘motifs
chéris’, garnered during her Parisian sojourns, with ‘appropriate Louis XIV
furnishings’ The ‘appropriate’ inventory comprised a Boulle style bureau plat, a
pair of Boulle meubles d’appui, a Boulle clock and filing cabinet and a Boulle
pedestal cabinet. The first, a desk (Fig. 6.), is related to a circa 1710 model by Boulle
for the duc de Bourbon exhibited during the nineteenth-century at the Louvre. It is
missing its border of Boulle marquetry from the top and has been embellished with a
gilt bronze molding around the surface edge. In this deviation from the French model,
the desk more closely resembles a period Boulle bureau plat in the Wallace
Collection, associated with the collection of Frederick, duke of York and altered in
London circa 1850. That the unsigned première partie Vanderbilt desk follows the
Wallace model rather then the Louvre model might indicate the hand of a skilled
specialist in neo-Boulle such as John Webb (active London, 1825-1860), best
remembered for Lord Hertford’s 1857 copy of the Boulle writing table for Maximilian
II Emanuel, Elector of Bavaria. Similarly the pair of première partie Boulle wall
cabinets acquired by Alva Vanderbilt, and placed in her ground floor corridor, consist
of conscious copies of the late seventeenth-century cabinets by Boulle in the English
Royal Collections. Similarly displayed in the grand corridor of Windsor Castle, the
English models were reworked in the nineteenth-century by Morel and Seddon with
the addition of an ebonized and gilt bronze-mounted plinth in the manner of J.L.F.

Delorme.121 It is again the restored English model with its attractive association, rather than a French public collections piece, that served as a prototype. As for the pedestal and clock and filing cabinets, these were placed against mirrored north and south wall bays. The première partie pedestal cabinet is mid-nineteenth-century after a cabinet on stand by Boulle and the première partie clock and filing cabinet are separately attributed to Boulle’s workshops but were brought together and much embellished in mid-nineteenth-century England.122 These latter pieces together with the Carolus Duran 1894 portrait of Consuelo Vanderbilt and a Louvre grande galerie Savonnerie carpet were removed from the room by Consuelo, duchess of Marlborough, for the redecoration of the state rooms at Blenheim Palace and her later Paris residence, where, with the exception of the carpet, they remain today.123 The English-supplied Boulle furniture collected by the Vanderbilt brothers and their wives constitutes the first grand siècle collection of its type in America and in its preference primarily for embellished première partie cases and in its taste for period and recombined Boulle, it echoes the aesthetic profile of the British, rather than Continental, gentleman collector of French decorative arts, as personified by the Hertfords.

The aesthetic goal Alva Vanderbilt aspired to with her Marble House could not have been more apparent. The entrance hall features a copy (1891), by Edme Suchetet (1854-1932), of Bernini’s 1665 bust of the youthful Louis XIV (Fig. 7.). The king is flanked by marble bas relief portrait roundels by Karl Bitter (1867-1915) depicting Jules Hardouin-Mansart and his only conceivable rival, in Alva’s opinion,

121 Furniture of Windsor, Royal Collections, London, no date, p. 108.
122 Peter Hughes, ‘Boulle at Blenheim Palace’ Apollo, September, 2006, pp. 50-5.
123 The carpet is now in the Wrightsman Galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Metropolitan acc. # 52.118, Rogers Fund purchase.
Richard Morris Hunt. Nearby hang two Gobelins tapestries from the *Histoire de France* series woven by Pierre-François Cozette (1790), *Le combat de Marcel et de Maillard* and *L’Assassinat de l’Amiral de Coligny*,\(^{124}\) (Fig. 8.) architecturally mounted in frames after Jacques Verbeckt for the *salon d’Hercule*. The tapestries may have been chosen as a reference to Alva’s Huguenot ancestry but more likely for their provenance, reputedly the collections of the duke of Rutland.\(^{125}\) The gunmetal and bronze ramp by Allard is decorated with gilt bronze bas relief trophy plaques cast from the vanished marble originals adorning the fountain of the Bosquet des Dômes at Versailles.\(^{126}\) It was claimed by Alva Vanderbilt that castings for these gilt bronze plaques, and others after Versailles models by Vassé and Ladoireau, were taken at the palace ‘under special permission extended by the French government’.\(^{127}\) It seems more likely these were commercially available to the Paris trade through any of a number of restorers having worked on the site. A further metalworking theme was to reproduce the impact of the original, legendary Versailles silver furniture inventory by ‘improving’ on the concept and commissioning a set of gilt bronze Louis XIV dining chairs, from a design by Allard, in gilt bronze. Manufactured by Jules Allard the chairs remain in place with their original upholstery of gold thread-overlaid silk cut velvet after a Berain-esque motif by the textile designer Roux for Prelle of Lyons.

