Cat. No. 11, Gillian Wilson

title: Corner cabinet

place\_date: French (Paris), cabinet, ca. 1744–55, clock, ca. 1744

attribution: By Jacques Dubois (French, 1694–1763, master 1742); clock movement by Étienne Le Noir II (French, 1699–1778, master 1717); enamel dial by Antoine Nicolas Martinière (French, 1706–1784, master 1720); design attributed to Nicolas Pineau (French, 1684–1754); maker of gilt bronze clock case unknown

materials: Mahogany\* and white oak\* veneered with bloodwood\*, kingwood\*, *ferréol*\*, amaranth, and mahogany; enameled metal clock dial; glass; gilt bronze mounts; brass and iron hardware and lock [Restorations in fir\*, walnut\*, and Andaman padauk\*]

dimensions: H: 9 ft. 6 in., W: 4 ft. 3 in., D: 2 ft. 4 1/2 in. (289.5 x 129.5 x 72 cm)

accession\_number: 79.DA.66

## ***Description***

A female figure, probably representing Astronomy, is seated on a cloud at the top of the clock. She holds a globe in her left hand and carries a torch, the flame of which is missing, in her right. Her head is encircled by a diadem of seven stars, and a sunburst is placed on her chest. In front of her stands an eagle whose head is turned in her direction, away from the viewer. The dial is surrounded by a concave band of auricular work, which is contained by large S-scrolls that continue down the sides of the clock to join the widely splayed and scrolled legs. The feet are overlaid with acanthus leaves, which rise and mingle with a garland of flowers to either side of the clock. Beneath the dial a large shell depends from addorsed leafy C-scrolls. The white enamel dial is painted with Roman numerals in blue and Arabic numerals in black. The pierced and scrolled hands are of gilt bronze. The whole facade of the clock is supported at the back by an S-shaped iron bar.[[1]](#endnote-1)

The open section of the étagère below contains one shelf. The front edge of the upper surface, on which the clock is perched, is set with a molding decorated with leaf tips and C-scrolls above beading. The étagère below is fronted on both sides by large scrolled and leafy mounts set above with shell-like forms and bordered below with broad auricular work. Above in the center is a large pierced shell. Further scrolled and leafy mounts extend along the interior walls of the space, above and below. The scrolls are set with auricular work and a winding stem of laurel. At the back a leafy mount rises from a cabochon surrounded by leafy scrolls. The vertical mount rises to enclose an oval concavity, chased with auricular waves and set with a short pendant of leaf clusters that falls from a fanned shell motif above.

The edge of the upper shelf is set with a molding of guilloche set with alternating rosettes and cabochons. The étagère below is framed above by leafy scrolls centered by a large pierced shell motif. The front edges of the sides of the area are set with massive mounts that consist of a naked winged putto sitting on a recumbent lion. The groups are supported by large leafy S-scrolls, which extend above to form the outer frame of the étagère, continuing and branching to form the scrolling two branch lights. The twisting branches are set with leaves and borders of pierced and unpierced shellwork. The bobeches and the drip pans are formed by scrolling leaves set with curved gadroons. Both the putti carry quivers of arrows. Their hands originally carried chains that were attached to the bars held in the jaws of the lions.

The double bombé interior walls of the étagère are set below with borders of leafy scrolls set with short areas of concave shellwork and a twining laurel stem. At the back is a complex vertical mount consisting of an oval cabochon surrounded by auricular work and held by two C-scrolls. Above rise large leafy scrolls that clasp the upper bombé profile of the wall and extend briefly across the undersurface of the shelf above. Feathered wings extend to either side. Below, the main vertical shaft of the mount is set with leafy scrolls and auricular S-scrolls above leafless scrolls. These enclose, in descending order, a small round cabochon topped by a leaf cluster, a short rising leaf spike on a stippled ground, a concave area of auricular work, and a corolla set with a leafy pod from which rises to either side leafy branches set with flowers. The mount terminates at the base in a further concave oval form, surrounded by C-scrolls and lined with auricular wave stippling.

The front edge of the double-bowed drawer component is set with a broad molding consisting of leafy S-scrolls enclosing buds and shell forms on a stippled ground. The frieze is occupied by the face of a drawer set at its center with a scrolled and stippled cartouche pierced with a keyhole. The cartouche is surrounded by a broad frame of auricular work from which extend, on either side, leafy S-scrolls. Crossed palm leaves are set behind this arrangement. The drawer front is also set with leafy scrolled rising handles, set with small clusters of flowers and leaves. The lower edge of the drawer is set with a narrow stippled molding of leaf tips.

The canted corners are set, at the level of the drawer, with a pierced mount consisting of C- and S-scrolls, enclosing a large cabochon below, surrounded by an auricular frame. Above, two leafy branches are suspended.

Below, the corner mounts on the lower case consist of a shaft that rises to form a double scroll. From this depends a pendant of bellflowers. To each side of this pendant are large concave areas of shellwork. The inner of the two moldings extends to form a leafy scroll that passes behind the other molding to emerge as a twining leafy stem set with flowers. The outer molding extends down the entire length of the corner and is entwined. A further pendant of bellflowers emerges from the area of shellwork. It passes down the outer edge of the mount and reemerges on the inner edge.

The four outer legs are mounted with broad leafy moldings on their inner and outer edges. The upper areas of the outer legs are clasped by large concave bosses, chased with auricular waves and set with horizontally placed concave cabochons. The bosses are clasped by auricular C-scrolls. Above rises an arrangement of three scrolled leaves. Extending from the inner edge is an outstretched feathered wing, resting on S-scrolls of auricular work. The moldings at the outer and inner edges of the leg extend to form the double-scrolled foot, the front of which is set with a fan of leaves and the back with a single acanthus leaf. The inner legs carry mounts of a differing form. Above is a curved cabochon clasped by four leafy C-scrolls, three of which carry borders of auricular shellwork. A small sprig of flowers and leaves appears at the outer edge of this arrangement. The outer moldings of the leg descend to form double scrolled feet. The scrolls support a large concave cabochon, framed with auricular work and topped by leaves. A large acanthus leaf forms the back of each foot.

