

THE BEST OF CULTURE, TRAVEL & ART DE VIVRE  
Summer 2013

# France

magazine



HERMÈS's Secret Garden

ARTISANS: The Next Rock Stars?

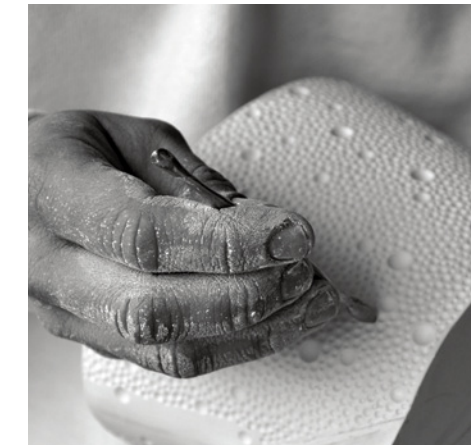
The New PATRONS



**The three most** sought-after letters in the world of French craftsmanship stand for ENTREPRISE DU PATRIMOINE VIVANT, a distinction that confers valuable recognition and benefits on the country's most outstanding artisans. On the following pages, AMY SERAFIN looks at what it takes to become an EPV and profiles several of the companies in this exclusive club.



Some 1,130 Living Heritage Companies perpetuate traditional French *savoir-faire* at its most refined; more than 340 of these have existed for at least a century, with the oldest dating back to 1309. **Left to right, from top:** crystal-blowing at Baccarat's factory in Lorraine; gilded Baccarat glasses; translucent Bernardaud porcelain; an artisan hand-sculpts bisque porcelain at Bernardaud; colorful Beauvillé table linens; a lotus necklace from Augustine by Thierry Gripoix; applying a signature to a finished piece; a *pâte de verre* Laliue sculpture; a hammered bowl from Roland Daraspe; the celebrated Restaurant Taillevent; elegant pastry from Pierre Hermé.







ALLY HANNON, A STURDY, SILVER-HAIRED WOMAN wearing a smudged apron, takes a glue-soaked sheet of recycled paper off a pile and places it on a plaster mold of a human torso, smoothing it with expert movements and making little rips in strategic places so that it lies perfectly flat. Her quick, confident gestures bear witness to 25 years of standing on her feet eight hours a day, crafting busts for Siegel & Stockman.

Newspapers seem to be filled with stories of factory closings, yet in hundreds of companies like this one, talented artisans are forging on, using rare tools, materials and techniques to create everything from riding boots to silver

chalices. Producing extraordinary things is part of what has always made France special; this country can claim more than 300 companies whose workers have passed their skills down through several generations, keeping their businesses alive through revolution, industrialization, war, recession, globalization and perhaps the biggest challenge of all: changing tastes.

The government has come to realize how important it is to protect this unique heritage. Seven years ago it created a quality label, *Entreprise du Patrimoine Vivant* (EPV), roughly translated as Living Heritage Company. Awarded by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, it recognizes French companies that have remarkable artisanal or industrial expertise. The brainchild of Renaud Dutreil, a former government minister, it is overseen by the Institut Supérieur des Métiers (ISM), a state-supported agency devoted to artisans and small business. As ISM director Alexis Govciyan explains, “The Minister knew that in every region of France there were beautiful companies with exceptional know-how, often passed down through generations, and that it was important for the State to be there for them—to bring them recognition but also to help them innovate and develop international markets.”

To earn the label, which is valid for five years, a company must fulfill three criteria (beyond, obviously, making its goods in France). First, it must use uncommon machines, tools or models, or hold a patent. Second, it must possess skills that are traditional or highly specialized, either artisanal or industrial. In practice, this often means that the company (or one of its employees) is among the last to master particular techniques, and that no schools teach them. Third, it must have an established reputation, either because it has been in the same location for at least 50 years, occupies a site of historical interest, produces its goods in an area that is historically significant for its industry or has name recognition among professionals in its field. Export is not a requirement, though it is a plus.