Perhaps the most directly evocative element was Mrs. Vanderbilt’s collection of royal portraits at Marble House. Grouped in the dining room (Fig. 9.), where

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\(^{124}\) Maurice Fenaille, *Etat general des tapisseries de la manufacture des Gobelins depuis son origine jusqu’à nos jours, 1600-1900*, vol. 2, Paris, 1907, pp. 372-3. Two sets of the series were made after paintings commissioned from a number of artists, with the second set being the last produced at Gobelins before the Revolution. *Le combat de Marcel et de Maillard* (after a cartoon by Bethelemy) is the sixth in the first set and *L’Assassinat de l’Amiral de Coligny* (after a cartoon by Suvée) is the eighth in the second set.


Numidian marble wall bays were geometrically designed to receive them, hang portraits of Louis XIV, Louis XV, Maximilian II Emmanuel of Bavaria, and the duchesse d’Orléans. The likeness of Louis XIV hangs over a salon d’Hercule-inspired mantel, reflecting the décor of the salon as known in the nineteenth-century when the Veronese from Versailles was replaced with an equestrian portrait of Louis. The portrait is a variant on the 1668 allegory of Louis as Protector of the Arts, commissioned by the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture from Henri Testelin (1616-1695). Believed to have been presented to the council chamber at Ypres, the canvas was cut from its frame during the Revolution and was subsequently acquired on the English market by Wertheimer. Its impression on visitors may have been magnetic. By 1897 Alva would offer her son-in-law, the ninth duke of Marlborough, an identical version of this portrait, also mounted as an over mantel for the second state room at Blenheim, where the Bourbon association was more historically-based than at Newport. Louis XV at the Age of 13 (1723) is one of a half dozen versions of the subject by Jean-Baptiste Van Loo and his school. This work is in an elaborately carved rococo presentation frame bearing the arms of the comte d’Artois. The arms were likely married to the frame during the era of the duchesse de Berry or fabricated by Allard. Joseph Duveen was more taken with the frame than the painting and is quoted by Alva as proclaiming it ‘the handsomest frame he had ever seen and worth $30,000.’ She did not resist the temptation to sell and the Louis XV together with the following portraits were consigned to Duveen in 1926 only to be returned unsold to the house in 1930. The other pair of portraits represented Max Emmanuel of Bavaria (1706) by Hyacinthe Rigaud and the duchesse d’Orléans.

(c.1715) attributed to Nicolas de Largillière. The Rigaud was thought to represent the duc d’Orléans and these latter works were originally acquired as pendants.

Of the architecturally mounted ceiling paintings, three are of particular note. The practice of removing seventeenth and eighteenth-century ceiling paintings from period buildings was commonplace in nineteenth-century Paris and entailed the specialized services of a rentoileur.\(^{131}\) It was his job to remove the painting in strips, to reassemble and reback the work. Once Allard took charge of the canvas’s resale and reinstallation, additional figures or scenery were often painted-in, to hide seams, and the canvas might be extended or cut down according to the architectural needs of the ceiling decoration.\(^{132}\) This seemingly cavalier approach to often significant compositions was in many respects an act of salvation for works which were located in imperiled interiors. It was often viewed as modern restoration. Once in place the paintings were generally glued directly to the masonry with white lead to insure a stable surface but, in so doing, they were permanently joined to the destiny of the structure. That this was not an apparent concern is apparent in Alva Vanderbilt’s reflections on Marble House: ‘It was like a fourth child to me and I felt, and feel, that it belongs to me, and to my children after me.’\(^{133}\) Ironically this dynastic dream would be quickly thwarted. She would live to see her children decline the house, which Consuelo dubbed ‘a prison’, and its token sale for $1 to a Newport neighbor in 1932.\(^{134}\)

