

MAKING FASHIONABLE FURNITURE IN ENGLAND AND FRANCE DURING THE AGE OF ELEGANCE



Chapter III

**How did the Neo-Classical Style
Develop in England and France?**

On the cover:

- From Robert Woods drawings in the book, *Ruins of Palmyra*, 1753 (first edition)
Picture taken from website: <http://www.manhattanrarebooks-art.com/wood.htm>,
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A. Introduction

This chapter traces the source of the Neo-Classical revival. Many authors relate the start of the Neo-Classical revival to the discovery of two important ruins in Italy – that of Pompeii (1748) and Herculaneum (1738). Though these two events did increase the interest in the ancient civilizations and for the first time provided examples of the household items of ancient Rome, the interest in the ancient design ideas began well before the C18th. This chapter will outline how the revival of classical ideals first impacted upon architecture and interiors, then furniture design. However, before beginning this account, it may be useful to identify a number of assumptions that shaped the research.

- The first assumption was that furniture designs followed interior designs, which in turn followed exterior and structural architectural designs. It was for this reason that the investigation into where the English and the French got their Neo-Classical furniture designs began with architecture. While there are correlations between the three, it will be demonstrated that this was not as strong a relationship prior to the Neo-Classical period as assumed. This period marked the moment when the correlation between architecture and furniture design became pronounced.
- The second assumption was that there was some kind of definitive demarcation between the development of the Neo-Classical style and prior styles. This line of demarcation will be shown to be blurred, as it became clear that there was a great deal of overlap between the Neo-Classical style and the Rococo - the previously dominant style. However, there were marked similarities between the design which emerged in the Neo-Classical era and classical architectural designs of earlier revivals, demonstrating that most design impulses tend to be cyclical and that the 'Neo-Classical Revival' of the C18th was the latest of many earlier revivals – if (arguably) more extensive and long-lived than any before or since.

B. The Neo-Classical Revival in England and France

The emergence of the 'Neo-Classical' style in England and France during the mid to late C18th was complicated - involving a play of influence between a number of different countries, people and events and around a number of (seemingly) unlikely areas such as politics and philosophy. As with all fashions, it seems clear that this is one example where the changes in design did not operate in a vacuum (does it ever?) but seems to have been an intimate part of the wider social and cultural changes of the time. To this end, it seems that the best way to understand the resurgence of Neo-Classical influence in these two countries is to set the stage by describing some indicative cultural events.

The Neo-Classical revival chimed with the period that is frequently called the 'Age of Enlightenment' or the 'Age of Reason.' This was a period of intensive changes. Philosophers such as John Locke (English, 1632–1704), David Hume (English, 1711–1776) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, (French, 1712–1778)¹ for example, all developed new ideas about how people should live. They asked questions about all aspects of life and they sought the 'truth' behind ideas through the application of reason. It was a period in which accepted authorities were questioned – and in France this meant the authority of the Crown in particular came under challenge.²

¹ Even Marie Antoinette was to show interest in the ideas of Rousseau and to show some support for him by visiting his tomb and admiring its simplicity. It is also believed that she was being influenced by his writings. One example of how the idea of simplicity was entering into Marie Antoinette's taste was in clothing. This was shown in her giving permission for men to dress in simple frockcoats in her presence, then in how she started preferring simpler materials such as linens and cottons over silks, and her lighter use of make-up. (A. Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2001, pp. 209, 266). As mentioned earlier a linen dress was sent to England to The Duchess of Devonshire that started to transfer the fashion trend to that country.

It should also be pointed out that while Rousseau spoke of simplicity in 'life' in general, which supported the ideas that were coming out of the Neo-Classical approach to art, design and architecture, he also wrote of the need for things to occur freely and without constraint which, one could argue, supported the ideas behind Rococo designs.

² This is one point where the political situation interacted with design. Rococo and all of its excesses became associated with the Royalty and as a result, Neo-Classical design became associated with the revolt against the excesses. In England Neo-Classical design became associated with the Whigs. Ironically, in the newly found country of the United States, the colonial version of Neo-Classical (Federal Style) became associated with their independence from the English monarchy.

One area where they searched for ‘truth’ was in art and architecture and the Classical ideal came to represent a kind of truth. Hume for example, in *Of the Standard of Taste*, suggests that the classical style offered ‘proof’ that there was an absolute standard of good taste.³ While other philosophers were less insistent in this regard, their ideas were consistent with the adoption of classical ideals.

Coincidentally, with this search for truth was an increased interest in the application of logic. Many Enlightenment scholars believed any problem could be solved through the careful application of logic. The ancient classical civilizations of Greece and Rome were strongly associated with such intellectual pursuits and as a result, in subjects ranging from art, to philosophy, to mathematics and architecture, the literati of England and France looked to the ancient civilizations for inspiration. Neo-Classicism became the artistic expression of these pursuits.⁴

Because the lead in the development of the Neo-Classical design in furniture came primarily from architecture, the discussion about where the design ideas came into furniture will begin here. As suggested above, many authors relate the start of the Neo-Classical revivals to the discoveries of Pompeii (1748) and Herculaneum (1738). While these two discoveries were important, the interest in the ancient civilizations architectural designs began as far back as the Renaissance and while interest was sporadic, prior to the C18th there was always interest in this subject. For example, the architectural studies of the Roman writer Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (80–70 BC - after 15 BC) were published in 1486. The response to *De Architectura* was so positive that it was subsequently translated into Italian (1521), French (1547) and English (1543) as well as several other languages. It was in this text

³ M. Bartholomew, D. Hall and A. Lentin, *The Enlightenment*, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK, 1992, p. 220.

⁴ Although a bit later than the period defined as the main focus of this thesis, Beau Brummell, (1778 - 1840) established the mode of men wearing understated, but fitted, beautifully cut clothes, adorned with an elaborately-knotted cravat, which became the model or dress for men even today. His inspiration for this approach to dress was to emulate the perfect proportions exhibited by ancient Greek and Roman statues of men. (I. Kelly, *Beau Brummell: The Ultimate Dandy*, Hodder and Stoughton, LTD, London, 2005.)

(known today as *The Ten Books on Architecture*) that the classical orders (Tuscan, Doric, Ionic and Corinthian) were first described and concepts of order, arrangement, eurhythmy and symmetry were first specified.⁵ These formed the basis of much of the Neo-Classical architecture that was executed in the late C18th by architects in England and France.

The involvement of the French Royal family (and hence the Government of France) was instrumental in the development of architectural design. Their interest (ironically) started somewhat as the result of their political ambitions. France first learnt something of classical material culture as a result of war with Italy in the C15th. It was some time later that Louis XIV was interested in the arts as a way to symbolize France's position in the world. Louis XIV showed an equal interest in classical learning and France became the first country in Europe to set up a professional academy of architecture –The *Académie Royale D'Architecture* (The Royal Academy of Architecture) which was founded on 1671 under Colbert. Its first director was the mathematician and engineer François Blondel (1618-1686) and the academy was to provide a forum for architects to develop the theory of architecture and ensured France's leadership in the field.

In addition to this Royal Academy, Louis XIV (with the assistance of Colbert and Le Brun) founded a school in Italy in 1666 to promote the study of art and architecture of the classical world. French artists awarded the *Prix de Rome* became known as *Pensionnaires de l'Académie* (Academy Pensioners) and their studies helped inspire and sustain classical interest in France and subsequently inform the C18th Revival.

⁵ These last two – eurhythmy and symmetry are very similar in that they reflect a comparison between different aspects of a design. While symmetry concerns the comparison of like measures (height to height, length to length, etc.) eurhythmy involves the comparisons of different measures (height to length, length to depth, etc.). Thus, both look at different aspects of the concept of balance. See R. Padovan, *Proportion: Science, Philosophy, Architecture*, Spon Press, London, 1999, p. 159. Here Padovan is discussing an interpretation of Vitruvius's *de Architecture* by Van der Laan.)



Figure 3-1: The *Marquis de Marigny* Painted by Alexander Roslin in 1764. (Currently at the *Château de Versailles*) In this portrait, the table is in the Neo-Classical style while the Chair is in the Rococo style

These were followed by a number of other notable publications, including J.-A. du Cerceau's three *Livres d'Architecture* (1559-72), and *Plus excellent Bâtimens* in 1576-1579, *Traté de Toute* by Cordemoy in 1706 and Abbé Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753).⁶ In addition, French architects frequently wrote papers on theoretical subjects relating to architecture, something that their English counterparts did not take up until much later in the C18th.