Today there are 1,130 EPVs, 341 of which have been around for a hundred years or more. One of these is Prat Dumas, the oldest French company still in operation. Its roots go back to 1309, when a monastery owned by Pope Clement V crafted crude writing paper. In the 1800s, the monks’ successors developed filter paper for a pharmacist in Bergerac, and it is this specialization that permitted Prat Dumas to negotiate the tricky transition from the Middle Ages to the 21st century. Today their vast array of filter papers includes such items as extraction thimbles, which analyze the fat and protein contents of food.

The oldest family-owned company on the list is Mellerio dits Meller, makers of *haute joaillerie*. Founded in 1613, it has thrived for an incredible 14 generations. Mellerio’s first royal client was Marie Antoinette. The many exquisite pieces they crafted for her include a cameo bracelet set with rubies; it survived the Revolution and was repurchased by the jeweler many years later. Now it is safely locked away in a company vault.

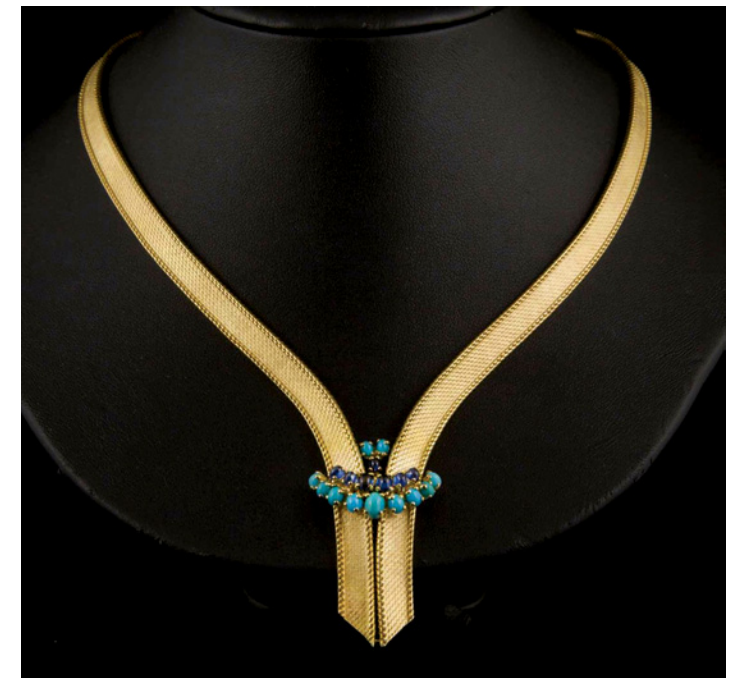
A number of EPV companies were born along with the French Revolution—Antoine Courtois Paris has been creating brass musical instruments since 1789. Others took shape during the Empire; the Hôtel du Palais in Biarritz, awarded the EPV label for its restaurant, was built in 1854 as Empress Eugénie’s summer residence. But EPVs don’t have to be old, just old enough to have established themselves as outstanding. Among the 70 that originated during the current millennium is Feeling’s, founded by Sylvie Coquet, who crafts delicate and unusual Limoges porcelain objects. But she wasn’t new to her art when she set up shop in 2001. Her father, Jean-Louis, launched J.L. Coquet (also an EPV) half a century ago. Today his creative tableware is found in several three-star restaurants.

EPVS ARE ORGANIZED INTO SEVEN CATEGORIES, THE LARGEST being Decoration—makers of furniture, clocks, passementerie and the like. There’s also Fashion and Beauty; Building Heritage (such

as parquet or stonework); Culture and Leisure (piano makers, ship builders); Professional Equipment (a more industrial category including leather tanners and medical instruments); Tableware (porcelain, crystal, knives); and Gastronomy, which was added in 2011 after UNESCO recognized the French gastronomic meal as part of the world’s cultural heritage. In the two years since, dozens of food and beverage companies have received the label, including legendary restaurant Taillevent, Pâtisserie Pierre Hermé and an absinthe distiller.