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Labeled as ‘Tintorettos’ by her Memoirs, the grand salon ceiling painting is an eighteenth-century allegory from the hôtel de Clermont in Paris by Hugues Taraval (1729-1785) and the dining room, a nineteenth-century composition from an still unknown French source. The salon canvas was installed in the hotel de Clermont during the architect Jean-François Chalgrin’s renovations for the comte d’Orsay in 1771; the pasted canvas ceiling was removed in the late nineteenth-century and entered Allard’s stock. Based on Pietro da Cortona’s works in the palazzo Pitti, the work was probably commissioned by the Orsay as a souvenir of his grand tour. Taraval’s cut down canvas represents Athena Rescuing a Youth from Idleness (Fig. 10.), depicting Athena seizing a youth from the bed of sloth and idleness and carrying him off to the industrious arms of Hercules. As installed at Marble House, Hercules, who should be represented in the upper right quadrant of the composition, has been cut out to create an octagonal outline for the canvas. The shape was dictated by the decorative stucco surround, executed for Allard by Hamel of Paris, loosely copied from Marie Antoinette’s bedchamber at Versailles. In the dining room, the later allegorical canvas depicts the Abduction of Psyché (Fig. 11.) and has been extended on all sides to meet a similar stucco surround by Hamel. Several rather hastily sketched attendants have also been added to conceal earlier damage.

The ceiling roundel in Mrs. Vanderbilt’s bedroom is the least altered work (Fig. 12.). A circa 1722 painting by Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini (1675-1741), removed from the library of the palazzo Pisani in Venice by Allard, it depicts

135 One ceiling painting, Psyché, by Taraval, was reinstalled in the hôtel Veil-Picard, Paris, demolished in 1970.
137 A ceiling design for this project signed by Florian Kulikowski for Hamel survives in the R.M. Hunt Papers at the AIA Foundation in Washington, D.C.
Minerva, Goddess of Wisdom, Overcoming Time. A related, larger ceiling by Pellegrini, The Chariot of Aurora from the palazzo Pisani’s ballroom, would in a curious twist of fate be installed by Allard in the library of brother-in-law George W. Vanderbilt’s ‘Biltmore’ in 1894.\(^{139}\) The Minerva theme so appropriate for a library, has here been appropriated by Mrs. Vanderbilt for her bedchamber as part of her rather telling iconography.

Although Jules Allard was busy supplying architectural paintings, Samson Wertheimer was equally busy supplying Old Masters and eighteenth-century paintings for the New York house. The new association with Wertheimer began quite simply, Alva Vanderbilt ‘was anxious to find a Rembrandt of the first grade’.\(^{140}\) When Rembrandt’s The Jewish Bride\(^ {141}\) proved unavailable, Wertheimer proposed The Moldavian Chief (1652)\(^ {142}\) which was promptly accepted. The prize gained, it was hung off the salon of 660 Fifth Avenue in a small Renaissance style breakfast room in company with portraits of Charles I and Henrietta Maria by the School of Van Dyck. In the spirit of her Boucher cartoon tapestries, Alva also requested and was furnished a major oil painting by François Boucher. Known as the Toilette of Venus (1751) (Fig.13.)\(^ {143}\) the painting and its pendant Venus consoling Love were commissioned by Madame de Pompadour for her château of Bellevue in commemoration of her title role in the play The Toilette of Venus staged at Versailles in 1750. Given the fleshy subject and the theme of a lady’s toilette, the canvas was

