A SPACE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL
The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Period Room Analysis

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The French design style of 'Rococo' is recognizable by its elaborate ornamentalism often marked by the use of scrolls and motifs, and there are few better period rooms in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art that better exemplify this style of decoration than the *Boudoir from the Hôtel de Crillon* (Accession No. 44.128) by Pierre-Adrien Pâris.[1] While the museum has myriads of larger, 'grander' French period rooms just steps away, this boudoir was instantly attractive as a topic of research due to its rich history and its ability to serve as a mechanism for understanding the gradual shift towards comfort in eighteenth century France.

Despite its rather modest size at just 9 ft. 3 ½ in. by 15 ft. 5 ½ in. by 14 ft. 3 ½ in. as well as its relatively covert location within Gallery 546 of the Wrightsman Galleries in the European Sculpture and Decorative Arts department, the shining gilded moldings and abundant 'sunlight' of the boudoir beckon viewers to approach and spend time examining the space.[2] This is rather reflective of the original intention for the space; a space in which extensive amounts of time can be spent self-reflecting, escaping the burdens of public life, or entertaining private guests.

In order to understand the function and design of this specific boudoir, it is important to give the space context by examining the conception of boudoirs and the manner in which their purpose has evolved. In Section 1 of *Designing the French Interior: The Modern Home and Mass Media*, Georgina Downey and Mark Taylor state, "Named for a mood and purposed for retreat or solitude, the boudoir as a category of modern domestic space was one of the first to be set aside purely for the individual, rather than for strictly socializing-." [3] When boudoirs were

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[1] "Rococo," *Oxford Dictionary of Art,* https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/rococo
[2] "Boudoir from the Hôtel de Crillon," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/199496
[3] Georgina Downey and Mark Taylor, "Impolite Readings and Erotic Interiors in Eighteenth-Century France," in *Designing the French Interior: The Modern Home and Mass Media*, ed. Anca I. Lasc (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 20.

first introduced, then called *médienne* (a French term for 'taking a midday siesta'), they were answering to a need for a quiet place for the men and women often featured in French novels to sulk, hence the name change to boudoir, adapted from *bouder,* or to pout.[4] As described in *The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual- and the Modern Home Began,* Joan DeJean determines that the space was first seen in the 1715 architectural floor plans for a bedroom suite in the Hôtel d'Humières, where it was marketed a space "reserved for the inner life."[5] As a reflection of their initial purposes of privacy, ease, and relaxation, early boudoirs featured understated decor, such as the simple flowered cotton fabric of the boudoir of Madame la Duchesse of Bourbon or the pastel shades of Emilie du Châtelet's boudoir.[6] The very meaning and use of boudoirs was changed with the space of Marie-Anne Deschamps, a prostitute turned dancer known for her serial penchant for wealthy lovers. Located in an urban Paris mansion (hôtel) near The Louvre, her pink and silver mirror-plastered boudoir became notorious for being constructed with "the wages of debauchery and prostitution" following its completion in November 1757.[7] DeJean states that this very room "succeeded in transforming one of the original small spaces reserved for private life into a blatant advertisement for exhibtionistic sexual display."[8] Despite its initial infamy and backlash, the boudoir of Deschamps launched a lifestyle revolution that transformed once-private boudoirs into spaces of seduction, which is perhaps some of the reason for the excessive display of this particular boudoir, originally located next to a bedchamber in the Parisian townhouse of Louis-Marie-Augustin, fifth duc d'Aumont.

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[4] Joan DeJean, *The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual- and the Modern Home Began*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 179.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid, 180.
[7] Ibid, 181.
[8] Ibid, 182.

