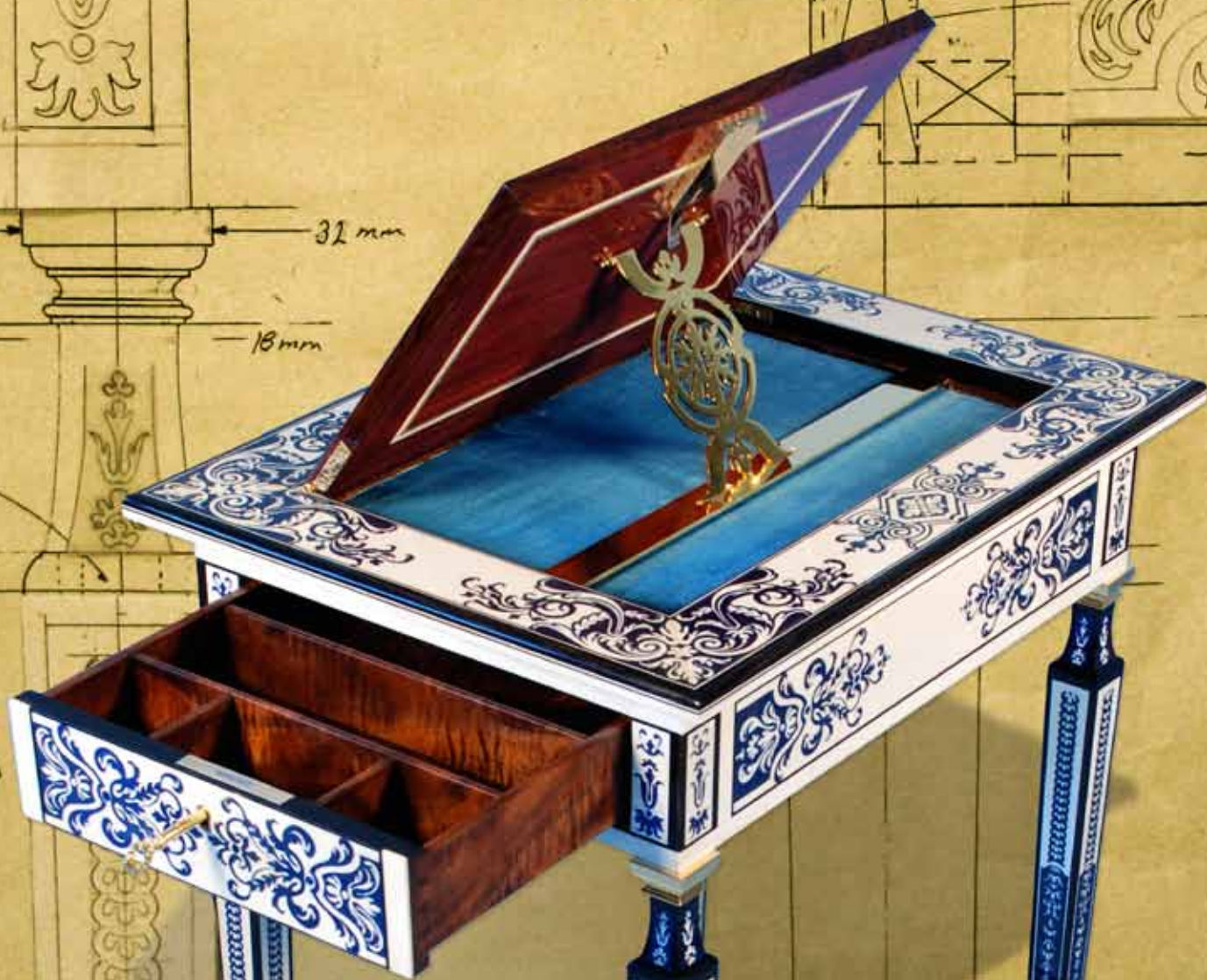


Aaron Kadelow

Making the King's Furniture

A MODERN DAY
ÉBÉNISTE RE-CREATING
A MASTERPIECE



AN INTERVIEW WITH

AARON RADELOW



AARON RADELOW HAS DEDICATED HIMSELF TO BECOMING ONE OF THE MOST DYNAMIC AND VERSATILE CUSTOM FURNITURE MAKERS IN AMERICA TODAY.

“My ultimate goal is to be constantly evolving as an artist and bringing life to unique creations.”

For the past twenty years, Aaron has been hand producing original designs and masterful re-creations in his native San Diego, California. His diverse portfolio of work includes everything from Queen Anne dressing tables and Byzantine hand-carved gates, to rustic Morris chairs.