The lower profile of the cupboard, between the two inner legs, is set with a small cabochon enclosed by C-scrolls, topped by a shell and flanked on either side by leaves from which extend twining branches carrying leaves and flowers, all supported by the scrolled moldings that rise from the inner edges of the legs. The outer lower profiles are set with large shells that are similarly supported by extensions of the inner and outer leg moldings. Above the double doors of the cupboard is a broad and plain ogee molding. The doors carry frames of gilt bronze, each consisting of a curved leafy molding set at the outer lower and upper corners with curved areas of shellwork and at the inner upper corners with an S-shaped area of pierced shellwork. At the midpoint the borders carry areas of shellwork, those set at the inner edges of the frames clasped by leaves and pierced with keyholes form the escutcheons. The frames are entwined along their lengths on all four sides by ivy branches carrying leaves and berries. Below the doors a further broad molding extends across the front. It is cast with the same elements as those found on the molding at the top of the cabinet, below the clock.

The interior surfaces of the étagère, the top of the lower case, and both the doors are veneered with bloodwood, the grain placed to form diamonds, set with twining branches of end cut kingwood, carrying stylized flowers and leaves. The surface of the top of the lower case is also bordered at the front by a broad band of *ferréol*. The interior of the cabinet doors are veneered with mahogany and set with foliate decorations in amaranth. The undersurfaces of the two shelves are veneered with bloodwood and twining branches of end cut kingwood. The upper surface of the upper shelf is plainly veneered with bloodwood, as are all the remaining surfaces of the cabinet.

## ***Marks***

The back of the carcass is stamped “IDUBOIS” three times ([fig. 11-1](#fig-11-1)). A paper label on the back of the carcass is inscribed in ink with the Nazi Administration/Zentralstelle für Denkmalschutz (Central Office for Monument Protection) confiscation number “AR 653.” This number is also painted twice on the back. Inscribed in Polish on the bottom of the carcass of the cabinet’s central drawer is “Josef Bone(k?) Poprawial w roku 1845,” which translates as “improved in the year 1845.” The clock dial is signed “ETIENNE LE NOIRE A PARIS.” The backplate of the movement is inscribed “Etienne LeNoir AParis.” The back of the dial is signed “a. n. martiniere, 1744-7 bre.” The spring of the striking train is signed “Buzot aout 1744.” Graffiti on the front plate reads, “RK. 1788 ie 28 Aprilis Kurk-hausy,” and on the dial plate, “metez/cinq/pieds/gros/troux/Etienne Le . . . /A . . . S/17/77.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

## ***Commentary***

The corner cupboard is stamped “IDUBOIS,” for Jacques Dubois.[[3]](#endnote-3) In its form and size it is unique in the oeuvre of Dubois, although mounts of the same model as those found on the main body of the cabinet appear on other pieces stamped by or attributed to this master. The corner mounts set to either side of the drawer above the double doors and the escutcheon between them can be found on the cornice of three *bibliothèques* (a pair and a single example) that have passed through the art market in recent decades.[[4]](#endnote-4) The model of the corner mounts at the sides of the cabinet are found on two *bureaux plats*, one in the Rijksmuseum attributed to Dubois,[[5]](#endnote-5) and the other, veneered with Japanese lacquer and stamped by the same maker, in the musée du Louvre.[[6]](#endnote-6) Two commodes also bear corner mounts of this model; one, stamped by Dubois, was formerly in the Niarchos collection,[[7]](#endnote-7) and the second that passed through the Paris market in 1988 was delivered by Joubert in 1764 for the comte d’Artois at Fontainebleau.[[8]](#endnote-8) Finally, a pair of corner cupboards in the Palazzo Quirinale (see [cat. no. 12](12)) bear these mounts.[[9]](#endnote-9) All the other gilt bronze mounts on this piece are of unique form, as is the model of the clock case surmounting it.

The exuberant design appears to be based on a print produced by Jean Mariette (1694–1774) ([fig. 11-2](#fig-11-2)),[[10]](#endnote-10) which is itself based on a drawing by Nicolas Pineau (1684–1754) ([fig. 11-3](#fig-11-3)).[[11]](#endnote-11) While the drawing is not signed, the engraving is inscribed “Pineau del. and Mariette exc.” Both the drawing and the engraving must date to some twenty years before the construction of the cabinet. Pineau, one of the great creators of the Rococo style, could not have conceived this drawing after 1730. It shows a corner cabinet in a markedly Régence style. The drawing may have been made by Pineau shortly after his return from Russia in about 1727, and the print made after it shows part of a *chambre à coucher* with bed and paneling also in the Régence style. It was subsequently reengraved by Johann Georg Merz (1694–1762) in Augsburg.[[12]](#endnote-12) The image was reversed, and the text appeared in French and German. The early representation of the cabinet shows putti sitting on lions, open shelves, and flanking candelabra, all supported on four short cabriole legs. The drawing is detailed, with even the direction of the striation of the veneers indicated.