\(^{141}\) Now in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
\(^{142}\) Now known as The Noble Slav or Man in an Oriental Costume, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession no. 20.155.2.
\(^{143}\) Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession no. 20.155.9.
hung in Alva’s boudoir. More problematic to hang was Jean-Baptiste Greuze’s *Les Oeufs Cassés* (1756), an allusion to lost virginity, it somehow found its way to the breakfast room. Since the house had no picture gallery, the full length Royal Academy portraits supplied by Wertheimer of *Mrs. Grace Dalrymple Elliott* (1778), by Thomas Gainsborough, and *Captain George Coussmaker* (1782), by Sir Joshua Reynolds, were hung beneath the musician’s gallery in the Gothic dining hall. The independent courtesan life of Mrs. Elliott in London and Paris must have provided Mrs. Vanderbilt with a historical narrative quite different from that of her father-in-law’s *Reception of Condé*. Both portraits feature very attractive and elegant subjects that set the tone in the profile of Royal Academy portraiture to be collected in the ensuing decades by Americans, a trend remarked in the ‘pretty’ pictures passing through Wertheimer and Duveen’s showrooms. As if reluctantly following suit, Cornelius Vanderbilt II arranged to buy from Samson Wertheimer’s son Asher a pair of Sir Peter Lely portraits from the ex-Robert Walpole collection at Houghton. Depicting Anne of Ditchly and Jenny Deering (both circa 1680), the portraits hung in the common parlour of Houghton as overdoors. Their status as such limited their appeal to Catherine the Great and they were omitted from the 1779 sale to Catherine, remaining in place until sold at Christie’s by the fourth marquess of Cholmondeley. Not unlike his sister-in-law, Cornelius II found it appropriate to hang his English portraits in his New York dining room (Fig. 14.). There the ‘Walpole pictures’ were

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144 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession no. 20.155.8.
145 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession no. 20.155.1.
146 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession no. 20.155.3.
149 Christie’s, 10 July, 1886, lot no. 211.
surrounded by Barbizon works from whence they were removed for over-mantel hanging in ‘The Breakers’, Newport in 1895.\textsuperscript{150} 

It is impossible for us to know how further the senior brothers of the third generation would have progressed along the path of collecting and patronage due to the untimely intrusion of death and divorce. On March 5, 1895 Alva Vanderbilt blazed a new trail when she became the first leader of society to divorce her husband on grounds of adultery. As part of the divorce agreement the Riesener furniture and the paintings were not divided but set aside as a future William K. Vanderbilt bequest (1920) to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. 660 Fifth Avenue and Marble House were closed and a period of residency abroad commenced. In the summer of 1896 elder brother Cornelius Vanderbilt II suffered a debilitating stroke and remained in fragile health until his death from a cerebral hemorrhage in 1899, effectively ending any further evolution of their generation in matters of artistic taste.

\textsuperscript{150} Ann of Ditchly remains as the over mantel of the morning room at The Breakers, Preservation Society of Newport County accession no. 11160. Jenny Deering remains in the Vanderbilt family.
Chapter 4: A Stylistic Denouement

In the final years of his life, Cornelius Vanderbilt II, heretofore largely reacting to Alva and William K.’s lead rather than instigating the Vanderbilt association with matters artistic, set off on a remarkable path, consolidating the family’s sponsorship of academic period rooms. Between 1893 and 1895, he engaged his architect G.B. Post in expanding and largely gutting the interiors of One West 57th Street. Allard created, in the new void, a Régence ballroom (Fig. 15.) and a Louis XV grand salon. In the absence of historical models for a ballroom of Belle Époque dimensions, Allard amplified the 1717 design for the hôtel de Toulouse’s galerie dorée by Robert de Cotte and created a 65’ x 50’, white and gold paneled and stucco wall decoration with ceiling and coves painted by the Salon painter Edouard Toudouze (1848-1907).\textsuperscript{151} The carved trophies of the paneling are after Antoine Vassé’s original marine and hunt carvings and the gilt stucco allegorical bas reliefs, decorating the coves at opposite ends of the ballroom, are closely related to the similarly-sited stucco work in the galerie dorée. Such a precise reference implies privileged access to the hôtel de Toulouse, since 1808, the seat of the Banque de France.\textsuperscript{152} In reality, the galerie dorée was largely rebuilt, due to the failure of its ceiling vault, between 1869 and 1879 and any of a number of decorators working on


the project could have made casts of the sculptural programme for subsequent use or sale.\textsuperscript{153}