Nearly half of the EPVs are in the Ile-de-France region; the remainder are spread throughout the country and France’s overseas departments. Several are internationally renowned, employ thousands of workers and are among the most successful brands in France—Chanel, Guerlain, Louis Vuitton Malletier (trunks), Baccarat and Hermès Sellier. Others consist of a single employee. Consider Roland Daraspe, a boilermaker and aeronautic mechanic with a creative bent who taught himself *orfèvrerie*, or silversmithing. Today he practices

EPVs run the gamut from cowbell makers to medical instrument manufacturers. **Opposite, clockwise from top left:** A lacquered and engraved tenor saxophone from Henri Selmer Paris; an intricate ceiling ornament by Atelier Rouveure-Marquez; jewelry from Mellerio dits Meller, purveyors to Marie Antoinette; filter papers from Prat Dumas, the oldest French company still in operation.



this ancient tradition in a totally contemporary spirit, designing and crafting unique pieces to order, such as a beautifully ridged silver wine carafe and a three-footed soup tureen that looks as if it landed from another (very chic) planet.

Several EPVs are bare hold-outs in industries struggling to survive in the modern world. There are feather masters, who flourished in an era when people wore hats, and fan makers, from a time when this accessory was de rigueur for ladies. Heraldic engravers. Corset-makers. Gold-beaters (who pummel gold leaf). Even bell forgers. Since 1829, the Devouassoud family has been following a 51-step process to make the steel bells hanging from the necks of Alpine cows. “We’re not a multinational, that’s for sure,” says Martine Devouassoud. “We’re pretty local. But we’ve managed to hold on for six generations. And

if we shut down, our craft dies with us.” Speaking for all these fragile sectors, ISM’s Govciyan notes, “When they’re gone, they’re gone.”

In general, though, EPVs seem to be doing very well, especially those that cater to high-end niches that resist economic downturns. Govciyan points out that one-third have an annual turnover of more than €1.7 million. “There was a major recession during our first five years, but when the original batch of companies applied to renew, we saw that many had not only maintained but had increased their sales during that period.”

He attributes this growth to the fact that most no longer rely solely on the French market; three-quarters of EPVs export their products, and 16 percent make the bulk of their revenues from international clients. Typical is Breton furniture maker Ateliers Allot, a company



founded in 1812 and run by seven successive generations. Although the French market for high-end furniture is soft, Ateliers Allot says that it is doing just fine, thanks to exports, which now represent 85 percent of its turnover. “If sales aren’t strong enough in France, why not try the Middle East or India, where there are wealthy people looking for exceptional furniture?” asks Govciyan. “Gilding, marquetry—these are very rare skills.”



An artisan painstakingly applies gold leaf to a Baccarat glass.

THE EPV VETTING PROCESS IS QUITE RIGOROUS (see sidebar), but that is what gives the label its prestige. Since its launch seven years ago, 2,508 companies have applied and 1,130 have been accepted. Govciyan expects the total to level off, now that most of the potentially eligible firms have already sought admission.

And to ensure that the distinction retains its aura of excellence, companies are required to re-apply every five years, going through the entire process all over again. You might ask why any business would subject itself to this grind when there’s work to be done beating gold, hand-blowing crystal or distilling absinthe. Sometimes it’s simply for the thrill of recognition. S.T. Dupont has been around for 140 years, making travel cases for the weddings of Queen Elizabeth and her grandson William, cigarette lighters for Marilyn Monroe and Pablo Picasso, pens for Jackie Kennedy and Karl Lagerfeld. And yet the owner was so pleased to receive the EPV label last year that he celebrated the honor by teaming up with another EPV, gunmaker Verney-Carron, to create a one-of-a-kind rifle. With a mechanism as sophisticated as a timepiece and a barrel coated in Chinese lacquer to resemble crocodile, it is a true masterpiece.

