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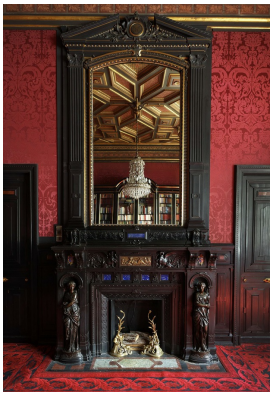
Napoleon III, emperor, by Franz Xavier WINTERHALTER, 1855. Palace of Versailles. © Photo RMN-Grand Palais - D. Arnaudet



Great salon in the Napoleon III style apartments with a monumental fireplace made out of Fleur de Pêcher marble. Louvre Museum, Paris.



Great salon in the Napoleon III style apartments. Louvre Museum, Paris.



Hotel of the Marquise de Païva. Library of Count Guido Henckel von Donnersmarck. Decor designed by Pierre Manguin. Extraordinary black marble fireplace, inlaid with lapis lazuli, supported by two figures of Fame. 1856-1865.



Monumental fireplace in the Great Salon of the Hotel of the Marquise de Païva. Red Griotte marble fireplace with gilt bronze ornaments made by Eugène Delaplanche. On both sides there are two marble statues : Allegory of Music (right) and of Harmony (left).

Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1808-1873) was **Emperor of France from 1852 to 1870** under the name of **Napoleon III**. In a way, the artistic codes of the Napoleon III style — also called **Second Empire style** — were presented at the Exhibition of 1844, during the reign of Louis-Philippe d'Orléans.

Ornamentation and decoration are the focus points of this period. There were plenty of high-quality furnishings and fabrics. **Second Empire designers were renowned for their imposing interior designs**. In a room, the focal points were the fireplace mantels, mirrors, candelabras, sconces and chandeliers. The decorative elements used, such as atlantes and caryatids , were synonymous with luxury.
The **Second Empire brought recognition to decorative art and artists** like the ornamental sculptor **Henri-Alfred Jacquemart (1824-1896)**, the famous metalworker **Charles Christofle (1805-1883)**, and the **cabinetmaker Alfred Beurdeley**.

The **Second Empire style** can be summed up with in one word: **abundance**. There is an abundance of inspiration, a profusion of materials and a **richness of decoration**, made up of a generous mix of 17th and 18th-century styles. This period is famous for its tortoiseshell and metal marquetry furniture in the style of André-Charles Boulle, Louis XV and Louis XVI-style living rooms, and Renaissance-Henri II-style dining rooms.

The Louis XVI style or more precisely the furnishings made for Marie-Antoinette set the tone for the Second Empire interiors. The **Empress Eugénie, who adored Marie-Antoinette, initiated the resurgence of Louis XVI-style** elements such as flower-baskets and tied ribbons. The Louis XVI-Empress-style copied and was inspired by the works of **Carlin**, **Weisweiler** and **Riesener** and was presented to the public at the Universal Exhibition of 1867 .

Important names of the time include **Bellangé**, **Beurdeley** (Imperial warrant), **Cremer**, **Dasson**, **Grohé**, **Diehl**, **Fourdinois** (the Empress' Warrant), **Linke** and **Sormani**. The **cabinetmaker Antoine Krieger** created *"meubles à mécanisme"* (furniture with a special, sometimes secret mechanism) inspired by 18th-century furniture. Small side tables on rollers were made as well as black lacquered furniture covered with flower bouquets.

This was the time of French industrialization, progress, and industrial art. **The technique for making large tufted cushions was invented in 1838**, as well as cast iron furniture that could be reproduced mechanically. This period saw many innovations: new machines allowed for very fine and precisely cut veneer, gold-plating could be used on ornamental bronzes, and marble-carving became easier. The invention of carton pierre (a type of *papier-mâché*) could be used to produce fake sculpted decorations. The use of **electroplating** and silver-plating in metalwork, the **Christofle** specialty, brought high creative freedom and a broader access to products that had up til then been reserved for the very wealthy.

The Second Empire was a period that sought to reconcile progress and innovation with tradition and historicism, a crossroad between a desire to evolve towards a promising future and a lingering sense of attachment to past centuries. This phenomenon is linked to the **Romantic** *"crisis of modernism"* of the 1800's.

In general, the **Napoleon III style was characterized by exuberant shapes, a profusion of decorative motifs, and rather naturalist human figures**, such as those created by **Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux**, a sculptor famous for making the Dance figure on the **Paris Opera house**.