Equally influenced by centuries-old French marquetry, and Art Deco, Aaron expects each piece to stand as a sculpture even as it functions as furniture. From Macassar Ebony to triple chrome plating, his pieces combine some of the finest styles and materials known. Excruciating detail is paid to every step of the process from sawing his own veneers to the labor-intensive application of a French Polish. Aaron intends for his work to be passed down through families and enjoyed for centuries to come.

Aaron has in the last 6 years created a piece that far surpasses the furniture of the modern woodworker today. He now can truly imagine what it must have been to build furniture for Louis XIV. This interview explains the reasons why he created the tables, his discoveries through the process and the support he received to keep this passion alive.

Boulle cut marquetry by Aaron Radelow.



This interview explains the reasons why he created the tables, his discoveries through the process, and the support he received to keep his passion alive.

Q: Why did you decide to create the tables?

A: I first discovered this unique table in a book written by French Master, Pierre Raymond, the global authority on everything marquetry. Pierre's book illustrated a small reading and writing table, veneered with blue painted cow horn and ivory marquetry. This table really captured my attention. Reading further I discovered that it was literally in my back yard at the Getty museum in Los Angeles. Visiting the museum for the first time and seeing the table in person was something really amazing. At that moment I felt I had to build it. I didn't know how I was going to do it, I just knew I had to. There was definitely a feeling that I had done it before in a past life.



Louis XIV



The King's mistress,
Madame de Montespan.



The J.
Paul Getty
Musuem,
Los Angeles



Pierre Gole : Ebéniste de Louis XIV (Relié)
by Lunsingh Scheurleer

THE MAKING OF THE TABLES



Q: How long did it take you to create the tables from concept to completion?

A: I built two tables. One is a re-creation of the original piece on permanent display at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. The other (*contre-partie*) is not known to exist. First I had to build a marquetrie sawhorse and a cabinet for storing the thousands of pieces. In addition, it was necessary for me to build a small marquetrie workshop prior to starting anything.

(continued on page 4)



Blue & White Table [*partye*]

Reading and Writing Table

Maker: Aaron Radelow

Finish: Patrice Penot-Lejeune

Materials: Oak carcass veneered with: Congo ivory, blue painted cow horn backed with sterling silver leaf, ebony. Hinged top is veneered with amaranth and ivory, banded with rosewood; top surface and interior shallow cavity are lined with French silk velvet by Prella. Drawer is made with claro walnut; turned ivory feet; gilt brass, and bronze. Marquetry cutting technique: Tarsia a Incastro.

Size: 63.5 X 48.5 X 35.5 cm

Description: This table's exotic materials set it apart from anything else in the history of furniture making. Europe's fascination with blue and white porcelain imported from the Orient had a very strong influence on design. The original of this table is attributed to French trained, Dutch cabinet maker Pierre Gole. Commissioned by Louis XIV, this table was made for a house at Versailles; Trianon de Porcelaine. Blue and white was the theme at the small summer tea house built for the Sun King's mistress Madame de Montespan. The blue and white ambiance would have created a relaxing environment for taking light meals and cool drinks. Unfortunately the Trianon de Porcelaine was demolished to make way for the The Marble Trianon, or Grand Trianon. The table is designed with a drawer for writing equipment. The hinged top of the table serves dual functions; as a writing surface, or it can be raised and locked at an angle for reading.

Note: All ivory used is legal pre-ban with documentation. (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)



Blue & White Table [*contre-partye*]

Reading and Writing Table

Maker: Aaron Radelow

Finish: Patrice Penot-Lejeune

Materials: Oak carcass veneered with: Congo ivory, blue painted cow horn backed with Sterling silver leaf, ebony. Hinged top is veneered with amaranth and ivory, banded with rosewood; top surface, as well as the interior shallow cavity, are lined with French silk velvet by Prella. Drawer is made with claro walnut; turned ivory feet; gilt brass, and bronze.

Size: 63.5 X 48.5 X 35.5 cm

Description: When marquetry is cut using *tarsia a incastro*, also known as the Boulle technique, the marqueteer simultaneously cuts two, three, or sometimes even four duplicates. In this situation, marquetry for two tables is yielded, because only ivory and blue horn were placed into the marquetry packets. Once the cutting is complete, the packets are opened, and all the pieces are separated and organized in large shallow trays. In assembling the marquetry, blue pieces are placed into white backgrounds, and white pieces are placed into blue backgrounds; this can be seen in the photos. The original, *contre-partye*, table has never been sighted or mentioned. Anyone who has seen the pictured table, is seeing it for the first time in about three hundred and thirty years; this table is the most admired and applauded of the two. Aside from the transposed marquetry patterns, the tables are identical.