The Duke's residence itself has an extensive history, located on what was formerly the royal property of King of France Louis XV that transitioned into a public square in 1748 when the King needed a prime location in which to display an oversized bronze statue that was offered to him by the city of Paris.[9] Designed by royal architect Jacques Ange Gabriel, the Neoclassical structure was left as a mere façade to allow for customizable construction based on the needs of the land developers.[10] In 1775, builder and entrepreneur Louis-François Trouard purchased the largest lot, upon which he built the townhome that housed this boudoir.[11] In 1776, the unfinished home was rented to the Duke, who was always one to stay on top of trends and often moved in search of increasingly popular addresses.[12] It is rather fitting that the Duke ended up living on land once owned by Louis XV as he spent much of his post-military life as gentleman of the bedchamber, or close attendant, to the King, who was also a childhood friend.[13]

As gentleman of the bedchamber, the Duke was tasked with "managing widespread estates, … forming a collection of French decorative arts, mainly contemporary, considered unique at the time."[14] Because he was constantly surrounded with fine furnishings and pieces of art, it is hardly surprising that the Duke would want only the best in decoration for his own dwelling, for which he appointed architect Pierre-Adrien Pâris.[15] As quoted in *The Rococo Interior* by Kelly Scott, French writer Louis-Sébastien Mercier describes the lengthy process of furnishing homes; "Completely decorating the inside [of a home] takes three times the time

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[9] James Parker, "The Crillon Room," in *Period Rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), 118.
[10] Ibid.
[11] "Boudoir from the Hôtel de Crillon."
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] "Boudoir from the Hôtel de Crillon."

employed by the bricklayers on the construction; antechambers, staircases, corridors, commodités, all of it is never ending."[16] It is clear that Rococo homes are not quick in composition, so the Duke likely put a lot of thought into choosing the architect of his interiors. Pâris, son of the royal architect of the Prince-Bishop of Basel and pupil of French architect Louis-François Trouard, spent an extensive amount of time working on this boudoir in particular; work that included a research trip to Rome that was partially funded by the Duke. [17] [18] It was in Rome that Pâris discovered the sixteenth-century arabesque Vatican wall paintings by Raphael, an admired painter of the Italian Renaissance.[19]

Drawing inspiration from Raphael's decorative work, Pâris had an unknown artist paint the faceted walls that form the small polyhedral boudoir in the home of the Duke. During this time period, wall painting was seen as both a necessary *and* luxury measure, as it offered an beautiful way to preserve and increase the durability of structures while covering materials that might be less than attractive.[20] The elaborate arabesque paintings of this boudoir go above and beyond merely protecting the oak walls, which was likely a result of the close communication between woodworkers and house-painters that was necessary in order to achieve successful boiserie.[21] The walls are adorned with garlands, scrolls, and small animals of subdued yet rich pinks, blues, yellows, and greens; in contrast to the walls and doors of a light, minty blue base. The delicately-painted animals, such as mice and snails, balance on scrolls of acanthus leaves, which was a motif commonly used in Rococo ornamentation. There are symbols painted

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[16] Quoted in Kelly Scott, *The Rococo Interior* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 14.
[17] "Pierre-Adrien Pâris," *The J. Paul Getty Museum,* http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/artists/537/pierre-adrien-pris-french-1745-1819/
[18] "Boudoir from the Hôtel de Crillon."
[19] Parker, 119.
[20] Scott, 21.
[21] Ibid.

throughout the room, including a 'sun face' above the rear door of the room. This was a widely-used representation of Louis XV, known as 'The Sun God'; the use of which here is perhaps in homage to the home's former landowner and the advisee of the Duke. During this period, colors rapidly went in and out of favor which resulted in the need for consultants with 'colourmen' who advised house-painters and clients on favorable colors for specific rooms- in this case, the minty blue base color.[22] Framing the wall-paintings is a series of gilded oak moldings that form concentrically-arranged rectangles, recurring from wall to wall. In the innermost rectangle of these panels, the corners are inverted to make room for gilded rosette decorations that were commonly used during the Rococo period. As described in *The Rococo Interior,* "various woods were used for such panelling- chestnut, lime, pine … or a combination of several- but for high-cost schemes oak was preferred."[23] The use of costly, luxurious oak, paired with the placement of the detailed wall paintings in this particular room as opposed to in a pass-through space such as a hall, enforces the idea that boudoirs were spaces in which extensive time could be spent.