The French were also active in publishing books on classic architecture. The first example was Vitruvius's *Ten Books on Architecture*, first published in 1547 by Jean Martin. Other books followed including translations of Alberti and Serlio (Alberti's *De re aedificatoria - On the Art of Building* in 1443-1452 and Serlio's *Regole generali d'architettura - The General Rules of Architecture* in 1537) both again translated by Jean Martin.



Figure 3-2: Portrait De Jacques Germain Soufflot, French Neo-Classical Architect (1713-1780) Painted by Jean-Pierre Mazies.

⁶ B. Fletcher, (Edited by J. Musgrove), *A History of Architecture, 19th Edition*, Butterworths, London, 1987, pp. 837-840.

In France, a key moment in the development of the Neo-Classical Revival emerged in 1749 when Madame de Pompadour arranged for her 19 year old brother Abel-François Poisson de Vandières (1727 – 1781, see Figure 3-1) to accompany a group of architects and artists on a trip to Italy.⁷ Writing to the *Duc de Nivernais*, (French Ambassador to Rome), she informed him:

*"My brother is taking with him a certain Soufflot of Lyons, a very gifted architect, Cochin whom you know, and I think the Abbé Leblanc."*⁸

While this suggests that Madame de Pompadour took an interest in her brother's activities, it may not necessarily equate with any real interest in the purpose of the trip. However, Posner argues that she did indeed take a great deal of interest in the trip.⁹ What is interesting here is that all three of the architects in the group were critical of the prevailing



Figure 3-3: The Pantheon in Paris is one of Soufflot's most widely recognized buildings.

style of Rococo.¹⁰ This was especially true of Soufflot (a German) who had visited Rome earlier and was a formidable advocate of the Neo-Classical. While Soufflot's opposition to the Rococo was already well known, the other two architects similarly began voicing their opposition after the trip – some years before Robert Adam was to arrive Rome.

Two things were to come out of this trip.

⁷ Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715 –1790), Jacques Germain Soufflot (1713 –1780) and Jean-Bernard, Abbé Le Blanc (1707 – 1781).

⁸ D. Posner, Mme. de Pompadour as a Patron of the Visual Arts, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 72, No. 1, 1990, p. 79.

⁹ D. Posner, Mme. de Pompadour as a Patron of the Visual Arts, p. 80.

¹⁰ Both D. Posner and S. Eriksen suggest that this trip was a way to train Madame de Pompadour's brother to take over as the future *Marquis de Marigny* and *Directeur des Batiments*. The trip served this purpose very well as he did take over from 1751 to 1753 (His full list of titles were to become *Directeur et Ordonnateur des Bastiments, des Jardins, Arts, Academies et Manufactures Royales*.). (See: D. Posner, Mme. de Pompadour as a Patron of the Visual Arts, and S. Eriksen, (Translated by P. Thorton), *Early Neo-Classicism in France: The Creation of the Louis Seize Style in Architectural Decoration, Furniture and Ormalu, Gold and Silver and Sevres Porcelain in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, Faber, London, 1974.)

First of all it resulted in several major publications by Cochin.¹¹ Secondly it inspired Madame de Pompadour's brother (later to become the *Marquis de Marigny*) to take an interest in art and architecture. As the *Marquis de Marigny*, he helped promote *Le Goût Grec* by purchasing a number of pieces of furniture in the Greek style.¹² He also undertook several trips to England to purchase furniture in the Neo-Classical style.¹³

Soufflot (for his part) was to design the Pantheon, one of the most important Neo-Classical buildings in Paris, built in 1771 (See Figure 3-3).¹⁴ Jean-Bernard, (Abbé Le Blanc 1707-1781) on the other hand, was responsible for two volumes of letters called *Lettres d'un François* (1745) which chronicled his travels in Holland and England which became very popular. In his letters, Le Blanc spoke favorably of English life and art and it possible that Le Blanc's conversations with Abel-François Poisson (*Marquis de Marigny*) helped stimulate the interest in English furniture that Poisson developed later in his career.

The first French school of architecture, the *École des Arts* was founded in 1743. Independent of the Academy (and hence the government), it was soon to attract students from across Europe. Its founder Blondel was a very strong proponent of the Neo-Classical style and interestingly enough, among Blondel's students was William Chambers of England (see Figure 3-4), a significant figure who was to play a defining role later in the development of England's Neo-Classical revival.¹⁵

¹¹ Some of these books include: A book called *Supplication aux Orfèvres*, some articles; *Observations sur le Antiquites de la Ville d'Herculanum avac Quelques Reflextions sur la Sculpture des Anciens* in the issues of *Mercure de France* - in this Cochin also wrote a manifesto for the coming Neo-Classical style and his book *Supplication aux Orfèvre*.

¹² S. Eriksen, Marigny and Le Goût Grec, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 104, No 708, 1962, pp. 96-101.

¹³ This will be discussed later in more detail (p. 143), see A. Gordon and M. Déchery, The Marquis de Marigny's Purchases of English Furniture and Objects, *The Furniture History Journal*, Vol 25, 1989, pp. 86- 108.

¹⁴ It was the architect Laugier's ideas that Jacques-Germain Soufflot (1713-1780) used as inspiration to design the Parisian church the Pantheon in 1757. Soufflot is also believed to have borrowed the dome of St Paul's Cathedral in London (designed by Sir Christopher Wren in 1708) but with columns all around the dome. Laugier said that this was the first expression of 'the perfect' architecture. It is interesting to note that the Pantheon was then the inspiration for some of the early Neo-Classical expressions of architecture in the United States.

B. Fletcher, (Ed. John Musgrove), *A History of Architecture*, 19th Edition, p. 147.

¹⁵ Blondel not only offered this school to the general public, but he established through this effort an entirely new approach to educating architects. Prior to the establishment of this school, architecture was taught like

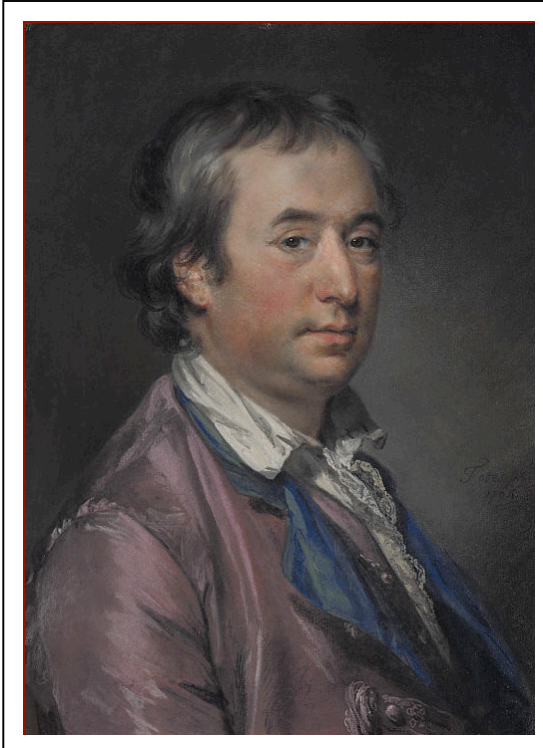


Figure 3-4: Leading English architect in the Neo-Classical style - William Chambers who studied in Paris under Blondel. Painted in 1764 by Frances Cotes.

Arguably, England had never shown the sustained level of interest in the classical before the C18th that can be seen in France – with some notable exceptions. For example, Henry VIII (1491 –1547) brought Italian, French and Flemish craftsmen to England to work on Royal Palaces in the C15th.¹⁶ Yet, despite Henry VIII recognizing the importance of the arts (enough to search for artists and architects outside of England) he did little else. Burlington was to be the figure to prove most influential in initiating sustained interest in the classical, particularly through patronage of his protégé William Kent. However, in the time we are investigating there was little interest shown by the Royal family and no

significant academic society or organisation was to emerge until the Royal Society was founded in 1754, to be followed by the founding of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1768.¹⁷

other arts, primarily through apprenticeships and self-learning. Blondel set up a series of standardized courses. Also in support of his school, Blondel became a prolific writer of articles and books on the subject. See:

- W. Sturges, "Jacques-François Blondel" *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 11 No 1, 1952 pp. 16-19.
- R. Middleton, Jacques François Blondel and the "Cours d'Architecture", *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 18., No. 4, 1959, pp. 140-148.
- F. Schmidt, Expose Ignorance and Revive the "Bon Goût": Foreign Architects and Jacques-François Blondel's *École de Arts*, *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol 61, No 1, 2002 pp. 4-29.
- J. Harris and M. Snodin (ed.), *Sir William Chambers: Architect to George III*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, USA and London, 1997.
- J. Harris, Sir William Chambers and His Parisian Album, *Architectural History*, Vol. 6, 1963, pp.54-90.