Note: All ivory used is legal pre-ban with documentation. (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)



Assorted raw materials used in the construction of the tables. Brass, bronze; ivory, cow horn; oak, amaranth, claro walnut, ebony, and rosewood.



Q: Is the table a true representation of the materials that make up the original?

A: Mainly. I substituted a couple nonessential materials. The drawers are made with highly figured Claro walnut, much more beautiful than the French walnut on the original. To eliminate any possibility of rust, I made the metalwork for the tables with brass, bronze, and German silver, much of this is gilt.

Before ever getting started, I researched the different types of ivories, their availability, and where I could find enough material to complete two tables. An e-mail to U.S. Fish & Game was useful.

I also befriended David Warther, of Warther's Carving Museum in Ohio who has been very helpful. Pre-ban legal Congo ivory, the finest African ivory available, was used throughout the creation of the tables for its purity in color.

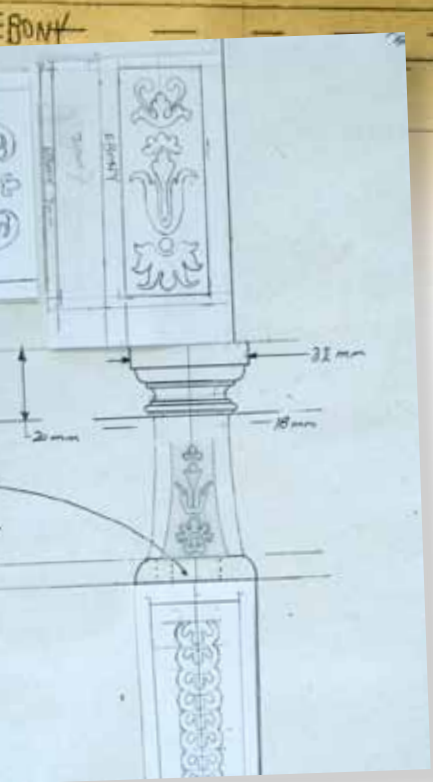
The other material difficult to obtain, due to hoof-and-mouth disease, was the cow horn. The finest cow horn comes from south Africa. Preparing these two materials is extremely labor intensive. The table is held together with hide and fish glues, and the finish is French polish applied by Patrice Penot-Lejeune, a graduate of École Boulle, Paris.



Gilt-brass lid support.



View of figured claro walnut drawer and lock.



Scale drawing of tables and marquetry by Aaron Radelow.

“In 2003 I sent a letter of inquiry to the Getty museum’s decorative arts department requesting measurements and information so that I could start my drawings.”



I was referred to intern Antonia Brodie who was gracious enough to record measurements directly from the original table during her own time when the museum was closed. I also took numerous trips to the museum and shot detailed photographs.



Raw unsurfaced white oak carcass and drawer.

Then came the rare fortune of meeting Brian Considine, head of the Getty’s Decorative Arts Department. Mr. Considine also donated valuable time to allow me to personally inspect the details of the original table’s cutting and construction when the museum was closed to the public.

All my dealings with Getty staff has been a wonderful experience. I worked on my re-creations in my spare time, outside of my hours working on commissioned pieces. Completion of my tables came on June, 22, 2009.

THE ONLY ONE IN EXISTENCE

CONTRE-PARTYE

Writing Table Top and Gilt Stand

Table tops can be raised for reading a book, and closed for writing. Tops are veneered with amaranth, rosewood, and ivory. The writing surface is covered with French silk velvet by *Prelle*.

Silk Lining

The top of the table and the interior shallow cavity are lined with French silk velvet.

Writing Drawer

The small drawer is made of claro walnut and divided into five compartments for writing equipment. The drawer is fitted with a lock and gilded key.

Ivory Table Feet

The feet are lathe turned by hand from a solid piece of antique Congo ivory; sanded and polished.

Legs

Each leg contains 266 individual pieces.

Marquetry

Each table consists of 3,216 marquetry pieces. Every piece is cut (by hand) on the *chevalet*, using a jeweler's blade. Saw blade kerf is 0.006"



The table consists of over 3,216 pieces of individual marquetry pieces.

Q: What is the *contre-partye* and why is this table so extremely rare?

A: First and foremost, the materials are very rare.

The surface materials comprise of Congo ivory, cow horn, ebony, rosewood, amaranth, French silk velvet, and gold. When cutting marquetry in the Boulle technique, contrasting materials are used to exaggerate the marquetry once assembled; such as the white and blue effect.