A similar degree of architectural precision is seen in the commission for the adjacent grand salon (Fig. 16.). Here Allard suggested as model the 1740 grand salon of the hôtel Jacques-Samuel Bernard carved by Jean-Marie Pelletier. Dismantled in 1887, the salon had been reassembled the following year by the decorator Eugène Barriol at the 41 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré mansion of baron Edmond de Rothschild (1845-1934).\textsuperscript{154} Barriol had taken great pain to sketch the room before dismantlement and took casts of the original cornice and cove before their destruction. The layout of the room for the baron de Rothschild did not however follow the original disposition of the paneling nor was the original cornice stucco model, depicting allegories of the fine arts to match the iconography of the wall trophies, used in its entirety. As Bruno Pons has pointed out, it was only in the 1893 installation of Cornelius Vanderbilt’s version of the room in New York that the 1740 cornice model was fully utilized as intended.\textsuperscript{155} Through professional ties, it appears that Allard had access to the original casts.\textsuperscript{156} In the choice, as prototype, of the Bernard paneled salon, that of an un-aristocratic merchant banker, rather than the more popular 1890s model in Allard’s oeuvre of the \textit{cabinet intérieur du roi} by Verbeckt, Vanderbilt demonstrated an aesthetic judgment evolving away from the convenient Versailles models.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid, p. 197. In fact King Ludwig II of Bavaria was so taken with the restoration that he requested elevational drawings for himself.
\textsuperscript{156} Both models have however since been destroyed, the Rothschild cornice was not copied for the period salon’s final transfer, and 1969 re-installation by Henri Samuel, as a Rothschild gift to the Israel Museum, Jerusalem and the New York cornice was destroyed with the building in 1927.
Having given evidence, in the final renovations to his city residence, of a taste for soundly grounded period style rooms, Cornelius Vanderbilt II was perhaps seen by Allard as receptive to the acquisition of a true period room for his, and R.M. Hunt’s, final project, the 1893-1895 erection of a neo-Renaissance Genoese palazzo-inspired summer villa in Newport known as ‘The Breakers’ (Fig. 17.). Allard had charge again of the reception rooms, which in a conscious attempt to re-establish the seniority, in all matters, of Cornelius as head of the House of Vanderbilt, endowed the structure with civic-scaled Third Republic French interiors reminiscent of the Paris Opera and Hôtel de Ville. A few pieces were acquired on a Renaissance or Italian theme such as a circa 1530 Burgundian chimneypiece formerly in the Frédéric Spitzer collection and a pair of roman Baroque armchairs with Borghese-Barberini arms and a circa 1780 Valadier and Asprucci console (Fig. 18.) from the Paolo Borghese sale in Paris. Overall the furnishings were made by the firm’s Paris workshops after Renaissance models illustrated in Havard, a novelty being however that several suites were platinum rather than gold-leafed, surpassing Alva’s gilt rather than silver seat furniture.

In this heady atmosphere, Jules Allard proposed a complete Louis XVI period room (Fig. 19.) from his stock that was, as recorded by the family, commissioned by Marie Antoinette as a gift to her goddaughter Mademoiselle de St. Aulaire. This

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157 Acquired with its pendant at the Spitzer sale by the Paris antiquities dealer Heilbronner and sold via Allard to the Vanderbilts; the pendant was sold by Allard to W.W. Astor for the hall of Cliveden in 1895.
158 Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 2-3 July, 1891.
160 Archives of the Preservation Society of Newport County, handwritten note (without date) in the hand of Countess Laszlo Széchényi.
story may have been an attempt to endow a ‘masculine Louis XVI’ room with a feminine and royal provenance, indeed the space allocated was destined for a ‘ladies’ reception room. It also echoes the Marie Antoinette association given the room’s ‘mate’, a cabinet from the same house acquired by the South Kensington Museum, London in 1869, a parallel Allard would surely have pointed out. It may, more importantly be, at this juncture that Cornelius Vanderbilt recognized the quality of the carving, trophies of the arts and sciences (by Gilles-Paul Cauvet circa 1778), and the innovative allegorical overdoors, as an important period ensemble, for it was quickly installed having only entered Allard’s stock when salvaged at the 1894 sale of Henry Dasson’s bronze foundry at 106, rue Vieille du Temple (the former hôtel Mégret de Sérilly). Foreshortened, embellished and reworked, the resultant ‘Marie Antoinette Room’ is nonetheless, in its essential elements, the first true French period room in America, having been removed from a townhouse in the Marais in Paris to a setting designed to receive it reassembled. The architectural reassembly took precedence and the furnishing plan for the room was never fully evolved; in much the same way as the period rooms in the city homes, a banal Louis XVI revival suite filled the space awaiting a further evolutionary phase.