Shortly after the corner cabinet was sold at auction in 1979, a 1903 inventory of the Viennese collection of Nathaniel Mayer von Rothschild (1836–1905) was found in the library of the Museum für angewandte Kunst in Vienna.[[13]](#endnote-13) The manuscript version still belongs to his descendants, and it gives a complete provenance for the cabinet, which had been lacking until this discovery. The entry for the cabinet reads as follows: “Dieser Eckschrank gehörte ursprünglich dem Grafen Clemens Branicki, Hetman des Königreiches Polen unter Stanislaus August und kam später durch Erbschaft in den Besitz der Familie v. Szymanowski von welcher ich ihn acquirierte.”[[14]](#endnote-14)

Jan Klemens Branicki (1689–1771) was Grand Hetman to the Crown of Poland. He had spent his early years in France, as was the custom, and did not return to Poland until 1715. His third and last wife was the sister of Stanislas Poniatowski, the last king and grand duke of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Branicki owned a palace in Warsaw, which was largely destroyed during World War II, and a residence outside the city at Białystok that was dubbed the Versailles of Poland.[[15]](#endnote-15) Shortly after his death in 1771, an inventory of his possessions was drawn up. “Paris corner cupboard with ornaments candelabra (Lustres), two candleholders each in gilt metal and on top one Paris clock,” was among the items described in the Parade Room of the Branicki Palace in Warsaw. The rest of the space is described in some detail, including an elaborate bed, Parisian console tables, and a large ensemble of seating furniture, all upholstered, like the bed, in red velvet with gold braid, which included two sofas, at least six chairs en suite, eleven *tabourets*, and twelve caned Polish chairs.[[16]](#endnote-16) Parisian wall lights, mirrors, and a chandelier decorated with porcelain flowers, birds, and figures illuminated the room. It was an interior of considerable splendor, but because the contents of both the Warsaw palace and the Białystok residence have been entirely dispersed, one cannot be sure of the date or style of the objects that occupied the same room as the corner cabinet.

It appears that Branicki was buying furniture from Paris in the early 1750s if not before and had agents working for him. In a letter of November 23, 1752, written to Mr. Ignacy Koziebrodski, administrator of the Branicki Palace in Warsaw, he states, “I wish the corner cupboard with [lights] for my chamber to be ready. I put Mr. Lullier under the obligation and I write about it to the Honorable General Mokronowski.”[[17]](#endnote-17) From this letter one can say with some certainty that the corner cabinet must have arrived in Warsaw soon after that date and was installed in the palace in late 1752 or early 1753.[[18]](#endnote-18)

The cabinet certainly exhibits the fullest flowering of the Rococo, a style apparently admired by the Polish aristocracy. It is very likely that Branicki knew Count Franciszek Bieliński and must have been familiar with and perhaps was influenced by the small room he owned that had been designed for him in an extreme asymmetrical style by Juste Aurèle Meissonnier (1695–1750) in 1734.[[19]](#endnote-19) It is also possible that he was familiar with the engraving by Mariette after Pineau or the copy by Merz, which would have been disseminated widely in Poland. Whether or not Branicki himself chose the design of the piece of furniture, it was necessary to update Pineau’s mid-1720s drawing reflected in Mariette’s or Merz’s printed versions to make it fashionable. It may be surmised that Pineau was asked to accomplish this task, although he would have been in his late sixties by this date and there are no marked similarities between his published engravings and this piece.

The back of the dial of the clock is dated 1744, as is the spring of the striking train, firmly dating the clock, its dial, and the movement to that year. It is most unlikely that an important commission like the cabinet was in production for some eight years. A likelier explanation is that Jacques Dubois used a clock that he already had in stock, though this was not usual workshop practice. The gilt bronze case is merely a facade, propped up at the back with an iron bar. It carries what might be read as a figure representing the muse of astrology. She is not usually shown with an eagle, which is, however, the heraldic symbol of Poland.[[20]](#endnote-20)

***Provenance***

1752 or 1753–71: Ordered by General Mokronowski for Count Jan Klemens Branicki, Polish, 1689–1771 (Warsaw, Poland), through the *marchand‑mercier* Lullier of Warsaw, by inheritance to the count’s sisters, 1771;[[21]](#endnote-21) 1771–late eighteenth century: Branicki family, possibly by inheritance to Marianna Szymanowska; late eighteenth century–1837: possibly Marianna Szymanowska, Polish, 1780–1837, great‑granddaughter of Krystyna (Branicka) Sapieha, sister of Jan Klemens Branicka;[[22]](#endnote-22) before 1903: Szymanowski family, sold to Baron Nathaniel (Mayer) von Rothschild;[[23]](#endnote-23) by 1903–5: Baron Nathaniel (Mayer) von Rothschild, Austrian, 1836–1905 (Vienna, Austria), by inheritance to his nephew, Baron Alphonse (Mayer) von Rothschild, 1905;[[24]](#endnote-24) 1905–38: Baron Alphonse (Mayer) von Rothschild, Austrian, 1878–1942 (in the Régence, or Rote, Salon, Theresianum Gasse 16–18, Vienna), confiscated by the Nazis, 1938;[[25]](#endnote-25) 1938–45: in the possession of the Nazis (stored at Das Zentraldepot für beschlagnahmte Sammlungen, Saal 6, Neuen Berg, Vienna, Austria, from autumn 1938 until May 25, 1941; moved to Hohenfurth Monastery, Vyšší Brod, Czech Republic, a Führermuseum holding location; later transferred to Altausee salt mines), recovered by the Allied Forces, June 30, 1945;[[26]](#endnote-26) 1945–48: in the custody of the Allied Forces (salt mines at Altaussee, Austria; transferred to Central Collecting Point, Munich, Germany), from June 30, 1945, repatriated to the Republic of Austria on May 5, 1948;[[27]](#endnote-27) 1948: in the custody of Austrian government, restituted to widow of Baron Alphonse Mayer von Rothschild, Baronin Clarice von Rothschild, 1948; 1948– : Baronin Clarice von Rothschild, Austrian, 1874–1967 (Vienna, Austria; sent to New York, NY, soon after 1948), sold to Rosenberg & Stiebel;[[28]](#endnote-28) –1950: Rosenberg & Stiebel, Inc. (New York, NY), sold to Wildenstein & Co., 1950;[[29]](#endnote-29) 1950– : Wildenstein & Co. (New York, NY); –1963: Georges Wildenstein, French, 1892–1963 (New York, NY), by inheritance to his son, Daniel Wildenstein, 1963; 1963–77: Daniel Wildenstein, French, 1917–2001 (New York, New York), sold through Sotheby Parke Bernet (London, England) to Akram Ojjeh, 1977; 1977–79: Akram Ojjeh, Saudi Arabian, 1918–1991 [sold, *Magnifique ensemble de meubles et objets d’art français*, Sotheby Parke Bernet, Monaco, June 25–26, 1979, lot 60, to the J. Paul Getty Museum].