For many others, the leading incentive to become an EPV is financial. The government offers EPVs a 15 percent tax break for expenses related to creating new jobs or products (salaries, payroll taxes, prototypes and so on). In addition, it gives a €2,200 tax credit for every new apprentice hired. This is key, says Govciyan. “Many companies need to train people in-house, as these skills are taught nowhere else.” The credit is especially important to companies that have neither *fil*s nor *fil*le waiting in the wings and are counting on apprentices to take over.

One of these is Atelier Anne Hoguet, located in Paris’s theater district, where most fan-makers set up shop back in the day. Anne Hoguet entered the family business at age 14 and is now nearing retirement age. Working alone, she performs the tasks once done by 20 different artisans, among them embroiderers, lacemakers, decorative painters and wood carvers. It’s slow, fastidious labor, and she still uses many of the same rudimentary wood and steel tools that have been in her family for more than a century. Business comes in spurts—a ready-to-wear collection for Louis Vuitton, a rush order for

*Don Quixote* at the opera, a period movie such as Sofia Coppola’s *Marie Antoinette*. But there’s no one to fill Hoguet’s shoes once she’s gone. “I’m not really looking to invest in the company anymore,” she says. “What I care about most now is finding somebody to run it after me, to ensure it will live on.” Graduates from applied arts programs are her ideal candidates, though they still need to train with her for three years before mastering the craft.

In some cases, a large EPV buys out a smaller one, thereby ensuring its longevity. One example is Anthony Delos, a young shoemaker who handcrafts luxurious custom footwear. In 2007 he received the EPV label and the coveted Meilleur Ouvrier de France title. Five years later, he sold his business to another, much bigger EPV, Berluti (owned by LVMH). His former competitor is now his boss.

For others, the appeal of belonging to this exclusive club is that it helps grow their business. Nearly two years ago, Fabienne Saligue bought Maison Fey, a small house that specializes in hand-tooled leatherwork. Soon after, she applied for the EPV label. She says she was attracted by the tax advantages but also by the image it affords, the guarantee of quality—she collaborates with a lot of other EPVs—and the support of the Institut Supérieur des Métiers can offer her, especially overseas. She cites its collaboration with Ubifrance, the French

agency that helps companies develop their export activities. One agreement, for example, permitted her and other EPVs to consult a detailed study of the Chinese market free of charge.

The ISM can also help EPVs secure loans, an invaluable boost when a company is having cash-flow problems. “Negotiating with banks can be difficult, especially in a recession. But when we intervene, they tend to treat EPVs differently,” says Govciyan. Along those same lines, his agency has signed agreements with various partners, such as an association of accountants, to offer EPVs additional assistance.

Given that small artisanal firms frequently have only a few employees, communications and marketing can also present enormous challenges—every minute devoted to PR and sales is a minute not spent producing goods. The ISM is helpful here as well, publishing a guide of EPVs that it sends out to designers, architects and interior decorators. Last June, the ISM hosted an exhibition of French excellence with some 30 EPVs at Harrods in London, and in 2011 it presented a selection of EPVs to American professionals at LVMH headquarters in New York. This year, you will find EPVs—sometimes at a stand of their own—at trade shows and events such as Maison & Objet, Made in France, Révélations, the France Production Expo, the Salon du Patrimoine Culturel and the Fête de la Gastronomie.

What does all this cost the government? Taken together, the EPVs account for 53,000 jobs and a total turnover of €11.5 billion. Govciyan estimates that the tax credits cost the state less than €15 million a year. “When you consider what these companies represent—the revenue, the number of jobs, France’s place on the world stage—it’s not expensive at all.”



• When the producers of the James Bond movies set out to find a suitably sophisticated libation for 007, they chose Bollinger Champagne. In fact, author Ian Fleming first introduced Bond to Bollinger in *Diamonds Are Forever* (1956), and it was the secret agent’s Champagne of choice in movies from *Live and Let Die* to *Skyfall*. Bond’s taste is, of course, impeccable. Bollinger is powerful and complex, made using traditional, labor-intensive techniques and with a majority of its grapes (notably

pinot noir) grown in the house’s own vineyards, a rarity in Champagne.