¹⁶ B. Fletcher, (Edited by John Musgrove), *A History of Architecture*, 19th Edition.

¹⁷ Royal Society of the Arts, the RSA, was founded in 1754 under a different name by William Shipley. Later, in 1761, The Society of Artists of Great Britain was founded in London by living artists. In 1765, the Society, then comprising 211 members, obtained a Royal Charter as the Incorporated Society of Artists of Great Britain. The



Figure 3-5: Front page of *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* or *The Four Books of Architecture*.

However the English were to learn the classical arts through the Grand Tour. The focus of the Grand Tour was the art, architecture and culture of classical Rome and Greece. Many of the sons of the English nobility came back inspired by their experience and anxious to convert the design of their own estates to the classical ideal. Francis Dashwood for example (1708 –1781)) was inspired enough to commission the architect Nicholas Revett (1720–1804) to undertake a tour of Greece and bring back plans for the building of West Wycombe in the Neo-Greek style. (As we shall see later – see p. 213, many of the library tables build for these English aristocrats had drawing tables and large drawers

in order to keep the architectural drawings for these new commissions.)

Another indicator of the depth of involvement by English architects is the number of books published. Prior to the late C18th, France (as noted above) had published numerous texts on the subject of classical architecture. The English tended to rely on either French or Italian texts (For example it wasn't until 1720 that Nicholas Dubois translated *The Architecture of A. Palladio, in Four*



Figure 3-6: Portrait Miniature of James Stuart, c.1778 - leading English architect. Attributed to Philip Jean. Watercolour on ivory.

Royal Academy was formed in part to rival the Society of Artists after dispute between two leading architects, Sir William Chambers and James Paine. Paine won, but Chambers broke off to help create a new organization - the Royal Academy, in 1769. (Source from the Biography of William Chambers, from the Oxford Reference database: web site: [http://www.oxforddnb.com/articles/5/5083-article.html?back =](http://www.oxforddnb.com/articles/5/5083-article.html?back=), Accessed on 09-February-2009.)

Books to English. About the same time, Lord Burlington worked with William Kent (1685 – 1748) to publish *The Designs of Inigo Jones* (1727) which included many of Palladio’s designs.) Thus, England relied heavily on the publications of Italian and French books on the topic of ancient architecture and design. However, in the late C18th several influential English Neo-Classical architects started publishing their own books upon their return from their Grand Tour, these included: Woods’ *Palmyra* (1753); Sir William Chamber’s *Treatise on Civil Architecture* (1759), Stuart and Revett’s *Antiquities of Athens* (1762); and Robert Adam’s *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro in Dalmatia* (1764).¹⁸ This late start in publishing architectural subjects was the lack of support by the Royal families. To quote Curl:

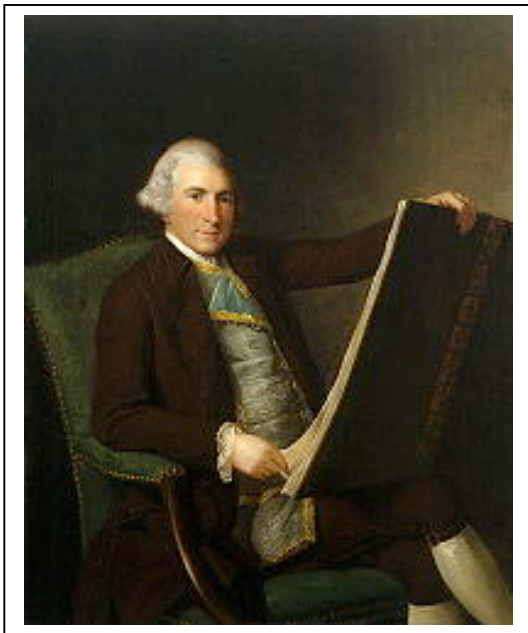


Figure 3-7: Robert Adam, one of England’s leading proponents of Neo-Classical Architecture – Painting is attributed to George Willison. c. 1770-1775.

“....direct and indirect influence of the monarchy on architectural development varied greatly during the Tudor, Stuart and Hanoverian dynasties..... However, the monarchy ceased to be the pace setter in architecture after the accession of George I (1714-1727) although George IV (1820-1830) was an active patron of building.”¹⁹

Instead it fell on the architects themselves and the landed aristocracy (many of the landed aristocrats were - or at least thought of themselves as - amateur architects and archaeologists.) The growth in England’s wealth and power in the world ensured that this group were wealthy enough by the late C18th to finance wealthy new housing complete with luxury furnishings to complete their opulent

¹⁸ Like Chippendale’s books these served the architects in multiple ways: They were records of their journeys and their learning, they voiced and supported their points of view to other architects and to potential customers, they advertised their services to potential customers, and made a little money through their sale. Like Chippendale, the recipients of these books were a combination of aristocrats, artisans and academicians.

¹⁹ J. Curl, *Classical Architecture*, B. T. Batsford, LTD., London, 1992, p. 821.

homes. Their interest in classical architecture and design, combined with the efforts by an influential group of Neo-Classical architects ensured that many of these homes would be built and furnished throughout in the Neo-Classical style.

Although the Grand Tours had figured in the English social calendar since Elizabethan times, there was a marked increase during the 17th and 18th Centuries. Again, these were generally thought of as educational, but in many cases (Lord Burlington for example) also served as extended shopping trips, supplied by a growing industry in classical souvenirs.²⁰

It was also through these tours that the English architects were able to study classical ruins like Herculaneum (1738) and Pompeii (1748) at first hand. Almost all of the architects that were to become famously associated with the Neo-Classical movement undertook the Grand Tour. James Stuart (1713-1788 – see Figure 3-6) returned in 1755 to become one of the first of a new wave to reintroduce the classical styles of architecture to England, together with Chambers (Figure 3-4), who returned in the same year.²¹ Above all, it was Robert Adam (1728 – 1792), who was to successfully translate Neo-Classical ideals into the architectural fabric that has become so identified with England of the late C18th after he returned from a Grand Tour, which lasted from 1754 until 1758.^{22 23} As accomplished as Stuart and Chambers were, neither were as prolific or as talented as Adam.

It should be noted that while on Grand Tour, Adam met several of the French artists and architects who were strong proponents of Neo-Classical design. In particular Charles-Louis

²⁰ J. Wilton-Ely, "Classic Ground": Britain, Italy and the Grand Tour, *Eighteenth Century Life*, Vol 28, Winter, Oxford, 2004, pp. 136-165.

²¹ J. Harris, Early Neo-Classical Furniture, *Journal of the Furniture History Society*, Vol.2., 1966 pp. 1 – 6.

²² During this time he studied under the French architect and artist Charles-Louis Clérissieu and the Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi. His tour of Italy and France included very intense study of the ruins of Diocletian's Palace. From this Adam published the *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro* (1764). Adam was to work very closely with his French tutor through his Grand Tour, and when he first returned. There is in fact a strong argument that it was Clérissieu who designed the Chimney Piece for the Earl of Hopetoun, which was presented to the Earl as an Adam design (See K. Eustace, Robert Adam, Charles-Louis Clérissieu, Michael Rysbrack and the Hopetoun Chimney piece, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 139, No. 1136, 1997, pp. 743-752).

²³ It was well known that James Stuart had health and business problems, which may have contributed to him not being able to be as strong of a promoter of his style of Greek influenced architectural design as Adam.