## ***Exhibition History***

*The Corner Cupboard by Dubois: A Closer Look*, J. Paul Getty Museum (Malibu), March 10, 1992–April 27, 1983.

## ***Bibliography***

{{Molinier 189?}}, vol. 3, 146–47, pl. 13; {{Schmidt 1920}}, 168–69, fig. 130; {{Salverte 1923}}, 96, pl. 18; {{Feulner 1927}}, 321, 330–31; {{Salverte 1927}}, 104–5, pl. 18; {{Salverte 1953}}, 97, pl. 19; {{Packer 1956}}, 34, fig. 40; {{Boutemy 1959}}, 36, 41, fig. 17; {{Salverte 1962}}, 100, pl. 18; {{Frégnac and Meuvret 1965}}, 102; {{González‑Palacios 1966}}, 58, 62–63, 64, fig. 27; {{Watson 1966}}, vol. 1, 231, vol. 2, 544; {{Kjellberg 1978}}, 192–93, no. 217, ill.; {{Kjellberg 1979}}, 115, ill.; {{Feulner 1980}}, 180–81, 358, no. 292; {{Wilson 1980}}, 1–3, no. 1, fig. 1–2; {{Verlet 1982}}, 222; {{Sassoon and Wilson 1986}}, 17, no. 38; {{Kjellberg 1989}}, 267, 270, 273, 275, ill.; {{Pradère 1989a}}, 173, figs. 153–54; {{Boiron 1990}}, 53, 55, ill.; {{Bourne and Brett 1991}}, 83, fig. 258; {{Verlet 1991}}, 181; {{Bremer‑David et al. 1993}}, 31–32, no. 35; {{Wilson et al. 1996}}, 70–77, no. 10; {{Kjellberg 1997}}, 165, fig. b; {{Wilson and Hess 2001}}, 20, no. 35; {{Leben 2004}}, 71, ill.; {{Baarsen 2013}}, 141; {{Heginbotham 2014}}, 154-55, figs. 6–7; {{Łopatecki and Walczak 2015}}, 177, 179, fig. 73.

## ***Technical Description***

This imposing corner cabinet appears to have been constructed in such a way as to facilitate its transport by river and sea from Paris to Count Branicki in Warsaw.[[30]](#endnote-30) The wooden cabinetry breaks down into nine relatively compact elements that can be easily assembled and disassembled by a nonspecialist using only thirteen simple wood screws. The nine individually fabricated elements of cabinetry can be assembled into three primary sections of the cabinet (<https://youtube/QHCTY7ctq6U>): the upper open section, or étagère; the drawer compartment in the center; and the lower case ([figs. 11-4](#fig-11-4), [11-5](#fig-11-5)).

The vast majority of the gilt bronze mounts could have been fixed in place prior to shipment; only eight gilt bronze elements (including the clock in its case) would have required being packed separately and mounted after the cabinet was assembled ([fig. 11-6](#fig-11-6)). Although this manner of construction for shipment became well known by the late 1760s through the work of David Roentgen,[[31]](#endnote-31) this cabinet represents an early and unusual example of furniture designed for transport.

The étagère itself breaks down into four flat sections. The two back panels are each made of three wide vertical oak boards, butt joined and capped at either end by horizontal battens (or breadboard ends) approximately 5 cm wide ([fig. 11-7](#fig-11-7)). The battens were originally secured to the end grain of the panels using only glue and wooden pins, three at the top and probably four at the bottom. The undulating form of the panels was created by gluing cross-grain boards of oak to the fronts of the panels and shaping them, probably with planes and scrapers. The left panel is flat along its back edge, fitting into a contoured rabbet in the rear edge of the right panel. It appears that the two panels were originally joined by four screws running through the back of the right panel and into the rear edge of the left panel.

The upper and middle shelves of the étagère are made of two and four oak boards, respectively, butt joined with the grain running diagonally, from side to side. The shaped aprons below the front edges are made from single pieces of oak and were attached to the shelves with three screws each, driven downward through the shelf and into the apron. At least one of the original handmade screws survives in the upper shelf, though the others have been replaced. The upper shelf rests on top of the side panels and is fixed in place with four screws, two at the rear and one at each front corner. The middle shelf rests in long dadoes in the back panels and is attached with two pairs of screws through the side panels near the front edges. The assembled étagère sits on top of the drawer compartment and is held in place by means of four loose unpegged tenons, two on each side, that are glued into mortises cut into the lower battens of the side panels (this join is visible in the radiograph, [fig. 11-7](#fig-11-7)).

The top and bottom panels of the triangular drawer compartment are each made of four oak boards, butt joined, with their grain running diagonally from side to side. The back sides of the drawer compartment are made of single heavy boards of oak, approximately 3.5 cm thick, dovetailed together at the back corner. On either side of the drawer opening, the stepped returns are assembled from mitered sections of molded oak, glued together with small supporting glue blocks but with no joinery. The top and bottom of the drawer compartment overlap the sides and are attached only with glue and sixteen wooden pegs, driven in from above and below.