There are several reasons that this is the first—and for now, the only—Champagne house to be an EPV. It still practices ancestral methods such as hand riddling, matures its wines on the lees twice as long as required by the appellation, and employs the region’s last barrel maker. Also unique: its “library” of 650,000 corked magnums of reserve wines, used to blend non-vintage *cuvées*.

Then there is the company’s impressive history. One of the last remaining independent Champagne houses, Bollinger is still owned by its founding family and occupies the same estate in Aÿ that the young nobleman Athanase de Villermont inherited in the early 1800s. His aristocratic title forbade him from being a tradesman, so he partnered with a local, Paul Renaudin, and a German who had come to France to learn the Champagne business, Joseph Bollinger. Together they created Renaudin-Bollinger & Co in 1829.

Joseph Bollinger married de Villermont’s daughter, and the house was passed down through the generations. One of the most unforgettable personalities in its history was a Scottish woman, Elizabeth, who wed the founder’s grandson, Jacques, then became a widow in 1942. She ran the house with passion and a sense of perfection. Locals still fondly remember her riding her bicycle through the vineyards.

In 2008, the house was entrusted to Jérôme Philipon, who together with Jacques Bollinger Company, the family group holding, strives to preserve and enhance its unique heritage. One example: Bollinger now uses sustainable winegrowing techniques that have made it the first Champagne label to obtain the government’s “High Environmental Value” certification.

Today Bollinger exports to more than a hundred countries—including England, of course, where Brits refer to it affectionately as “Bolly.” *champagne-bollinger.com*

Bollinger remains the first and only Champagne maker to have acquired EPV status. Boasting an impressive history, the house still practices age-old techniques as well as sustainable wine-growing methods.



• Parquets Romoli has its atelier in Pierrevert, a medieval village of some 4,000 souls in the Luberon, but its reputation stretches from Moscow to Doha. Founded in 1969 by Gino Romoli, it is now headed by his sons Yves and Gilles. The company specializes in decorative parquet: friezes, rosettes, checkerboards and original designs made to order. Many look more like carpets than floors, with intricate patterns resembling kaleidoscopes or exotic games of chance. (The company also offers more than 100

models of ready-made flooring.)

Romoli's creations decorate the mansions, châteaux, yachts and government buildings of an extremely elite clientele, which has included Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates, King Hassan II of Morocco and the Al Thani family of Qatar. You will also find their work in the Uzbek Parliament building, the Kremlin's Red Salon and one of the Queen Mary 2's restaurants.

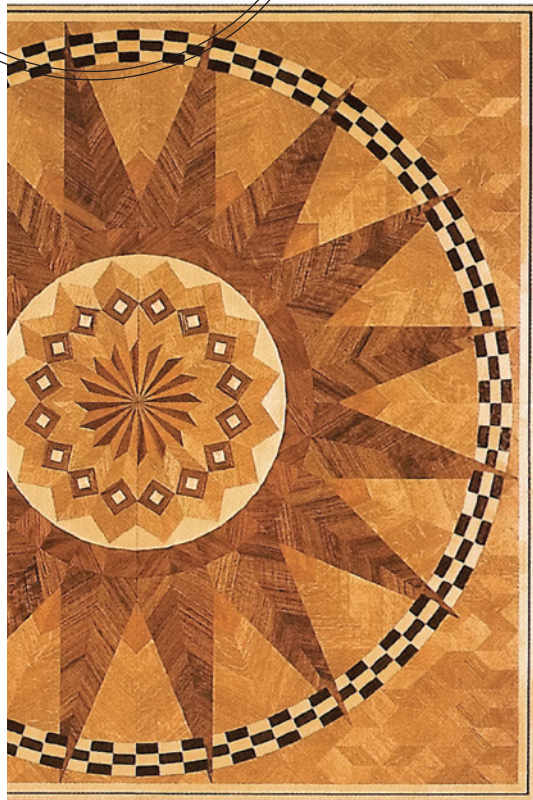
"Our products have nothing in common with basic floorboards," says Yves Romoli, explaining that his family's specialty is solid-wood marquetry that is one

