

Verre églomisé panels, circa 1934, designed by Jean Dupas for the ocean liner S.S. Normandie.



fair trade

As New York City's premier fine-arts and antiques fair opens, dealers and designers are already sensing a renewed interest in mixing periods and provenance

For top-level antiques hunters, as well as decorative-arts oglers, October is an exciting time of year—it marks the return of the International Fine Art & Antique Dealers Show to New York's Park Avenue Armory. The fair, which runs from October 21 to 27 (a preview party on October 20 benefits the Society of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center) presents the finest wares from 64 dealers around the world. Tastemakers like Axel Vervoordt of Belgium, the United Kingdom's Mallet, and Primavera Gallery in New York unveil everything from a second-century Roman sculpture to 18th-century Chippendale dining chairs to uncommon 20th-century lamps by Fontana Arte.

It's an event not to miss. "I try to go to all the shows," says Robert Couturier, one of the many designers who will be in attendance at this year's event. "It establishes what is fashionable, what isn't, and what the trends are. Even if we say we don't do things that are influenced by fashion, we all do. It opens your horizons."

The international show features a diverse mix of periods and styles, which might just make it a hotter ticket than ever this year. As the antiques market recovers after a few tough years, dealers and designers alike are seeing what Benoist F. Drut, a partner in New York's Maison Gerard, describes as "the great eclecticism." Unlike the ▶

Hervé Van der Straeten mirror.



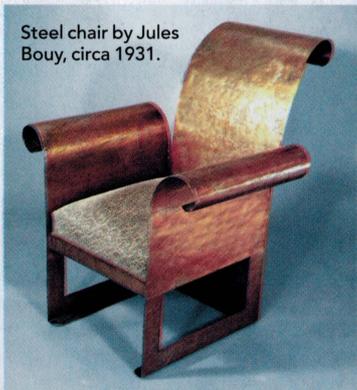
Painted relief by Jan Schoonhoven, 1975.



Bronze sculpture by Joseph Csáky.



Steel chair by Jules Bouy, circa 1931.



George III commode, circa 1775.



19th-century Irish console.

19th-century Scottish bookcase.



Stainless steel desk by Maria Pergay.



period rooms of the past, “most designers and clients today do not want to surround themselves with only one type of furniture,” says Drut, who credits designers like Couturier, France’s Jean-Louis Deniot, and the partners at New York’s Haynes-Roberts with leading the eclectic charge. “They’ll mix something from the 18th century with a pair of chairs from the 1970s.”

Couturier goes further: “The apartment where everything is French 18th century or English 18th century is completely done and completely over,” he says. “If you mix something that’s very good—like a wonderful, contemporary item with a beautiful Louis XV piece—it’s like singing. It’s different music.”

Bernd Goeckler, a New York dealer specializing in 20th-century design who also dabbles in a few older furnishings, has observed the same tendency. “American decorators do very much like to mix in a Louis XVI bergère or even a Louis XV armchair or commode, which can blend in beautifully in a very modern loft.”

When it comes to selecting signature items for a room, that trend puts the focus squarely on jaw-dropping, unusual examples of the decorative arts, regardless of era or style. That’s why Maison Gerard will be installing a showstopper in its booth—a pair of four-foot-tall verre églomisé panels employing gold, silver, platinum, and palladium leaf. The panels were designed by Jean Dupas for a mural on the S.S. *Normandie*, the famed French Art Deco ocean liner. (Fortunately they were removed before the ship burned in 1942.) Goeckler, noticing an uptick in interest in metal furniture,

will show a stainless steel desk by contemporary Parisian designer Maria Pergay—and not just any old thing, but the designer’s former personal desk.

Designers and decorative-arts enthusiasts are also rediscovering periods and pieces that were left for dead just a few years ago, including so-called brown furniture—the classic dark-mahogany pieces from the 18th and 19th centuries. “Prices fell away in recent

years,” says Martin Levy, director of London’s H. Blairman & Sons. “But the market is now building up again, based on a slightly lower starting point. People are realizing that brown furniture is well designed, has some history to it, and is good to live with. So, it offers good value, financially and artistically.”

“Brown furniture has definitely had way more interest in the last year or so,” agrees New York dealer Niall Smith. “It’s all about fashion, really. People have done the 20th century, so what can you go back to? You have to go back to period.” So which items are generating the most interest? Irish furniture from the 18th century and early-19th-century English neoclassical pieces, says Smith.

However, “it’s a much more simple look nowadays,” he says, pointing out that most younger buyers are likely to purchase only a few key pieces of furniture, to mix with other periods and styles in a pared-down interior.

“The cluttered look is definitely out; simplicity is in,” says Smith. “And quality still sells.”

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