The front of the trapezoid-shaped drawer is made of oak, veneered on the back, top, sides, and bottom with mahogany. The drawer sides, back, and bottom are also mahogany, with half-blind dovetails at the front and full, through-dovetails at the rear. The top edges of the sides and back are only very slightly rounded. The drawer bottom is made of three boards with the grain running from side to side; it rests in rabbets in the drawer sides but overlaps the entire thickness of the back. Thin strips of mahogany are applied to the bottom along the sides as drawer runners, and a pair of parallel strips running from front to back acts as drawer guides, mating with a corresponding central strip of oak, running from front to back in the interior of the compartment ([fig. 11-8](#fig-11-8)).

The drawer compartment sits on top of the lower case and is held in position with four loose dovetail tenons that fit into corresponding dovetail mortises in the lower case, two on each side. The tenons are glued into their mortises in the drawer compartment, and all mortises are open on their rear faces.

The cabinet base is made in a conventional frame-and-panel construction. Three substantial oak stiles running from the floor to the top of the case at each corner form the core of the structure.[[32]](#endnote-32) The front corner stiles are each formed from timber approximately 9.5 x. 9.5 cm in section, while the rear stile measures 8 x 8 cm. The rear stile is heavily chamfered on the inner corner. The front corner stiles are connected to the rear stile with oak rails framing a single large panel of mahogany on each side. The rails measure approximately 12.5 cm in height and 2.2 cm in thickness and are attached to the stiles with double-pegged mortise-and-tenon joints; the tenons are the full height of the rails (not shouldered) and are offset (i.e., formed by rabbets on the rear sides and flush on the inner surfaces). The pegs are irregular in shape and measure 8 to 9 mm in maximum diameter. The edges of the stiles and rails adjacent to the panels are chamfered on their exterior faces. The solid mahogany panels are quite thin, at approximately 7.5 mm in thickness. One panel is made from two wide boards and the other from three wide boards, butt joined, with the grain running vertically. They are very slightly chamfered on the exterior edges and are fitted into grooves within the stiles and rails. The inner surfaces of the rails and the rear stile are all veneered with mahogany to match the back panels.

The bottom panel of the lower case is made of five butt-joined boards, with the grain running diagonally, parallel to the front of the cabinet. The panel is supported at its back corner in a dado cut into the rear stile. Along the back sides, the panel sets into a rabbet cut into the lower edges of the back rails; three evenly spaced wooden pegs, driven in horizontally from the rear, secure the bottom panel to the rails on each side.[[33]](#endnote-33) X-radiographs reveal that along the front edge, the bottom panel is simply glued to the top of the lower front rail without any joinery. The front rail, in turn, consists of two sections that meet end to end in the center, again with no joinery. The ends of the front rail are housed, along with the bottom panel, in dadoes in the corner stiles. X-radiographs show that the two medial feet are made of single blocks of oak joined to the rail above with unpinned mortise-and-tenon joints; the tenons at the top of the legs run the full width of the leg. A series of glue blocks glued in place adjacent to the legs form the curved transitions from leg to rail.

The upper rail of the lower case is made of a broad horizontal oak plank. It follows the shape of the carcass at the front and rests in open dovetail mortises in the corner stiles. The rear rails have also been notched just behind the corner stiles in order to make a narrow shelf that supports the end of the rail. Large handmade screws, apparently original, run downward through the dovetail tenons of the rail, into the end-grain of the front stiles. In addition, wooden pegs (one on each side) have been driven through the backside of the rear rails and into the edge of the rail.

Three small glue blocks attached to the inside surfaces of the stiles indicate that there was once a central shelf in the lower case. One of the glue blocks is still attached with a handmade screw that is very similar in form to the other original screws of the cabinet, suggesting that the shelf was an original feature. A large hole going diagonally through the back stile at the level of the shelf would originally have held a handmade screw to firmly secure the shelf in place.

X-radiographs of the cabinet doors show that their cores are made of seven vertical staves, butt joined and capped at either end with transverse battens approximately 5 cm wide ([fig. 11-9](#fig-11-9)). The battens were originally attached only with glue and four evenly spaced wooden pegs on each end (approximately 8 mm in diameter), driven through the battens and into the staves. The tops and outside edges of the doors are veneered with mahogany, while the bottom edges are unveneered. Along the middle edges of the doors, where they meet and lock together, long strips of solid mahogany about 2.5 cm wide have been glued to the oak core. These strips are rabbeted on alternating sides so that the doors overlap at the center when shut.

The cabinet doors are hung on loose knife hinges that allow the doors to be lifted off of their mounts when the central drawer compartment is removed. This is similar to the black lacquer corner cupboards by Dubois (see [cat. no. 12](12), 78.DA.119), though in this instance the upper half of the upper hinges are fixed directly into the bottom of the drawer compartment, and as a result the doors fall loose as soon as the middle case is lifted.

The widespread use of pegged joinery is unusual in the finest Parisian work of the mid-eighteenth century. In particular, the use of pegs (rather than tongue-and-groove joints) to attach cross-grain battens to the end grain of solid wood panels must be considered a relatively poor construction technique. This has resulted in massive structural failure of the doors and rear panels of the upper case, and there have been several campaigns of extensive restoration (see below). On the curved doors, the use of pegged battens can be attributed to the relative difficulty of cutting curvilinear tongue-and-groove joints. Dubois used the same technique of pegged cross battens on the curved doors of his lacquered corner cupboards (see [cat. no. 12](12)). It is interesting to note that in other pieces in the Getty collection, Bernard II van Risenburgh, a superior cabinetmaker, did go to the extra trouble of cutting long, curved tongue-and-groove joints on the doors of both a commode (see [cat. no. 5](5)) and a pair of corner cupboards (see [cat. no. 4](4)).