162 Ibid, p. 372
CONCLUSION

With this generation of Vanderbilts, the family’s preoccupation with erecting Bourbon-inspired architectural monuments, begun with the Medicean aims of their father William Henry Vanderbilt, comes to a close. Prior to any economic need to consolidate, the family completed a cycle of architectural patronage with which their name has now become inextricably linked. That this palatial building campaign had a cultural mission at start became progressively less clear as the competition between the two senior brothers, Cornelius and William K. sought to refine the nature of Vanderbilt taste. That this taste should be as respected as the family’s economic prowess meant that it should avoid the pratfalls of provincialism so leveled against 640 Fifth Avenue. It required being taken seriously on an international level and to achieve such esteem matters of art and architecture were abetted by international arbiters such as Richard Morris Hunt, Samson Wertheimer and Jules Allard. Each, in their own way or collaboratively, added stimuli which triggered new pursuits amongst family members. There is no denying however that the most powerful agent of taste was family muse Alva Vanderbilt. It was largely her perception of what a Vanderbilt style should represent that turned the family away from collecting paintings to
collecting houses.\textsuperscript{163} The family no longer identified acquiring fine art as their 
priority.\textsuperscript{164}

With Hunt and Allard as their guides the senior brothers saw the effective 
means of obtaining the state of grace status of refined patrons. Their potential glory 
lay in promoting the high style interior architecture they so effectively patronized, and 
to a degree, launched. Launched that is as the initial response to the acquisition of 
royal furniture. Once embraced by both critics and the family, the interiors evolved, 
with concessions to function and comfort, towards a more studied evocation of the 
past. The attempt to create a modern Louis XIV inventory at ‘Marble House’ was an 
ambitious program reminiscent of Ludwig II’s scheme for Herrenchiemsee (1885). 
Such sensibilities culminated in the emergence of a period room in the truest sense of 
the term by the close of the century. It is images of these evolving luxurious rooms, 
more than any other, that come to mind consciously and sub-consciously when one 
seeks to visualize a ‘Vanderbilt’ interior. Whether or not the Vanderbilts were active 
or passive participants in the stylistic definition of these interiors and the taste that has 
become synonymous with their name is the question we must pose of all ‘goût’ labels; 
they remain however for America the consummate symbol of the ‘International Style’ 
of the Belle Époque. French novelist Paul Bourget (1852-1935) wrote the summary 
judgment on the Vanderbilt interiors as he saw them in the Newport of 1893: ‘Cet 

\textsuperscript{163} The Wertheimer-supplied works remain nonetheless masterpieces of the Metropolitan’s collections. 
Cornelius, for fourteen years chairman of the Museum’s Collections Committee, also donated Rosa 
Bonheur’s \textit{The Horse Fair}, and Turner’s \textit{Grand Canal}, amongst the most valued paintings given any 
museum in the nineteenth-century.

\textsuperscript{164} In contrast to such contemporaries as the H.O. Havemeyers. By 1892 L.C. Tiffany designed an 
artistic home for Henry O. and Louise Havemeyer, social peers of the Vanderbilts, that recalled the 
La Farge interiors of Cornelius Vanderbilt II (Katherine S. Howe, \textit{Herter Brothers, Furniture and 
Interiors for a Gilded Age}, New York, 1994, p. 77). Rather than alter their architectural interior as it 
became outmoded, the Havemeyers sought to add more art, moving from Salon artists to the 
Impressionists creating the Havemeyer Collection, bequeathed to the Metropolitan in 1929. The 
Vanderbilts instead upgraded their architecture.
effort pour s’entourer, pour s’ennobrir du passé, sauve ce que ces intérieurs de
millionnaires auraient de si brutal, de si fait à coups de dollars et pour la montrer. C’est
un peu de poésie inattendue dans ce qui ne serait sans cela que l’apothéose du chèque
et du chic.\textsuperscript{165}