Clérisseau (1721–1820) who became Adam’s drawing teacher, is thought by some to have suggested Adam publish a book of design upon his return.²⁴ As Adam noted:

“Mr. Wilton introduced me to a most valuable and ingenious creature called Clérisseau, who draws ruins in architecture to perfection. He stays in this house with Mr. Hugford the painter, to whom I delivered my letter from Mr. Hamilton the painter in London”²⁵

It was the French engraver Cochin (described above) who introduced Adam to his mentor – Clérisseau and who was himself just about to publish an article on the subject of ‘Grec’ design. It is hard to believe that Cochin would not show some of his artwork to Adam.²⁶ In addition, as Adam met Clérisseau just before he himself published a key article in the *Mercure de France* in which he criticized the Rococo style, it is hard again to believe that they would not have discussed the subject at some point. Adam is also thought to have met Piranesi, Peyre, Deproux and DeWailly – all of whom were likewise strong proponents of the Neo-Classical approach to architecture, all of which speaks to the direction of the prevailing fashionable current at that moment in time, as well as its pan-European nature and the particular close cultural connections between England and France where it came to a shared preference for the classical ideal.²⁷

Adam frequently included designs of furniture along side his house or room designs and often he would recommend furniture makers to his clients. Others did this too but not as often as Adam. By contrast, Chambers was known to dislike designing furniture.²⁸

Interestingly enough, English furniture makers increasingly recognized the importance of the architect during this period. As Chippendale noted in the introduction to his first

Director:

²⁴ Clérisseau was also thought to have helped Adam draw one of Adam’s early commissions. (See: K. Eustace, Robert Adam, Charles-Louis Clérisseau, Michael Rysbrack and the Hopetoun Chimney piece, pp. 743-752)

²⁵ This quote was taken from T. McCormick, *Charles-Louis Clérisseau and the Genesis of Neo-Classicism*, Architectural History Foundation/MIT Press, New York, 1990 where it was reported to have come from the Diary of Robert Adam from January 1755.

²⁶ C. Musgrave, *Adam and Hepplewhite & other Neo-Classical Furniture*, Faber & Faber, London, 1966, p. 27.

²⁷ C. Musgrave, *Adam and Hepplewhite & other Neo-Classical Furniture*, p. 27.

²⁸ J. Harris and M. Snodin (ed.), *Sir William Chambers: Architect to George III*.
T. McCormick, *Charles-Louis Clérisseau and the Genesis of Neo-Classicism*.

*"Of all the Arts which are either improved or ornamented by Architecture, that of the CABINET-MAKING is not only the most useful and ornamental, but capable of receiving as great assistance from it as any whatever."*²⁹

It is also clear from the *Director* that Chippendale not only fully understood the importance of the cabinetmaker relative to the architect but also of furniture design relative to architecture.³⁰

While the discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii were not in themselves wholly responsible for the renewed interest in the classical, it is generally accepted that both England and France were influenced by these events.³¹ The importance of these discoveries cannot be understated; allowing the objects of everyday life of these civilizations to be studied first hand more fully for the first time. Although architectural remains had always been available, now interiors and domestic furnishings could be appreciated for the first time.³² These two events also seemed to have generated much excitement; attracting even greater publicity around classical ideas and ideals and playing directly into the intellectual fervour of the Enlightenment.

Ironically, the excavation of Herculaneum (1738) were started neither by France nor England, but by Charles de Bourbon (1716-1788), King of Naples and later Charles III of

²⁹ T. Chippendale, *The Gentleman and the Cabinet-Maker's Director (First Edition)*, T. Chippendale, London, 1754.

³⁰ H. Cescinsky, The Influence of the Architect on English Furniture, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 36, No. 204 (March), 1920, pp. 134 – 135 + 138 – 140.

³¹ M. Coutinho, *18th Century French Furniture*, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, 1999, p. 38 and Interview with M. Hirst, Curator, Waddesdon Manor, Nov. 2004 (Presently head of collections at Chatsworth).

³² Even this was not the first exploration by the French of the artistic thought based on the archaeological study. As early as 1683, Louis XIV's able assistant, Colbert was assembling information on ancient Roman architectural styles (Colbert even approved the creation of a French school in Italy specifically for the purpose of studying the ancient arts (See: P. Cret, The Ecole des Beaux-Arts and Architectural Education, *The Journal of the American Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol 1, No 2, 1941, pp 3-15) and those in Italy had been interested in the ancient civilizations for example there was Johann Winckelmann who was in Italy at the request of a Cardinal in Italy to study art of the ancient civilizations both for the esoteric reasons such as finding the 'truth' behind art and for financial gain as a dealer in antiquities (See J. Winckelmann (Translated from German by G. Lodge), *History of Ancient Art*, James B. Osgood and Co., Boston, 1873.)

Spain. The Bourbons were also responsible for the excavation of Pompeii (1748) and Stabia (1749) and represented the first concerted attempts of the newly emerging science of archaeology to uncover and interpret ancient artefacts.³³ This interest was characterised by a growing appreciation of antiquity as an educative force. These excavations attracted the attention of the nobility and many of French, English and Prussia aristocratic families vied for the privilege of owning such cultural *objet d'art*.³⁴

In many ways, art also played an important role alongside architecture and archaeology, in reviving interest in the classical. A number of French artists colonized Rome as early as the 1730's at the French king's expense. Writers like Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717 - 1768) were no less important.³⁵ Winckelmann's scientific approach to archaeology helped pioneer the study of the classical world and his descriptions of Herculaneum were read throughout Europe. These included: *Sendschreiben von den Herculanischen Entdeckungen* (Letter from the Discoveries at Herculaneum) - published in 1762, and two years later a follow-up report - *Nachrichten von den neuesten Herculanischen Entdeckungen* (News of the Latest Discoveries at Herculaneum). His two major work *Anmerkungen über die Baukunst der Alten* (Comments on the Architecture of the Ancients) published in 1760 and *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (The History of Ancient Art) published in 1764 were immediately translated into French (1766) and shortly thereafter into English and Italian.

In addition to an Enlightenment search for 'truth' and all of this earnest historical endeavour, no doubt part of the reason for the increasing popularity of the Neo-Classical style was a growing weariness on the part of the public with the overblown Rococo style.³⁶

³³ The Royal Academy and The Victoria & Albert Museum, *The Age of Neo-Classicism*, The Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1972, p. xlvii.

³⁴ Among the Englishmen who benefited were Smith-Barry (Marbury Hall), Thomas Mansel-Talbot (Margam), the William Weddel (Newby Hall), The Royal Academy and The Victoria & Albert Museum and many others, *The Age of Neo-Classicism*, p. xlvii.

³⁵ Winckelmann held a series of posts that placed him at the centre of archeological activities in the C18th - in 1763, he became Superintendent of Roman Antiquities, later he became Librarian at the Vatican and still later he was to become the Secretary to Cardinal Albani – a wealthy and powerful member of the church.

³⁶ For example, at a later time, the Arts and Crafts movement is generally accepted as developing as a reaction to the Victorian designs and the automated methods of manufacturing. In fact, Ruskin, while trying to point out his dislike of the Neo-Classical style, referred to architects were

According to S. Eriksen, the reaction to Rococo came as early as the 1730's in France, even though the style would remain the dominant fashion for several decades. Voltaire expressed the shifting mood when he referred to the Rococo as:

*"... a ridiculous jumble of shells, dragons, reeds, palm-trees and plants, which is the be-all and end-all of modern interior decoration."*³⁷

More serious criticisms came from the academicians – beginning with Soufflot (discussed above) in 1741. Three years later Le Blanc argued that the decorative arts had lost that *"noble simplicité."*³⁸ Ten years later, Cochran would make similar remarks in the *Mercure de France* (1754) and criticize craftsmen for their lack of 'common sense'.³⁹ By 1752 France's leading architect Pierre Vigné de Vigny had adopted the Neo-Classical and what he called the architecture of the *"Grecs et des Romains"*.⁴⁰

The decline of the Rococo took different forms in different countries. In France, it represented for the most part a shift in stylistic preference. However, in England it represented in part a kind of patriotic statement. Since the Rococo was so strongly associated with France, England's embrace of Neo-Classicism was in part an attempt to break France's historic cultural hegemony.⁴¹ Robert Adam for example argued that the reign of George III represented an era:

"...men who liked triglyphs, and the painters and sculptors as obsessed admirers of antique marbles."

See The Royal Academy and The Victoria & Albert Museum, *The Age of Neo-Classicism*, p. xxii.