The table on display at the J. Paul Getty Museum has a majority of blue marquetry on a white ground, *partye*. The *contre-partye* has a majority of ivory marquetry on a blue ground, and it is this table that does not exist. Unfortunately, countless pieces of art have been lost forever to wars, fires, natural disasters, etc. Furthermore, the proportions and design of the table I have never seen anywhere.

The marquetry patterns are dynamic. A unique characteristic is how the first part and second part marquetry transpose in the same section, and then the alternating blue and white ground veneers.



“The original, *contre-partye*, table that has never been sighted or mentioned. Anyone who has seen the pictured table, is seeing it for the first time; this table is the most admired and applauded of the two. Aside from the transposed marquetry patterns, the tables are identical.”

A MODERN DAY ÉBÉNISTE

BUILDING A MASTERPIECE

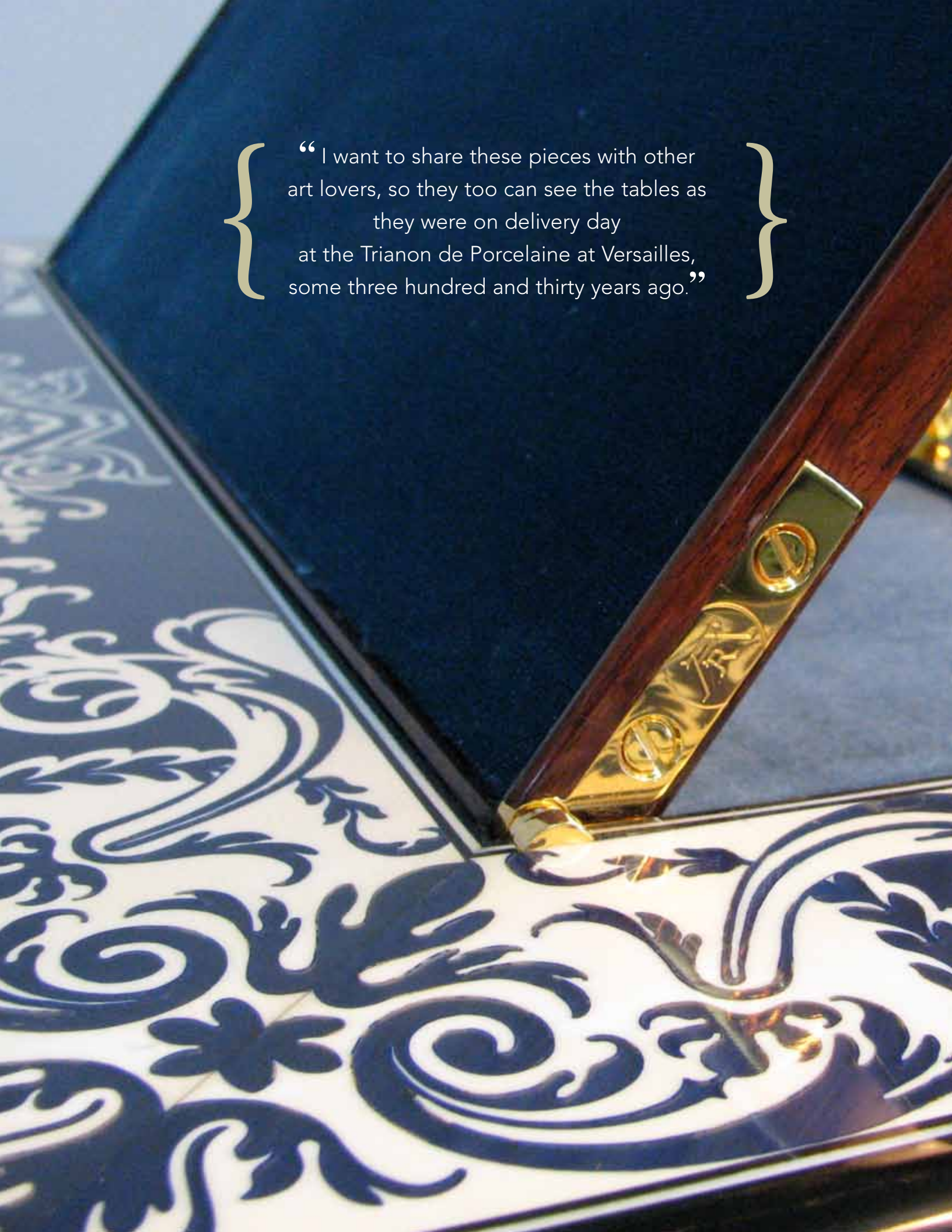
Q: What did you hope to achieve with making these tables?