centimeter thick. More than 15 different species of hardwood are carefully chosen for what he calls "an attractive vein, an attractive grain and a natural color that doesn't fade in the sun." They source materials from the very best sawmills, similar to the way top chefs use only the finest ingredients. The company's highly trained workers measure the wood by hand, cut it using carbide blades and fit it into elaborate patterns like puzzles. The result, says Romoli, is "*le beau pour durer*"—beauty meant to last. [parquets-romoli.com](http://parquets-romoli.com)

## Building Heritage

### PARQUETS ROMOLI

Founded in 1969,  
EPV since 2010



Parquets Romoli's solid-wood marquetry incorporates more than 15 species of hardwood; resembling a compass rose, Stella Cubeti is one of its decorative patterns.

## Tableware

### LA CORNUE

Founded in 1908,  
EPV since 2006

• George Clooney may or may not actually cook, but he owns a La Cornue, the Bentley of ranges. The company was born in 1908 in Paris, a city then buzzing with creativity and invention. At the Ritz, Auguste Escoffier was revolution-

izing gastronomy, but in their own homes, people still cooked in fireplaces or coal-fired ovens.

Along came Albert Dupuy, a perfumer who decided to make a better oven. His design reduced the cooking area and added a vaulted top to minimize dehydration. It wasn't self-heating but fit inside coal stoves. After WWI, gas came to affluent residences, and Dupuy produced an independent gas oven. Business boomed.

Albert's son André took over in 1951. He was an artist not a businessman, and he

focused on making extremely luxurious ranges to order. Dismayed by the minimalism of Scandinavian design in the 1960s, he responded by creating Le Château, a nostalgic design of colored enamel, solid brass burners and stainless steel knobs. It was a hit (and still is).

Xavier Dupuy, the third generation to run La Cornue, is a businessman first and foremost. He expanded the company, and exports now represent 80 percent of sales. At the factory 20 miles west of Paris, wooden crates bear shipping labels for Cannes, California, Moscow and Amman. The

business employs 70 people, some of whom have worked here for decades. It takes about two months to make a Château by hand, cutting and folding sheets of steel, and the company produces about 800 each year. Last year it unveiled La Cornue W by architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte—its first new design in almost half a century. Composed of an induction table and separate oven, it adds an exciting contemporary flair to La Cornue's impeccable pedigree.

La Cornue was one of the first companies selected to become an EPV. As Dupuy explains, "It was a positive thing for our team—working for a company that has a quality label makes our employees feel like they each have a label, too." [lacornue.com](http://lacornue.com)



La Cornue's ranges, such as the top-of-the-line model below, take more than two months to make by hand. **Right:** A scene from the workshop, located west of Paris.







Left: Rinck is particularly celebrated for ultra-high-end period furniture, such as this marquetry commode inspired by the work of the great 18th-century *ébéniste* Riesener.

Below, bottom: Decorative sycamore veneer; a saw used to cut intricate shapes.



• A few years ago, Sotheby's valued a shagreen-and-veneer cabinet from the 1930s at upwards of €100,000. The Art Deco treasure had been crafted by Rinck Meubles, still one of the greatest makers of fine furniture in France—or indeed, in the world.

Jacques Rinck founded the company in 1841 and for most of its history, it had more competition than it does today. “Before the oil crisis of the '70s, Paris's Faubourg Saint-Antoine was the biggest exporter in France, ahead of Renault,” says Bruno Sachet, who runs Rinck Meubles. He notes that the Passage de la

Bonne Graine, where the company makes its wares, used to be home to 33 artisans in the furniture trade. Now there are barely a dozen in the entire neighborhood.