³⁷ This was taken from Voltaire's *Le Temple du gout* of 1733 and referenced by S. Eriksen (Translated by P. Thorton), *Early Neo-Classicism in France*, p. 25.

³⁸ S. Eriksen (Translated by P. Thorton), *Early Neo-Classicism in France*, p. 26.

³⁹ S. Eriksen (Translated by P. Thorton), *Early Neo-Classicism in France*, p. 25.

⁴⁰ S. Eriksen (Translated by P. Thorton), *Early Neo-Classicism in France*, p. 29.

⁴¹ To further add irony to the spread of the Neo-Classical design, in the newly formed United States of America, the Neo-Classical design became popular however they called it the Federal Style in part to differentiate themselves from the English from whom they just recently broke away.

The United States also embraced the designs that England called Neo-Classical; however they called it Federal in order to separate their fashion and themselves from England. Again, the adoption of the Neo Classical appeared to have become a political statement (See F. Kimball, *Thomas Jefferson and the Origins of the Classical Revival in America*, *Art and Archaeology*, May, 1915, pp 219-227., and B. Pickens, *Mr. Jefferson as*

“... no less remarkable than that of Pericles, Augustus or the Medici.”⁴²

However, it is clear that the adoption of the Neo-Classical style represented more than the appropriation of aesthetic detail but was a striving after classical ideals such as ‘truth, purity, nobility, and honesty’⁴³ consistent with the Enlightenment view that classical art represented in some fundamental way, the natural order of things. J. F. Blondel’s illustrated account of Neo-Classical design in Diderot’s and d’Alembert’s *Dictionnaire des Sciences* (1762) probably best represents the apotheosis of this transition from the Rococo to the Neo-Classical.⁴⁴

Was it England or France that lead the development of the Neo-Classical design? While some would argue that the late C18th represents the moment when England overtook France for the first time as the leading style-maker on the European stage⁴⁵ others argue that it was the French that first introduced the classical style to the world.⁴⁶ What is clear is that whichever country might hold the cultural ascendancy in this respect, there was substantial interaction between the two countries. While France, with its well developed connections with Italy and its early academic institutions did have a head start, it is also clear that architects from both countries interacted a great deal during this time; William Chambers attending a French Academy for example and Robert Adam learning from the

Revolutionary. Architect, *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol 34, No 4, 1975., pp 257-279, and E. Miles, The Young American Nation and the Classical World, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 1974, pp. 259-274., and J. Greene, *American Furniture of the 18th Century*, Taunton Press, Newtown, CT, USA, 1996)

⁴² The Royal Academy and The Victoria & Albert Museum, *The Age of Neo-Classicism*, p. xxii.

⁴³ The Royal Academy and The Victoria & Albert Museum, *The Age of Neo-Classicism*, p. xxiii.

⁴⁴ S. Eriksen (Translated by P. Thorton), *Early Neo-Classicism in France: The Creation of the Louis Seize Style in Architectural Decoration, Furniture and Ormolu, Gold and Silver and Sevres Porcelain in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, p. 41.

⁴⁵ For example John Gloag argues that ‘Pompadour’s legacy to national taste, which owed more to the work of Robert Adam than was ever admitted or even suspected by French society’ J. Gloag, *Guide to Furniture Styles: English and French 1450 to 1850*, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1972, p. 180.

⁴⁶ In a lecture by Arthur T. Bolton on 31 March 1925 for the L.C.C. at the Geffrye Museum, Shoreditch (The typescript is at the Soane Museum). He stated that the ‘work of Percier and Fountaine for Napoleon’ was ‘washed out Adam’ in his attempt to dissuade others that Adam was ‘merely imported a phase of French work’ E. Harris, Bolton’s Adam Room at Wembley, *The Journal of the Furniture History Society*, Vol XXIX, 1993, p. 204

French artist Charles-Louis Clérisseau. However, it is also clear that England – perhaps due to the architectural accomplishments of Adam in particular - was much quicker in its adoption of the Neo-Classical style.

The classical style was introduced by Robert Adam when he returned from Italy in 1758. His two brothers (John & James) had already begun work on Dumfries house in Scotland, but soon after setting up Adam and Company together, Robert began work on Harewood House and Kedleston Hall – key Neo-Classical sites. A couple of years earlier (1755), James Stuart had begun Shugborough Hall, followed it in 1758 with Spencer House for John the 1st Earl Spencer. Around this time, Sir William Chambers (1723-1796) also returned to England to set up his architectural firm and begin work on The Pagoda in Blackheath in 1755 (which



Figure 3-8: The tapestry room at Croome Court with tapestries supplied by *Gobelins* in France. Although Adam designed this room, it still included a number of Rococo elements.

was oriental in inspiration too) and later Somerset House, in 1776.⁴⁷ Despite earlier forays into the Neo-Classical field by others, Adam remains the pre-eminent architect of this new style; Stuart was not very ambitious and suffered from ill health and a possible drink problem and while Chambers was more productive than Stuart, he was neither as prolific nor as consistent as Adam.

In France there is some question about who was most instrumental in popularizing the Neo-Classical style as no obvious figure emerges. The first influential advocate of the

style, was Madame de Pompadour but she died in 1764 – relatively early in terms of the Neo-Classical era. The first Parisian house in the new style was that commissioned by the classical scholar Lalive de Jully from the architect Barreau which was built in the 1750s.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ H. Roberts, A Neoclassical Episode at Windsor, *Journal of the Furniture History*, Vol. 33, 1997 pp.177-187.

⁴⁸ François Dominique Barreau de Chefdeville (1725 – 1765). Barreau won the *Prix de Rome* for a building inspired by ancient buildings.

Certainly the first major architectural project was Soufflot's *Panthéon* (1757), considered the most "*beautiful monument built since the Renaissance*."⁴⁹ In terms of Royal buildings,, the first notable example in the Neo-Grec style was the *Pavillon de Louveciennes* built in



Figure 3-9: This is the decoration surrounding a picture frame over a fireplace mantle in Marie Antoinette's private rooms in Versailles. Notice the detailed floral design that was present on much of Riesener's later furniture for the queen.

1771 for Madame du Barry by the architect C. N. Ledoux . The design, it should be pointed out, included neo-classical interior and furnishings and was completed a year before James Stuart designed Spencer House.⁵⁰

It is clear that cultural influences went back and forth between England and France. As noted above, Chambers's studied in France, Adam's was tutored by a French artisan and all three English architects visited the French academy in Italy. Clérissieu provided Adam's with drawings for a fireplace that Robert Adam's brother James produced. It is also equally possible to trace the profound influence of France in Robert Adam's tapestry rooms at Croome Court,

⁴⁹ S. Eriksen (Translated by P. Thornton), *Early Neo-Classicism in France: The Creation of the Louis Seize Style in Architectural Decoration, Furniture and Ormalu, Gold and Silver and Sevres Porcelain in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, p. 53.

⁵⁰ One thing that needs to be pointed out, and that is at a later time, William Chambers was to work with the Royal family to refit Windsor Castle to the 'new style'. Although this shows significant support for the new fashion, it does not show the Royal family being leaders in the fashion. At such a late time (1776) many would agree that King George III could hardly be called a leader in the fashion.

Moor Park, Newby Hall and Osterley - and the Tapestry Rooms at Croome Court (supplied by Gobelins – See 3-8.) for example, determined the character of the furniture and the design of the whole room.⁵¹

C. How were Neo-Classical Designs Applied to Furniture?

As noted earlier, there had not always been a direct stylistic connection between architecture, interiors and furniture designs - especially in England. However, in the early C18th, French architecture began to develop the idea of a unity of style, uniting exterior and interior.⁵² Increasingly, the French went to great pains to have everything match and architectural motifs found on the interior fabric were repeated on the furniture provided to furnish the scheme.

⁵¹ C. Musgrave, C., *Adam and Hepplewhite and other Neo-Classical Furniture*, p. 62.

⁵² F. Watson, "Holland and Daguerre: French Undercurrents in English Neo-Classic Furniture Design," *Apollo*, vol. XCVI, Oct., 1972, pp. 282-287.



Figure 3-10: These are three pictures of *les Appartements Grand de la Reine* in Versailles showing how the designs were coordinated by the architect/interior designer. Note the ormolu decoration running around the top edge of each piece and the pilasters on the corners matches the gilt bronze decoration on the marble fireplace surround.