In addition to self reflection, reflection of the literal sense occurred in the space as well, which was a result of four mirrored wall panels angled with the intent of reflecting the painted panels. As described in *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century,* a catalog highlighting a 2004 Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute exhibition of the same name, "While many materials were used for inserts to boiserie in the eighteenth century, such as velvets, brocades, and tapestries, mirrors held a unique position because of their ability to

[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid, 14.

augment a room's spatial, ornamental, and luminescent arrangement."[24] In its current state, the room has an additional, larger mirror set into a niche, however this is a contemporary addition that replaced an interior window that originally shed natural light on a rear stairwell.

The wall paintings aren't the only things reflected by the mirrors, however, as the room is graced with soft natural light as the result of a set of glass-laden French doors. The doors, framed by a pair of carefully-draped ribbed silk curtains, would have opened up onto a balcony facing the courtyard that housed the bronze statue of Louis XV that prompted the development of this very townhome.[25] The curtains, of a light blue color that blends with the walls and their respective paintings, are held back by a pair of coordinating gold swags and medallions that reference the gilded moldings. When the curtains were open, natural light streamed in and allowed the metallic molding to shine, however it may not have been as enhancing of the wall paintings. According to painter Girard, "Decorative painting is easily prone to losing its freshness, and if neglected, it soon deteriorates; sun, fresh-air, and damp together conspire to destroy such works-."[26] While a beautiful and softening addition to the otherwise hard lines of the polyhedral boudoir, the curtains serve the purpose of protecting the walls from the harsh sun.

Like the curtains, the furniture of the room also serves a purpose, not only within the space but also as an apparatus to allow for better understanding of the shift towards comfort within eighteenth century France. The idea of comfort was not necessarily commonplace in France prior to the introduction of the boudoir, which became a space in which architects could ease clients into the idea of comfort and function meeting form before introducing it to

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[24] Andrew Bolton and Harold Koda, "The Late Supper: The Memento: Crillon Room (Paris ca. 1777-80)," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 109.
[25] Parker, 120.
[26] Scott, 21.

more-centralized spaces of the home, such as a salon or gallery. As described in *The Age of Comfort*, "The [boudoir] was more relaxed and private than other rooms, the place where you went to get away from everything- even the already intimate and stress-free socializing in private and semiprivate [sic] rooms."[27] The boudoir of the Duke was no exception to this, as evident in the room's original furniture that was carefully curated by Pâris. An inventory list drafted after the Duke's death in 1782 states that the room housed four stools, two armchairs, and a sofa (or canape), all of which were upholstered in the same blue moiré silk as the curtains.[28] By swathing all of the furniture in a fabric nearly identical in color to the walls, the focus was cleverly placed on the detailed, gilt-framed wall-paintings. Each of the four stools was placed under the four mirrored wall panels while the sofa resided in the right-wall niche that faced the balcony doors on the opposite wall. While little information on the original furniture exists, inferences can be made based on the furniture of the Rococo period. Despite the fact that there are many different seating option within this space, the sofa is of particular note as it was of relatively new invention, and, according to DeJean, allowed "even the grandest lady [to become] carefree and at ease."[29] As described in *The History of Interior Design* by John Pile, the upholstered sofa was "developed in response to a new concern for informality and comfort"[30], which is evident in its versatility. Sofas provide the options of sitting or lying, and are therefore an ideal space-saving solution for a room like a boudoir that might not have space for both a bergere armchair and a chaise longue. Because the purpose of boudoirs changed over time, and likely varied from home

[27] DeJean, 180.
[28] "Boudoir from the Hôtel de Crillon."
[29] DeJean, 115.
[30] John Pile, "Renaissance, Baroque, and Rococo in France and Spain," in *The History of Interior Design* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000), 181.

to home, versatility in seating was common and interior architects increasingly channeled this versatility through the use of sofas.

In *The Age of Comfort,* it is stated, "The boudoir was thus in a sense the ultimate interior room, a place where architecture, furniture, and interior decoration made absolute privacy absolutely comfortable."[31] All of these elements come together in the boudoir of the Duke, of which the decorative arts, walls, and furnishings, require time spent in (if not self-reflecting or entertaining) appreciation for the space.

[31] Ibid, 178.

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