There appear to have been at least three generations of repair to the back panels of the upper case, including the application of numerous battens to the rear of the panels with screws and glue, as well as additional generations of both wooden pegs and large screws driven through the horizontal battens and into the vertical boards.X-radiographs of the doors also show extensive restoration with battens of wood inlaid into the back sides to stabilize major splits, large screws, and an iron plate used to reinforce splits and joint failures. These repairs are hidden under the veneer of the doors’ inner surfaces, suggesting that the veneer was entirely lifted and then relaid after the repairs were done.

In general, the quality of oak used for the construction of the cabinet is not high. All three stiles as well as several boards used in the back panels of the upper case and the doors have large knots included, visible either by eye or in X-radiographs. This feature is consistent with the quality of timber used in other pieces by Dubois in the Museum’s collection (see [cat. nos. 12](12), <13>).

The stylized flowers of the marquetry decoration are of kingwood inlaid into a bloodwood background. The marquetry decoration is framed primarily with *ferréol* (*Swartzia* sp.). The inside of the cabinet’s doors is veneered with stylized foliates of amaranth (*Peltogyne* sp.) inlaid into a background of bloodwood.

Based on close examination of the marquetry decoration and the tool marks, it is clear that the entire marquetry was inlaid with a knife. The bloodwood background would first have been glued in place in large sheets. The outline of the kingwood petals, leaves, and stems would then have been incised into the bloodwood using a sharp knife known as a shoulder knife or inlay knife. Next, the bloodwood within the incised lines would have been removed using chisels, and finally the kingwood elements would have been glued into the prepared cavities. The intrinsic challenge of using the shoulder knife often resulted in slight losses of control, which are visible in the form of small, unwanted cuts referred to as shoulder knife marks. The corner cupboard marquetry displays these shoulder knife marks as well as distorted wood fibers around tight curves or on the edges of hardwood veneer ([figs. 11-10](#fig-11-10), [11-11](#fig-11-11)). Both marks are indicative of the inlaying technique.

Despite their relatively large dimensions, the stylized leaves and petals of the flowers were cut from single pieces of so-called oyster veneer, where the wood is cut on a bias across the grain and through the center of a piece of timber, resulting in an oval, concentric ring pattern. These oval blanks would have been cut to shape with a fretsaw. The stems, however, are cut from long-grain, quarter-sawn veneer and were likely prepared with a knife. The marquetry is relatively poor in quality. Although the apparent substandard quality may be exacerbated by age and restoration, there are clear signs of poor original cutting and inlaying. The modest quality of both the construction and the marquetry seems rather incongruous in a commission of this scale and ambition, particularly considering the outstanding quality and extravagant design of the mounts.

X-ray examination of the marquetry reveals many small holes caused by the placement of veneer pins during construction. These small iron nails were placed alongside a piece of veneer to prevent it from sliding out of position during gluing and clamping. These holes are now only visible by X-ray and, as is symptomatic of hand-forged nails predating the Industrial Revolution, are of rectangular cross section.

The veneer of the lower case and the étagère are extremely consistent and display the same quality of execution. There is little doubt that they were made at the same time. It is interesting to note that the two top shelves of the upper cupboard possess marquetry decoration only where it can be easily seen. They are veneered with the same elaborate stylized floral marquetry below but are veneered with a plain bloodwood veneer on their top surfaces, which are too high to be visible to a person of average height.

The suite of gilt bronze mounts on this cabinet is noteworthy not only for its exuberance but also for the variety of techniques used in its fabrication. The majority of the mounts are relatively flat and were sand cast in the usual manner, utilizing a two-piece mold.[[34]](#endnote-34) A number of mounts on the cabinet, however, are more three dimensional and thus required more complex mold-making procedures. In particular, the massive candle arm mounts (with putti and lions), as well as the clock, were cast in multiple sections using the lost wax technique.[[35]](#endnote-35) The sections were joined using a combination of brazing and mechanical joins. Curiously, the left and right figural groups of putti seated on lions were not cast in the same way. In the left mount, the lion and putto were cast separately, and the putto itself was cast in four pieces (body + 2 wings + PR arm), all of which were joined by brazing. In contrast, for the right mount, the putto and lion were cast together in one pour. The putto in this latter mount was cast in six parts (body + one wing + 2 arms + 2 legs). There is no easily discernible reason for why the two compositions were cast so differently. On both of these mounts the candle arms were cast in seven separate pieces, many of which are joined with threaded rods and brazing metal ([fig. 11-12](#fig-11-12)), though there are also lapped and pinned joints as well. The candle arm sections are joined to the figural groups at about the level of the putti’s heads with riveted brass straps at the rear ([fig. 11-13](#fig-11-13)) and brazing at the front. Oddly, on both sides, the lion’s tail runs across this joint between the figural group and the foliate candle arms, and in both cases, the two parts of the lion’s tail were chased in completely different ways. This suggests that the two halves were chased at different times or by different people, prior to being assembled. Presumably, this reflects the fact that it was easier for the chaser(s) to manipulate the smaller individual castings rather than the massive, fully assembled mounts.

The gilt bronze clock case was made in three major parts: the left side, the right side, and the upper figural group. The two sides of the clock case are mechanically joined with three large rectangular plates of brass riveted across the central seam with numerous brass pins. This joint was then brazed shut from the front to hide the seam. Additional floral elements (two on each side, though one is now missing on the left) are attached to the sides of the case only with threaded rod and nuts. The upper figural group was cast in four pieces; the eagle’s head, the billowing upper drapery, and Astronomy’s right arm are separate castings, attached both mechanically and by brazing. The figural group as a whole is attached to the lower portion of the clock case only with threaded rods and nuts.