Princess Mathilde, the Emperor's cousin, supported artistic creation during the Second Empire, primarily by collecting paintings. She herself painted watercolors and participated in the Salons held from 1859 to 1897. She held a famous art salon rue de Courcelles, where she received **Carpeaux, Marcello, Gavarni, Lami, Doré, Flameng, Roybet, Détaille, and Jacquet**. These three last painters were to acquire great fame under the Third Republic.
The State supported the arts by commissioning artists from the official Salon whose work did not shock the eye, placing public and private orders. The former Salon de l'Académie (Salon of the Academy) became the **Salon des Artistes français** (**Salon of French Artists**), and at the end of the Empire, the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts (Fine Arts Society) was created. **In 1863, Napoleon III authorized the Salon des Refusés** (a salon for the paintings refused at the official Salon), which illustrated the rise of modernism in painting as opposed to official taste and *"Classicism"*. The Emperor also supported the Universal Exhibitions during his reign. Many monuments were constructed or renovated in different *"historicist"* or "*eclectic*" styles, a mixture of European styles from the past. There are for example the **Vestibule d'Harlay at the Palais de la Justice** (constructed 1852-1868) by **Joseph-Louis Duc** (1802-1879), reminiscent of Ancient Greek architecture, **the "Gothic-style" restoration of the château de Pierrefonds** (1857-1879) by **Eugène Viollet-le-Duc** (1814-1879), the **New Louvre by Visconti and Lefuel inspired by Renaissance architecture, and the Opera** (1861-1875) by **Charles Garnier** (1825-1898), a monument inspired by Baroque architecture but also by many different styles from the past, a characterization of "*eclectism*".

This period saw the **transformation of Paris under the impulse of Baron** Haussmann . The creation of investment-property apartment buildings led to a renewal of urban architecture and allowed architects and decorators to freely express their imagination, to the delight of the bourgeois society that was gaining power continually throughout the Second Empire.
The **eclecticism of the Second Empire**, the association of past tradition with the development of modernism, would be referred to as a *"style without style"*. The Napoleon III-"style" was in fact more of a combination of different styles from past centuries adapted to the modern era in order to correspond to a time of dynamic, innovative transformation.

See also

Haussmann — 1855 World's Fair — 1867 World's Fair — Neo-Renaissance style — Neo-Gothic style — Onyx — The Val d'Osne foundry — Eugène Viollet-le-Duc

See our antique furniture



Charles-Guillaume Diehl (1811 – 1885), Princess Mathilde 's jewellery Box with imperial emblems. Chateau of Compiègne. Realized at the occasion of the World's Fair of 1867. This bluish marble casket adorned with gilded bronzes was considered the greatest master piece of the Fair, perfect in conception, composition and execution. The portraits of the Emperor, Empress and imperial prince are gilded bronze on antique red marble. Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (domaine de Compiègne) / Daniel Arnaudet



Empress Eugénie's bed at the Chateau de Compiègne. Made in 1867 for the new apartments of the Empress Eugénie at the Elysee Palace, this exceptional Louis XVI style bed was designed by architect Robert Ruprich and made by the workshops of the Imperial Garde-meuble. It survived several fires and arrived at Compiegne in the early twentieth century.



Jules Fossey, Louis XIV style Serre-bijoux cabinet of Empress Eugenie. Gilt wood with porcelain plaques painted by P. Roussel. Circa 1855. Chateau of Compiègne. Photo (C) RMN (domain Compiègne) / Gérard Blot.



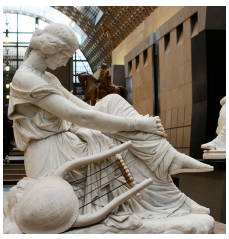
François-Désiré Froment-Meurice, Wine-Harvest Cup. Agate, silver, gold and enameled silver, pearls. Circa 1844. A similar cup was exhibited by Froment-Meurice at the exhibition of French industry products in 1844. It was donated in 1855 by King Jerome to his daughter Princess Mathilde and is preserved at the Chateau of Compiègne. A second cup is kept at the Louvre Museum.



Garnier Opera in Paris realized by architecte Charles Garnier.A first inauguration took place August 15, 1867 for the sole main facade at the request of Napoleon III and at the occasion of the Universal Exhibition.



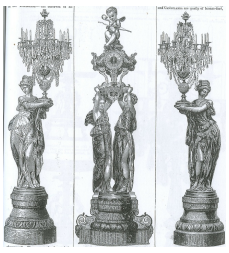
Henri-Auguste Fourdinois, Two bodies cabinet. Carved walnut, inlaid blood jasper and lapis lazuli inlaid. Exhibited at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867, this piece was rewarded with a Grand Prix. © Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris / Photo: Jean Tholance



James Pradier, Sapho, 1852, marble. Exhibited at the Salon of 1852 when Pradier died : the statue is then covered with a black veil, and the medal of honor of the exhibition was attributed to the artist posthumously.



Louis XVI style centre-piece, by Christofle & Cie, 1867 World's Fair.



Clock and pair of candelabras from a design by Carrier Belleuse, presented by the Compagnie des Onyx, directed by M. Viot, 1868 World's Fair. In part in gilded bronze, draped with onyx, enamelled bouquets and antique green marble stands. This mantel piece ornament greatly impressed the Fair's visitors.



Christofle Manufactory, Paris. "France distributing crowns of glory," 1852 - 1858. It was commissioned in 1852 by Prince-President Louis Napoleon, future Napoleon III and was destined to adorn a table of more than 30 meters long, hence its exceptional width of about 3 meters. It survived the terrible fire of the Tuileries Palace in 1871. Museum of Decorative Arts, Paris.



Émile Froment-Meurice, Napoleon III table centerpiece. Models for a table centerpiece commissioned by Napoleon III which was presented in 1867 at the Paris Universal Exhibition. Museum of Decorative Arts, Paris.