



Above: Antiques and taxidermy by Lee Hardcastle Antiques, Sydney.
 Top right: 19th century carved frog handle walking stick from Greengrass Antiques.

PETIT PALAIS

For the potential collector, interior designer or architect looking for long-term investments as well as decorative pieces suited to contemporary interiors, French antiques certainly deserve attention

Think of Versailles with room upon room filled with glorious treasures, and then you have a glimpse into the world of Anton Venoir Interiors — a business with a passion for French decorative wares.

There are only a few authentic period interiors that have survived since the French

Revolution. Anton Venoir Interiors' collection of French antiques places the business in a league of its own, collecting and selling the most elegant pieces of the highest quality. "We are only interested in perfection," say Tony and Anna Venios, who advise decorative art collectors. "It is much more important to buy one significantly important piece than several less-significant pieces. This has been our model for more than 20 years."

Their business specialises in fine French furniture, textiles and objet d'art from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. The collection is displayed in a private showroom where you can view and appreciate the diversity and fine quality of the pieces. Apartment 26/321 Chapel Street is an opulent Parisian salon in the heart of Melbourne's design and fashion precinct. Nothing will prepare you for the experience behind the door, marked 26. There one can enjoy the world of Anton Venoir Interiors, often labelled "Petit Palais", a private salon where guests are invited to enjoy the elegance and luxury of the latest acquisitions.

Often referred to as a private museum, the decorative arts, fabrics and furnishings inside pay homage to the French period, considered the apogee of elegance and design, which is the way Tony and Anna have operated for years. The effect of perfect pieces, which have been lost in time, arranged by Tony, is breathtaking.

Anton Venoir Interiors sells 18th-century French decorative arts, Louis XIV, XV and XVI (1643-1792) and often signed and stamped pieces from ebenistes and clockmakers, who often made pieces for monarchs and the royal court. The magnificent collection of 17th, 18th and 19th century French decorative arts the couple has assembled include many pieces headed for museums.

Each item has been carefully studied, assessed and chosen — from chairs, clocks, mirrors and tapestries to commodes, salon suites, tulipwood and kingwood pieces with brèche violette marble tops, from the 17th century to the 19th century in the styles of Louis XIV, Régence, Louis XV and Louis XVI.

The 18th century in France, like the rest of Europe and Britain, was filled with glory years, the fertile, rich land providing prosperity through active trade. More sophisticated pieces were influenced by Paris as the 18th-century Provencal furniture makers responded to the

latest fashions from the capital.

Mirrors from the region near Beaucaire were revered for the quality of regional timber used. Their strength facilitated the work of the sculptor who carved its applied decorative ornament that was later gilded. The residents of Arles, Beaucaire and Tarascon supported the tradition of fine furniture making in their region, produced by local craftsmen.

Anton Venoir Interiors currently offers a splendid 17th-century royal Aubusson tapestry by Isaac Moillon (1614-1673), which depicts the Banquet of Dido and Aeneas. In the grand palace of Carthage, the guests at a banquet are gathered around Dido Queen of Carthage, who has her arm around Cupid, an indication the Trojan hero Aeneas on her right is holding her captive with his many charms. Accompanied by Achate, Aeneas is relating to Dido the story of the misfortunes of the city of Troy. The border of the tapestry is a garland of flowers and it's signed "A Fleurs de Lys B" — royal factory of Aubusson. The factory produced both carpets and tapestries in France from the 14th century. Their origin was with the weavers of Flanders, who sought refuge in the town of Aubusson in the late 1500s.

During the 17th century, Aubusson weavers were given Royal Appointment status. Aubusson, and also the Gobelins workshops, which King Louis XIV (1638-1715) purchased in 1662, then took tapestry making to a high art form.

French decorative art reached its peak of excellence during France's ancient regime in the 17th and 18th centuries. For the first and probably the last time, a beautiful Louis XV bureau plat, a great painting, a magnificent Louis XIV tapestry and a Louis XVI canape stood side by side as equals in artistry.

Anton Venoir Interiors also has a base in Europe and imports pieces that are shown off to perfection in the private Prahran showroom. Here you can view pieces from this collection for yours. 🐾

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