All the lost wax cast sections suffer from numerous casting flaws where the molten metal failed to fill the mold. Many of these were repaired with brass rod or wedges of brass, hammered into the gaps from the rear and brazed in place. These repairs are conspicuous on the interior surfaces of the mounts.

In addition to two-part sand casting and lost wax casting, two of the mounts on the cabinet were clearly produced using complex piece molding in sand. These mounts, from the outer edges of the upper shelf ([fig. 11-14](#fig-11-14)), have the relatively smooth and unblemished interior surfaces typical of sand castings but clearly show mold lines that suggest that the mold into which they were cast was probably made of from ten to fifteen pieces of compressed sand. Complex sand casting of this type is well documented in the nineteenth century, but these mounts offer uncommon evidence that the technique was being practiced in mid-eighteenth-century Paris as well.

A representative selection of eighteen gilt bronze elements were removed from the cabinet and analyzed for alloy composition using X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF). The alloys of the majority of the mounts are very typical in all respects of eighteenth-century Parisian castings, and this supports the view that they are original to the cabinet.

Three mounts, however, have an alloy composition that differs substantially from the former group. These are framing mounts from the lower doors that appear to be replacements. They have distinctly different chasing (with textured surfaces that appear somewhat more regular and “mechanical”) and are also notable for the carving tool marks that have been cast into the rear surfaces, suggesting that they were molded from wooden master models ([fig. 11-15](#fig-11-15)). The two are clearly distinguishable based on their chasing (top) and the working of the models (bottom), as well as the composition of their alloys.

The alloy of the replacement mounts is significantly higher in tin as well as in several impurities (iron, antimony, and nickel) than that of the original mounts. The relatively high levels of these elements, the substantial silver content, and the apparent use of a wooden master model make these mounts very similar to gilt bronze mounts produced in Berlin and Dresden that have been examined and analyzed by Getty conservators. This elemental distribution has also been shown to be common in copper alloys from central European sources in the publications of Josef Riederer.[[36]](#endnote-36) It is certainly possible that the reproduction of these mounts is associated with the 1845 restoration by the Polish restorer Josef Bonek (see below), though the identity of the workshop that could have produced these bronze mounts is unknown.

The dates of two significant restorations to the cabinet are known. The first is known from an inscription in Polish written in pencil on the lower surface of the drawer compartment. The inscription reads:

*Josef Bone(k?)*

*Poprawiał w roku* *1845* [Improved in the year 1845]

The second known restoration was undertaken in 1982, shortly after the Museum’s acquisition of the cabinet. This restoration was executed in England by David Hawkins.

There are numerous small areas of veneer restoration using Andaman padauk (*Pterocarpus dalbergioides*) on the outside of the cabinet. This wood has a color and figure similar to the bloodwood it replaces, but the width of the stripes is narrower and the dark vessels are more pronounced ([fig. 11-16](#fig-11-16)). In addition, the entire surface of the internal bottom panel of the lower cupboard is veneered in padauk. Although some correspondence and photographs exist in the Museum’s object file showing the corner cupboard during the Hawkins restoration, there is no conservation report. Bloodwood was relatively unknown by English restoration workshops at this time, and it is very probable that the appearance of all the padauk dates from this recent English restoration. Most restoration work seems to have been concentrated in the bombé parts of the corner cupboard and the large lower bottom panel. X-ray analysis shows cracking and recent consolidation of the proper right door in particular. X-radiographs also show extensive repairs to splits in the case bottom, executed with nine butterfly spline inlays, now covered by the padauk restoration veneer. The upper panel of the drawer compartment, which has marquetry on the top, is counter-veneered on the underside, with what appears to be padauk. This was presumably also done by Hawkins to minimize warping and/or splitting of the panel. The counter-veneer is arranged in two symmetrical diagonal fields.

The rear foot has been replaced, probably by Hawkins, with a solid walnut block; the joint is just below the recess on which the bottom shelf rests. The block is attached with four dowels. X-radiographs show holes apparently drilled with a relatively modern spade or screw-auger bit.