A typical example is shown in Figure 3-9, in which the detailed floral and foliage arrangement is mirrored in the detailed ormolu on the furniture provided by Riesener for these rooms - this ormolu will be discussed in detail in Chapter V (P. 192).

What is interesting is that the design process was never very uniform in France. In the case of Royal houses, architects would generally work closely with the *garde-meuble*, leaving the furniture maker to come up with appropriate furniture design. In other situations the



Figure 3-11: Bolsover Castle - an early example of where the interior was designed by the architect.

furniture maker would be obliged to incorporate specific design elements (motifs, colour schemes, etc.) specified by the architect.

By contrast, in England, the general practice was for the architect to design the exterior and/or the rooms; but it was usually left to the owner to obtain their own furnishings:

“During the greater part of the 17th century it was rare for British architects to concern themselves at all with the physical layout and appearance of the interiors of houses. The design of the house was the responsibility of the patron and the master builder.”⁵³

One of the first English architects known to have to changed this system by designing a complete an interior room was John Smythson (1588–1634) for Bolsover Castle in Derbyshire (See Figure 3-11).⁵⁴ Christopher Wren (1632 –1723) was another to provide unified schemes of this kind, however, this practice was to remain relatively scarce and it was not until the late C18th that the idea of a ‘unity of design’ was to become the norm.⁵⁵



Figure 3-12: Lalive portrait by Greuze in 1759 showing a piece of Neo-Classical furniture – notice the classical inspired ornamentation on the chair that Lalive is sitting.

⁵³ C. Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration: Design and the Domestic Interior in England*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1993, p. 11.

⁵⁴ C. Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration: Design and the Domestic Interior in England*, p. 11.

⁵⁵ H. Cescinsky, *The Influence of the Architect on English Furniture*, pp.134-135 + 138-140.

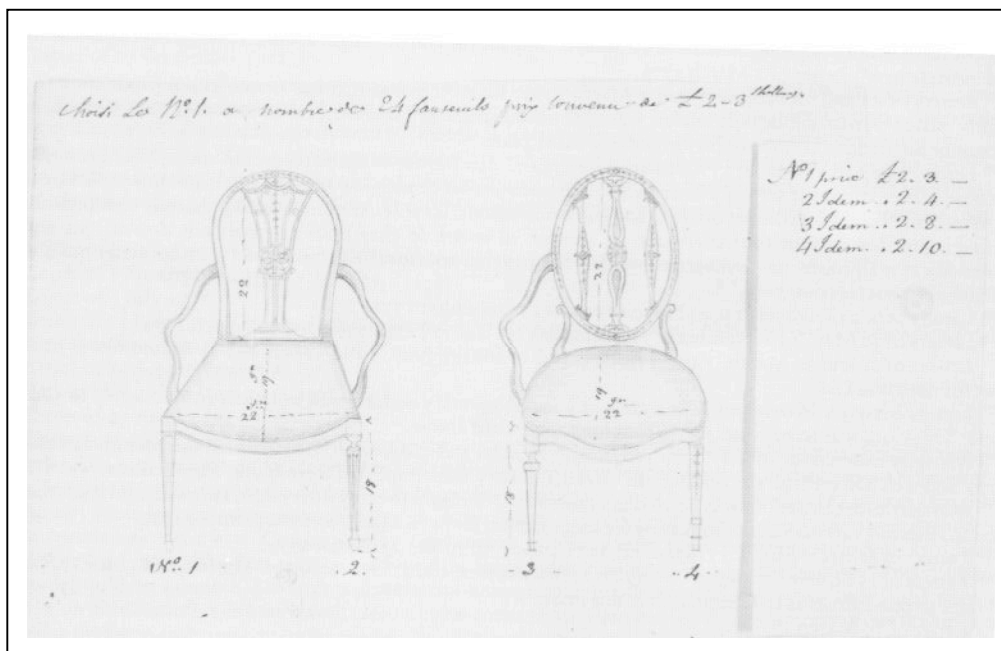


Figure 3-13: Drawings of two Neo-Classical English chairs that were recommended for purchase by the Marquise. Showing the Marquise's interest in English designs.

Perhaps this unity came about at this time because the Rococo style had been largely promoted in England by furniture designers and (conversely) it was architects who were largely responsible for promoting the Neo-Classical style in England.⁵⁶ Another contributing factor may have been that the number of commissions given to architect were essentially refurbishments (a 'make-over' to use a modern term) many of which focused their efforts on interiors. Adam (arguably) was the only major Neo-Classical architect who fully embraced the idea that furniture design should also be an integral part of an architect's work. Even though both Stuart and Chambers designed Neo-Classical Furniture,

⁵⁶ Again, this is not to say that the architect always left the furniture selection to the owner in England, there are a number of exceptions. Another example is William Kent (1685-1748) who was another early major wholly English architect to enjoy designing every aspect of a house from its setting to its contents. There are even examples of architects who use Rococo designs of furniture to fit into their architectural designs. However, this combination of furniture and architecture being designed in combination was rare in England. (See I. Hall, Some Lightoler Designs for Burton Constable, *Journal of the Furniture History Society*, Vol. 21, 1985, pp. 229) There was one article that did discuss William Kent working with a few furniture makers, however even here most of the examples are mirrors, pedestals, and some tables but none of the examples included anything more sophisticated such as desks, chairs, game or work tables, etc. (See G. Beard, William Kent and the Cabinet-Makers, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol 117, No 873, 1975, pp. 865-867.)

as C. Gilbert notes, only had a ‘...*fringe interest in designing furniture*’ – they did not embrace it in the way that Adam did.⁵⁷

Before the Neo-Classical revival it was ‘*openly acknowledged by English furniture makers*’⁵⁸ that they drew inspiration from France. However, the respect was mutual and influences also ran the other way:

*“Pierre Verlet wrote that in a study of the decorative arts in the eighteenth century the francomania of some great English amateurs must be counterbalanced by the anglomania of several French personalities.”*⁵⁹

The Marquis de Marigny for example was typical in this regard, preferring to furnish with English furniture that he admired for its simplicity of design.⁶⁰ According to C. Sargentson, it was quite fashionable for *Marchand Merciers* to buy goods from England and several specialized in such purchases.⁶¹ There also several indications that the French increasingly looked to the English in the late C18th for inspiration in respect of furniture design. In the years immediately before the revolution for example, the French can be seen to simplify their cabinet furniture. Following English design, ornate marquetry became less common and French furniture makers began to make increasing use of grain in the wood to decorate their furniture.⁶² Similarly, in the late C18th, the French furniture designers began to follow the English practice of making chairs out of solid mahogany.⁶³ In fact (as noted recently)

⁵⁷ C. Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, Studio Vista/Christies, London, 1978, p. 119.

⁵⁸ J. Gloag, *Guide to Furniture Styles: English and French 1450 to 1850*, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1972, p. 180.

⁵⁹ See A. Gordon and M. Déchery, *The Marquis de Marigny’s Furniture*, p. 87. These authors were paraphrasing from P. Verlet, *Le Bronzes Dorés Français du XVIII E Siècle*, Picard, Paris, 1987, p. 67

⁶⁰ See: A. Gordon and M. Déchery, *The Marquis de Marigny’s Purchases of English Furniture and Objects*, pp. 86-108.

⁶¹ See C. Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1996, pp. 114-115.

⁶² Hirst, Matthew, Curator, at Waddesdon Manor (Presently head of collections at Chatsworth), Conducted Wed., 17, Nov 2004, and Paul Tear - Course Leader at BCUC, Thurs. 18, Nov. 2004.

⁶³ N. Gasc and G. Mabile, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum, Musées et Monuments de France*, Paris, 1991.

the French were somewhat envious of the English monopoly of the mahogany trade.⁶⁴

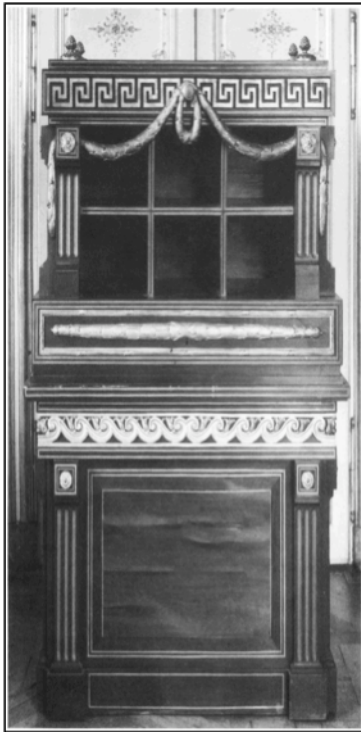


Figure 3-14 Filing cabinet made for A.L. La live de Jully thought to have been made before 1757. (Currently in the Musee Conde, Chantilly)

England on the other hand began to copy France by adopting more complicated marquetry designs and (in a somewhat limited way) began to make more of decorative metal mounts – Chippendale’s Harewood Library Table is a good example.