\textsuperscript{165} Paul Bourget, \textit{Outre Mer, Notes sur l’Amerique}, Alphonse Lemerre (ed.), Passage Choiseul, Paris,
1895, p. 75.
Fig. 1. Pierre-Philippe Thomire (mounts), 'Demidoff Vase' (1819) gilt bronze and malachite urn, as drawn by Durin in the main vestibule of 640 Fifth Avenue (1883), William H. Vanderbilt residence, New York. (Photo: Edward Strahan, Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection, plate: 'main vestibule', Vol. I)
Fig. 3. Jules Allard et ses Fils, Paris, Régence Salon (1883), William K. Vanderbilt residence, 660 Fifth Avenue, New York, circa 1885. (Photo: By courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County.)
Fig. 17. Richard Morris Hunt and Jules Allard et ses Fils, ‘The Breakers’ (1895), Cornelius Vanderbilt II summer villa, Newport. (Photo: Richard Cheek; By courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County.)
Fig. 14. Sir Peter Lely, Jenny Deering (upper left) and Anne of Ditchley (lower right), (both circa 1680), oil on canvas, dining room, Cornelius Vanderbilt II residence (1893), One West 57th Street, New York. (Photo: By courtesy of the Vanderbilt family and from a circa 1895 family album.)
Fig. 5. Attributed to workshop of André Charles Boulle, Régulateur (circa 1720) as shown in ballroom, Cornelius Vanderbilt II residence (1893), One West 57th Street, New York. (Photo: By courtesy of the Vanderbilt Family and from a circa 1895 family album.)
Fig. 15. Jules Allard et ses Fils, ballroom (1893), Cornelius Vanderbilt II residence, One West 57th Street, New York. (Photo: By courtesy of the Vanderbilt family and from a circa 1895 family album.)
Fig. 18. Valadier and Asprucci, console, (circa 1780), made for the villa Borghese, Rome; ‘The Breakers’ (1895), Cornelius Vanderbilt II summer villa, Newport. (Photo: By courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County.)
Fig. 16. Jules Allard et ses Fils, grand salon (1893), Cornelius Vanderbilt II residence, One West 57th Street, New York. (Photo: By courtesy of the Vanderbilt family and from a circa 1895 family album.)
Fig. 4. Jules Allard et ses Fils, petit salon (1883), Cornelius Vanderbilt II residence, One West 57th Street, New York. (Photo: By courtesy of the Vanderbilt family and from a circa 1895 family album.)
Fig. 6. Boulle style bureau plat, (circa 1890), ‘Marble House’ (1892), Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt summer villa, Newport. (Photo: By courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County.)
Fig. 19. Gilles-Paul Cauvet, *Architecture boiserie panel (circa 1778) from a salon at the hôtel Mégret de Sérilly, Paris; As reinstalled in the ladies reception room, ‘The Breakers’ (1895), the Cornelius Vanderbilt II summer villa, Newport. (Photo: By courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County.)
Fig. 8. Pierre-François Cozette, L’Assassinat de l’Amiral de Coligny, Gobelins tapestry, (1790), ‘Marble House’ (1892), Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt summer villa, Newport. (Photo: By courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County.)
Fig. 13. François Boucher, *The Toilette de Venus*, (1751), oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest (1920) of William K. Vanderbilt. (Photo: By courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.)
Fig. 11. Hugues Taraval (after Pietro da Cortona) Minerva Rescuing a Youth from Idleness, (circa 1771), oil on canvas applied as ceiling painting, ballroom, ‘Marble House’ (1892), Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt summer villa, Newport. (Photo: By courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County.)
Fig. 12. Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini, Minerva, Goddess of Wisdom, Overcoming Time, (circa 1722), oil on canvas applied as ceiling painting, Mrs. Vanderbilt’s bedroom, ‘Marble House’ (1892), Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt summer villa, Newport. (Photo: By courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County.)
Fig. 10. Hugues Taraval, The Abduction of Psyché, oil on canvas applied as ceiling painting, (circa 1771), dining room, ‘Marble House’ (1892), Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt summer villa, Newport. (Photo: By courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County.)
Fig. 2. Jean-Henri Riesener, Secrétaire for Marie Antoinette at St. Cloud (1783), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest (1920) of William K. Vanderbilt. (Photo: By courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.)
Fig. 7. Jules Allard et ses Fils, grand stair (1892), ‘Marble House’, Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt summer villa, Newport. (Photo: By courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County).
Fig. 9. Jules Allard et ses Fils, et al; dining room (1892), ‘Marble House’, Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt summer villa, Newport. (Photo: By courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County.)