A: This question has multiple answers. When I started this endeavor, it was basically to see if I could create it. As I became more involved, the complexities and the investment became ever more clear.

Companies everywhere are in constant competition to develop anything to set themselves above and apart from all others. I'd say I was doing this too. It would be a great achievement to have my tables photographed along side the original.

I want to also share these pieces with other art lovers, so they too can see the tables as they were on delivery day at the Trianon de Porcelaine at Versailles, some three hundred and thirty years ago. It would be wonderful to have them go on tour to all the museums that have original pieces attributed to Pierre Gole.

Le chevelet is the tool by which all marquetry is cut out by hand, piece-by-piece, with a jewelers blade.



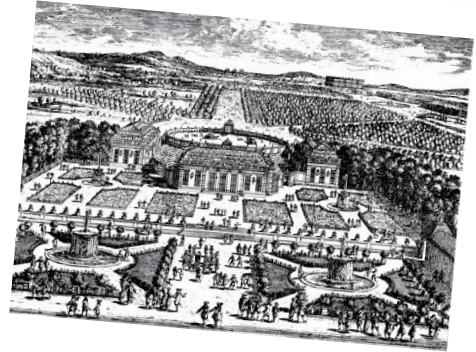
“ I want to share these pieces with other art lovers, so they too can see the tables as they were on delivery day at the Trianon de Porcelaine at Versailles, some three hundred and thirty years ago.”

AT THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES

TRIANON DE PORCELAINE



The Palace of Versailles



Drawing of Trianon de Porcelaine

Where the Table is Believed to Originate

It is believed that this table came from the Trianon de Porcelaine, which is now where the Grand Trianon stands, a small chateau built for the King's mistress, Madame de Montespan.



Madame de Montespan

“ Le Trianon de Porcelaine was a tea-house built in 1670 by Louis XIV for his mistress, Madame de Montespan.”



This table's marquetry of ivory and horn, painted blue underneath, would have followed the chateau's blue and white color scheme, imitating blue and white Chinese porcelain, a fashionable and highly prized material at the time.

The table's top may be raised to form an angled reading stand, or locked flat for writing, while a drawer at the side is fitted for writing equipment. It is now housed in the Getty. Le Trianon de Porcelaine was a tea-house built in 1670 by Louis XIV for his mistress, Madame de Montespan. According to The Garden and Landscape Guide.

In order to spend more time with her, the king had a little chateau, an elaborate summerhouse, built in a remote part of the grounds of Versailles. The chateau was named Trianon de Porcelaine. The chateau became a show-place.



The original table in the J. Paul Getty Museum



Ivory & horn table by Aaron Radelow.



Q: How is it that you were able to create these amazing pieces?

A: One word: Support. I've had years of unwavering support and encouragement from my family, girlfriend and many interested people (friends/associates). That in and of itself, for me, is even more amazing than the tables themselves.

If you don't have support and encouragement, it doesn't matter how talented you are. One can have all the money and talent, but if you don't have the emotional backing, you will be defeated.



Images: Top right; each piece of ivory is cut out and assembled one by one.

As in past centuries, camaraderie with your fellow craftsmen is important in order to hammer out and shape ideas, and craft a strong and well tempered plan. Some of my associates are W. Patrick Edwards, a great instructor of marquetry techniques, and Patrice Penot-Lejeune, a knowledgeable ébéniste. From time to time we'd meet and discuss the finer points of furniture making over a cup of coffee. Lastly, I studied intensely the books by Pierre Raymond which are invaluable.

“If you don't have support and encouragement, it doesn't matter how talented you are.”

Images: Below; The ivory feet were turned from a solid piece of ivory and crafted into the curved feet as on the original Pierre Gole table. Bottom; marquetry packet with pieces cut and removed. Left photo; blue and white table by Aaron Radelow.





Aaron Radelow's Gole tables next to the original Pierre Gole table (center) in the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Q: Having created these tables, how do you envision the future?

A: In the end, after they've had a good public viewing, I would like to see my tables purchased by a collector or perhaps a museum. Due to the ivory they will of course have to remain in America.

Having successfully completed these tables, I see myself as a public educator, demonstrating that amazing pieces can still be made to custom order. The Kings and Queens of yesteryear still walk among us, as do the master craftsmen they employed. I'm hopeful before I leave this realm there will be a Renaissance, the tide will turn, and a healthy appreciation and desire to commission such unrivaled furniture will once again surface with zeal.

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