What else might be said about this mutual exchange? We know for example that Chippendale’s *Director* found its way to France and in fact was translated to French a few years after it was first published.⁶⁵ We also know that Chippendale shipped chairs from France to his workshop then gilded and upholstered them. We know that Madame de Pompadour’s brother, *Abel-François Poisson de Vandières* or *Marquis de Marigny*, was one of a number of French aristocrats who travelled to England to purchase furniture – the Marquis’s first trip being in 1756⁶⁶. With the help of a dealer⁶⁷, he purchased 180 mahogany chairs, 6 clothing presses, a shaving table, 6 gaming tables, chandeliers, candelabra, candlesticks and a billiard table!⁶⁸ The *Marquis* also later made a cunning

purchase of English furniture from England’s French Ambassador after he was recalled from

⁶⁴ According to A. Bowett, the increased usage of mahogany as a furniture wood came about as the result of changes in the UK tax laws early in the century, which allowed for cheap imports from their colonies in the new world and the Far East. (See A. Bowett, *After The Naval Stores Act: Some Implications for English Walnut Furniture*, *Journal of The Furniture History Society*, Vol 31, 1995, pp. 43- 56. See also John Cross, FHS).

⁶⁵ The French version of the third edition was published the following year, being translated for the ‘convenience of foreigners’ and was titled *Guide Du Tapissier, De l’ Ébéniste*, see C. Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, p. 83.

⁶⁶ The inspiration for his interest in English furniture was in no doubt influenced by his good friend and partner during his tour of Italy, *Abbé Jean Benard Le Blanc* (1707-1781) who had visited England a number of years before, in 1737 (A. Gordon and M. Déchery, *The Marquis de Marigny’s Purchases of English Furniture and Objects*, p. 86.)

⁶⁷ Although over time there were actually several sources that Marigny used to purchase English furniture, his primary contact was the agency of Count Louis de Reinach (b. 1708) who took many orders from Marigny, ranging from glassware, to gaming tables, desks, and quite a large number of chairs.

⁶⁸ All of this is documented by letters that were written between the dealer (named Reinach) and the Marquis de Marigny. See A. Gordon and M. Déchery, *M., The Marquis de Marigny’s Purchases of English Furniture and Objects*, p. 88.)

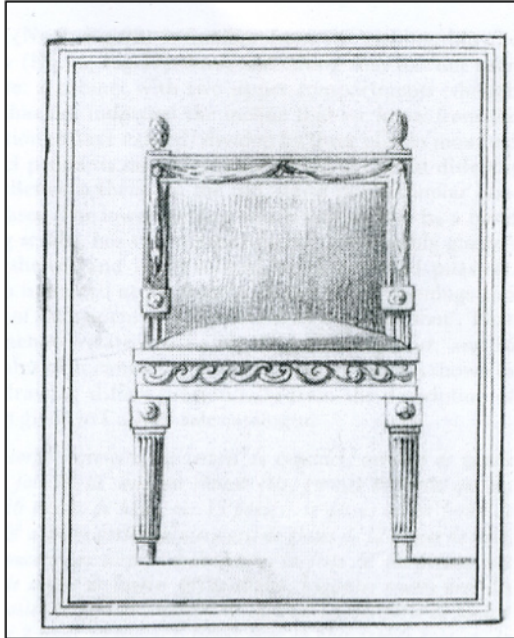


Figure 3-15: Drawings of furniture is from a collection of drawings belonging to Matthew Boulton (1728 -1809). It is believed that he picked up these when he visited Paris in 1765 and that these are based on the designs by the painter L. J. Le Lorrain whom Lalive himself was said to have designed the furniture.

France following the war of independence in America and apparently was always keen to point out the quality of his English furniture to the many visitors to his home.

The earliest documented suite of French Neo-Classical furniture was probably that designed for the French financier, Live de Jully alongside his new Neo-Classical house.⁶⁹ S. Eriksen cites two pieces of evidence to support this; a painting by Greuze of Live de Jully made before 1759 (see Figure 3-12) and a drawing of the chair upon which de Jully is sitting (See Figure 3-15). Furniture designed by Louis-Joseph Le Lorrain around 1756-57 can be seen in Figure 3-14 - the table and filing cabinet are now in *Musee Conde* at

Chantilly. In later communications from La Live de Jully and Cochin, these pieces are described as being in the '*Goût Grec*'.⁷⁰ This would seem to indicate his understanding of the new Neo-Classical fashion.⁷¹ As early as 1755, Horatio Walpole (1717 –1797) wrote to friends in England that everything in Paris must be '*a la grecque*'.⁷² According to E. Harris:

⁶⁹ S. Eriksen (Translated by P.Thorton), *Early Neo-Classicism in France: The Creation of the Louis Seize Style in Architectural Decoration, Furniture and Ormolu, Gold and Silver and Sevres Porcelain in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*. It should be pointed out that Musgrave and Kimball argue that it was England who produced the first Neo-Classical revival but their argument is weaker. See also:

- C. Musgrave, *Adam and Hepplewhite and other Neo-Classical Furniture*.

- F. Kimball, The Beginnings of Style Pompadour, 1751-9, *Gazette de Beaux-Arts*, Vol 6, 1954, p. 57-64.

- F. Watson, F., *Wallace Collection Catalogues. Furniture*, William Clowes, London, 1956.

⁷⁰ S. Eriksen, Lalive de Jully's Furniture '*a la grecque*', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol 103, No 701, 1961, pp. 340-338.

⁷¹ R. Edwards, counters this argument with the observation that William Kent, had designed furniture in England that displayed many of the Neo-Classical elements 20 years earlier and one could continue this with Inigo Jones who designed based on Classical forms before that. However, this seems to be taking this debate to an extreme...couldn't one just as easily argue that Neo-Classical furniture was first designed by the Romans

*"The acme of fashion was to do one's buying in Paris. Horace Walpole's Parisian journals record almost daily visits to the marchands-merciers, often to execute commissions for his friends at home. Adam patrons the Earl of Coventry, William Weddel, Sir Laurence Dundas, Sir Henry Bridgeman, the Earl of March and others- are among the countless Englishmen who imported French pieces and designs in the latest style antique."*⁷³



Figure 3-16: Classically inspired chair designed by William Chambers in 1759 for the Royal Society of Arts.

Interestingly enough, the French Royal family were still purchasing both Neo-Classical and Rococo pieces at this time, once again demonstrating their lack of leadership in terms of setting fashion in France.⁷⁴

In England, it was probably Stuart who (arguably) first designed furniture in the Neo-Classical style in 1757 for Kedleston and shortly thereafter in 1759 for Spencer House. W. Chambers executed his first piece of furniture in the Classical style in 1759, in the form of a chair designed specifically for the President of the Royal Society of Arts (see Figure 3-16). Both of these examples predate Adam's first Neo-Classical piece of furniture – a sideboard for Kedleston,

installed in 1762.

In France, Riesener (who is to figure large later) produced his first piece for the Royal family, - a *Bureau du Roi* (a roll top desk) - in the Rococo style in (delivered in 1769),

and the Greeks! R. Edwards, Review: Neo-Classical Furniture, (Review of Adam and Hepplewhite and Other Neo-Classical Furniture by Musgrave, C.), *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 108, No. 765, 1966, pp. 635-637.

⁷² It was Musgrave who concluded that this statement was an exaggeration, in that it was known that Rococo designs were still being produced by and for the most fashionable people at the time. Perhaps, this explanation was an expression of the excitement of a new and (he thought) growing fashion. C. Musgrave, *Adam and Hepplewhite and other Neo-Classical Furniture*, p.175.