1. See {{Wilson et al. 1996}}, 70–77, no. 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See {{Wilson et al. 1996}}, 70–77, no. 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For more information on Jacques Dubois, see {{Pradère 1989a}}, 168–75; {{Boiron 1990}}, 42–59; {{Wolvesperges 2000}}, 283–91. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. A pair of *bibliothèques*, attributed to Jacques Dubois, *Important French and Continental Furniture, Sculpture and Rugs, April 26, 1990* (New York: Christie’s, 1990), lot 160. See another similar *bibliothèque*, also attributed to this master: *Bel Ameublement, July 3, 1993* (Monaco: Sotheby’s, 1993), lot 98. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Acc. no. RBK-16660. See {{Pradère 1989a}}, 174, fig. 155; {{Baarsen 2013}}, 138–41, no. 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Acc. no. OA 6083. Purchased by Louis-Philippe, duc d’Orléans, in 1769. See {{Pradère 1989a}}, 171, fig. 149; {{Durand 2014}}, 258–59, no. 82. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. {{Kjellberg 1979}}, 116, fig. 2. See also {{Pradère 1989a}}, 168, fig. 146, where the commode is described as also bearing the stamp of Migeon as dealer. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. With the dealer Michel Meyer in the 1980s. It was painted with the inventory number 2321. Photograph in the files of the Sculpture and Decorative Arts Department, J. Paul Getty Museum. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. {{Gonzáles-Palacios 1996}}, 136–40, no. 9. They bear the marks of the Palazzo Colorno. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. The engraving is listed in {{Guilmard 1880}}, 127. Part of Mariette's *L’Architecture française*, the engraving is titled “Dessein de Lambris d'une Chambre à coucher avec lit en niche.” The corner cabinet, lettered D, is captioned “Commode d'encognure surmontée par une tablette qui porte une pendule.” [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Inv. no. 4504, musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris; {{Meuvret and Frégnac 1963}}, 101; {{Pradère 1989a}}, 172. Pineau, also known as “Pineau le Russe,” was in Saint Petersburg from 1716 to about 1727, employed by Peter the Great as *premier sculpteur de Sa Sacrée Majesté Czarienne*. See {{Biais 1892}}, 15–30. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. In the collection of the Österreichisches Museum für agewandte Kunst (MAK), Vienna, Austria, acc. no. KI 10018-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. I am grateful to Jonathan Bourne for first bringing this inventory to my attention. {{Rothschild 1903}}. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. I am grateful to Mrs. Bettina de Rothschild Looram for her assistance. She provided the Museum with a transcript of Nathaniel von Rothschild’s manuscript of the inventory and lent the original photograph of the Rote Salon in Vienna, from which the Museum took a copy. Correspondence with David Cohen, September 9, 1991, in the files of the Sculpture and Decorative Arts Department, J. Paul Getty Museum. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. {{Łopatecki and Walczak 2015}}. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Inventory of Jan Klemens Branicki, October 20, 1772, no. 82, f. 535v-536, Roskie Archives, Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw. I thank Dr. Andrew A. S. Ciechanowiecki for his translation of the relevant part of the inventory and for his assistance in contacting Polish colleagues concerning Branicki and his ownership of the corner cabinet. Correspondence with the author, September 2, 1981. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. “Szafkę kątową ze szkłem w pokoju moim, abym zastał gotowa, bardzo obligować Mr. Lullier i piszę o to do Jegomości Pana Generała Mokronowskiego.” Correspondence between Jan Klemens Branicki and Mr. Koziebrodski, November 23, 1752, no. 320, fol. 85v, Roskie Archives, Teke Glinki, Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw. I am grateful to Bozenna Majewska-Maszkowska, curator of the Art Collections, Royal Castle of Warsaw, for providing me with this reference. Correspondence with the author, July 28, 1981. Lullier was a Warsaw *marchand-mercier*. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. It is possible that Branicki’s cupboard may have been paired with a stove. Although no such object is known to survive, the count’s inventory does mention a freestanding cast iron stove with gilding on the bottom and stone legs in the vicinity of the corner cabinet. Whether this object’s appearance was meant to echo the design of the Dubois corner cupboard is impossible to determine from this vague mention, but *encoignures* are traditionally paired with another object of like design, and Branicki’s may have been no different. See {{Valentino 2011}}, 10. It is worth mentioning too that Branicki ordered a second, even larger cabinet. Although the 1772 inventory does not allude to any other large corner cabinets, it seems to mention the Getty’s cabinet specifically. See Correspondence of M. Koziebrodzki, December 6, 1753, no. 30, f. 163, Potocki Archives, Teke Glinki, Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw, as indicated by {{Valentino 2011}, 10–11. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. See {{Nyberg 1969}}, pls. 87–90; {{Fuhring 2008}}, 38. The small cabinet has since disappeared. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. {{Wilson et al. 1996}}, 70–77, no. 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Correspondence between Jan Klemens Branicki and Mr. Koziebrodski, November 23, 1752, no. 320, fol. 85v, Roskie Archives, Teke Glinki; Inventory of Jan Klemens Branicki, October 20, 1772, no. 82, fols. 535v–536, Roskie Archives. Both in Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Correspondence with Bozenna Majewska‑Maszkowska, Curator of Art Collections, Royal Castle in Warsaw, July 28, 1981, in the files of the Sculpture and Decorative Arts Department, J. Paul Getty Museum. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Inventory of Baron Nathaniel (Mayer) von Rothschild in the collection of the library of the Museum für angewandte Kunst in Vienna. Notizen über einige meiner Kunstgegenstände, 1903, no. 80. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Inventory in collection of the library of the Museum für angewandte Kunst in Vienna. Notizen über einige meiner Kunstgegenstände, 1903, no. 80. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Correspondence with Bettina de Rothschild Looram, September 9, 1991, in the files of the Sculpture and Decorative Arts Department, J. Paul Getty Museum. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum Zentral Depot, database record of the Zentralstelle für Denkmalschutz, under number AR653; Katalog Beschlagnahmungen, Sammlung A.R., p. 13, no. 653. And correspondence with Bettina de Rothschild Looram, September 9, 1991, in the files of the Sculpture and Decorative Arts Department, J. Paul Getty Museum.

    <https://www.zdk-online.org/k/AR_653/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Berlin, Deutsches Historisches Museum, digitized records under number 1855; Koblenz (Germany), Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives), B 323/609 (Control Number File 609) and B 323/652 (Restitution Card File 652).

    <https://www.dhm.de/datenbank/ccp/dhm_ccp_add.php?seite=6&fld_1=1855>. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Correspondence with Bettina de Rothschild Looram, September 9, 1991, in the files of the Sculpture and Decorative Arts Department, J. Paul Getty Museum. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Conversation with Wildenstein & Co, October 4, 1991. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. It is likely that the cabinet traveled down the Seine by barge to Le Havre on the English Channel and then by oceangoing vessel north, around Denmark, to the city of Gdansk on the Baltic coast of Poland. From there, it would likely have traveled by barge up the Vistula River to Warsaw. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. {{Koeppe and Baarsen, 2012}}, 12, 98. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. The rear leg, below the level of the case, however, has been replaced with walnut during a later restoration. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. There are now four pegs on each side, but one of each group appears to be a later addition. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. For a detailed description of this process, see {{Considine and Jamet 2000}}, 283–95. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. The most obvious indicators of lost wax casting are the presence of small bubbles of metal and branched flashes on the interior surfaces of the castings. See {{Heginbotham 2013}}. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. {{Riederer 1980}}; {{Riederer 1982}}; {{Riederer 1983}}. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)