⁷³ E. Harris, *Furniture of Robert Adam*, pp. 27-28.

⁷⁴ As late as 1770, Marie Antoinette took a delivery of a Rococo toilet-table that was made by Joubert. This was reported by S. Eriksen, Marigny and *Le Goût Grec*, p.96.

however this piece was actually started while his shop master Oeben was still alive.

Therefore, in all likelihood, Oeben designed this desk only to be completed and delivered by Riesener. However, one of his earliest *secrétaire à abattants* (designed in 1763 before he



Figure 3-17: On the left a late C18th Rococo styled *bureau a cylindre* frequently called *bureau du roi* by Riesener in 1769 – it was the first piece of furniture that Riesener delivered to the Royal family after he took over Oeben's workshop after his death. On the right is the last *bureau a cylindre* delivered to Marie Antoinette in 1786 executed in a much simpler design, despite the use of very exotic materials such as silver and mother of pearl.

took over the Oeben workshop) had many of the attributes of the Neo-Classical style; it was symmetrical for example and it made many references to classical themes (acanthus leaves, guilloche patterned ormolu, etc. – see Appendix C – p. 434). As time progressed, Riesener's work became simpler, due no doubt in part by the increasing preference for the simpler Neo-Classical line but perhaps also in part by pressure from the *Garde Meuble* at that time to reduce costs. Figure 3-15 shows two *Bureau a cylindre* produced by Riesener's workshop. While the earlier model is definitely in a very elaborate Rococo style, the later example is elegant but far more restrained in its design.

Chippendale makes for an interesting comparison with Riesener. Much of his early work was in Rococo and Chinese styles, as can be seen illustrated in the first two editions of his

Director (1754 and 1756). By 1762 when the third edition of the *Director* was published Chippendale can be seen to have adopted the more 'modern' Neo-Classical style. As Chippendale (to the best of our knowledge) had never undertaken a Grand Tour, he probably acquired his Neo-Classical education from the architects that he worked along side.⁷⁵ C. Gilbert suggests Chippendale probably had access to texts on ancient architecture (such as J. Dawkin's and R. Wood's *Ruins of Palmyra* (1753) and *The Ruins of Balbec* (1757) or illustrated works on architecture and archaeology by a variety of authors - perhaps including the work published by figures like Adam, Chambers and Stuart. Of course, his *Director* offers a definitive architectural prologue, setting out the key elements of the Neo-Classical style - its detail, proportions etc. – together with a close explanation of their relevance to furniture design.

Following the success of Chippendale's *Director*, a raft of other publications was to follow, the most famous being:

- Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Maker and Upholsters Drawing Book*, (1794)
- George Hepplewhite, *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide*, (1794)

From what has been written, it is clear that explaining how and when the Neo-Classical style started is very complicated. C. Gilbert and S. Eriksen, for example, argue that the Neo-Classical style originated in the French Academy in Rome, somewhere between 1740 and 1750.⁷⁶ While it they may be correct in suggesting the French Academy in Rome did initiate

⁷⁵ There is some speculation as to where Chippendale received his artistic training. As we know, England at the time had determined that some sort of practical training was needed for crafts persons such as furniture makers and efforts were being made to provide this instruction to the crafts industry. (See A. Puetz, Design Instruction for Artisans in Eighteenth-Century Britain, *Journal of Design History*, Vol 12, No 3, 1999, pp. 217-239.) Thus, Chippendale may have availed himself to some training either in York before he came to London, or in a private school in the St. Martin's (St. Martin's Lane Academy) area in London. At the very least, he probably associated himself with many of the students and learned by observation and questioning the other students. See C. Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, p. 121.

⁷⁶ Harris, J., 1966, Early Neo-Classical Furniture, pp. 1 – 6.

the conversation around the Neo-Classical style it was probably not a defining influence.⁷⁷ In this connection, perhaps it should be more widely acknowledged that Madame de Pompadour provided greater impetus to the movement in promoting the first ‘official’ expression of interest in the idea of Neo-Classical design. Of course, we should not forget the part played by the discovery of the ruins of Herculaneum in 1738 and of Pompeii 10 years later – and the re-discovery of the Doric Temples of Paestum in 1745. All of these factors contributed to the adoption of the Neo-Classical style in England and France.

In terms of official interest and in terms of the earliest expressions of the Neo-Classical design, France perhaps was ahead of England. However, it was to be the English who were to embrace the Neo-Classical with a fervour that was to recast much of the British urban and rural landscape during the C18th, in such a way as to rebrand it (to use a modern term) and permanently identify it with the Neo-Classical Revival and (arguably) the work of Robert Adam in particular⁷⁸.

C. Concluding Remarks

In the exploration to develop this thesis, there have been several ‘theories’ as to how and when the Neo-Classical style started. As with most complex new trends, the answer is very complex involving a number of factors. One suggestion was that the Neo-Classical approach to design was developed in the French Academy in Rome somewhere between 1740 and 1750.⁷⁹ While it seems likely that C. Gilbert and S. Eriksen are correct in that, it is likely that the French Academy in Rome did impact the initial conversation about the Neo-

⁷⁷ C. Gilbert agrees with S. Eriksen when he concludes that while this academy did impact the start of the Neo-Classical movement in architecture, it was not the major factor driving its becoming the next fashion in architectural design. See, for example, C. Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, p. 118.

⁷⁸ One count has Robert Adam executing work on nearly 50 different projects around England at the time. Many were some of the most important examples of classically inspired architecture in England and the world. These include Harewood House, Kedleston Hall, Kenwood House, Luton Hoo, Newby Hall, Nostell priory, Osterly Park and Syon House. In addition, Adam served as Architect of the King’s Works from 1761 - 1769 (along side of William Chambers). His designs inspired both architects and furniture makers as many following this period produced design books that were based solely on classical themes (e.g. Sheraton and Hepplewhite.)

⁷⁹ Harris, J., 1966, *Early Neo-Classical Furniture*, pp. 1 – 6.

Classical style⁸⁰ but it was not a defining influence. It must be recognized that it was Madame de Pompadour who provided one of the first indications of ‘official’ interest in the idea of Neo-Classical design, however there were many more steps that were to be taken before it was fully expressed in French design. Others suggest that it was inspired specifically by the discovery of the ruins of Herculaneum in 1738 and of Pompeii 10 years later and the re-discovery of the Doric Temples of Paestum in 1745. At the same time, there had been a build up of negative reactions to Rococo in both England and France. Thus, Rococo had reached its peak and was in its decline as the ‘fashionable’ form of design. Throughout this process fashion leaders were moving back and forth between the two countries exchanging ideas and goods with each other. All of these factors probably contributed to the adoption of the Neo-Classical style in both England and France.

In both the earliest official interest, in having the earliest infrastructure to study Classical approaches, and in the earliest expressions of Neo-Classical designs, France had the advantage over England. However, it was England that embraced it the fastest and with the greatest vigour. This can be traced primarily to the active promotion of the new design elements by the architects – particular that of Robert Adam. The other factor that has not been strongly mentioned is that this was the first time that England believed that it was developing this style and not just copying the French designers.

It cannot be forgotten that the classical styles had been prevalent in both countries a number of times before the late C18th. Like fashion in general, as discussed in the prior chapter, the Neo-Classical movement was yet another wave of the classical designs that were being taken from the Greek and Roman cultures. Thus, the ‘Neo-Classical’ style was another step in the learning process – taking one to the next classical interpretation.

⁸⁰ C. Gilbert agrees with S. Eriksen when he concludes that while this academy did impact the start of the Neo-Classical movement in architecture, it was not the soul or even THE major factor driving its becoming the next fashion in architectural design. See, for example, Gilbert, C., *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, p. 118.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, in regards the process of taking architectural designs and transferring it to furniture appears to have been driven primarily by architects as it was assumed at the start of this research. However, it was not nearly as strong as it was though in England. And while the connection between the architects and the furniture designs strengthened during this revival of the ancient designs it was still fairly weak in England. While it was the architects who brought the ideas back from their Grand Tours and their studies in Italy and Greece and it was the architects who first published these ideas and to express them in concrete objects (both buildings and furniture). In both countries the furniture makers followed with their own creations that borrowed from the architect's classical design elements. In England, the furniture makers also began to produce their own books that would include the Neo-Classical ideas to potential buyers of their furniture.