Rinck's glory days came between the two World Wars under Maurice Rinck, who interpreted the designs of Art Deco masters such as Ruhlmann. After the death of Gérard Rinck in 2003, a carpenter and businessman named Thierry Goux bought the company, saving it from closure. Goux created three divisions: one for project design, one for interior design and a third, Rinck Meubles, for high-end furniture design and manufacture. This is the division that carries the EPV label.

Once again, Rinck is in fine form. “We have found our place,” says Sachet. “We don't design products ourselves but work with designers, decorators and architects to execute their

ideas.” They are content to remain behind the scenes, not minding that when people buy furniture signed by Philippe Starck, they don't know that it may have been crafted by Rinck.

Though they collaborate with contemporary designers, Rinck's specialty is ultra-high-end period furniture. One day this winter they were finishing up an order for a luxury yacht: 60 pieces of furniture representing six months of work, all in an elaborate Louis XVI style. Along with a pair of dining buffets in varnished walnut with Chinese lacquer scenes of birds and flowers, there were gilded his-and-

her bathroom cabinets and even an ormolu-mounted rosewood box for hiding electric plugs on a desk.

Rinck's artisans still use many of the same tools and practices they did 150 years ago, combined with modern techniques such as digital machining. When a piece of furniture requires a specialty they don't practice, such as leatherwork or lacquer, they bring in outside collaborators—often other EPVs.

“It's thanks to quality that we exist,” Sachet says. And to the fact that they know how to tap into the global market, connecting with moneyed consumers who continue to crave French *savoir-faire*. [rinck.fr](http://rinck.fr)

Maison Fey specializes in leatherwork, including *gainerie d'ameublement* (upholstering furniture) and *cuir de Cordoue*, tooled Cordovan leather.

Against one wall is a row of old wooden-handled implements; some have engraved wheels, others iron stamps. These are antique *roulette* and *fleuron* tools for embossing decorative gold or silver designs on customized desktop leathers, one of the house's most popular items. Artisans heat the carved iron end, then run or stamp it against the back of a metallic ribbon, impressing the leather with flourishes and fancy

• The smell of skins is the first thing you notice when you walk through the door of Maison Fey, located in the Viaduc des Arts, an area of Paris dedicated to craftsmanship. Here, calfskin, goat, ostrich, beaver and shagreen of every shade hang from the ceiling and walls. Established in 1910,

borders. Maison Fey also fixes old leather boxes, reupholsters leather furniture and makes leather trim. Two recent projects included re-covering some American weight-lifting benches from the 1950s for a French gallery and crafting a leather headboard for the movie *Taken* with Liam Neeson. But the house's

greatest pride is *cuir de Cordoue*, a thick leather embossed with motifs or geometric patterns. The technique is practiced entirely in-house, from fabricating the metal plates to hand-painting the leather, centuries-old methods that require at least five years to learn. “There is no school for this,” says owner Fabienne Saligue. “We train our own people.”

While preserving traditional techniques, Maison Fey keeps an eye on the future, frequently collaborating with Sophie Böhr, a young artist who creates exquisite floral and abstract motifs. And now that the company has a machine that digitally engraves plates, the design possibilities are endless.

Ninety percent of its clients are professionals—architects or designers such as decorator Jacques Garcia. Non-professional customers typically come to them for desktop leathers sized to fit in the color and trim of their choice; orders can be turned around in 48 hours. Another popular item: storage boxes for archives or DVDs cleverly camouflaged as old books by Pierre de Ronsard and George Sand. [maisonfey.com](http://maisonfey.com)

Cordovan leather embossed with a delicate floral motif designed by Sophie Böhr, a frequent Maison Fey collaborator.

*Decoration*

**RINCK MEUBLES**

*Founded in 1841,  
EPV since 2006*







## Culture & Leisure

### ORGUES PASCAL QUOIRIN

*Founded in 1970,  
EPV since 2006*

- It might be hard to believe that there is much of a market for organs (the musical kind), but there is, and Pascal Quoirin is proof of that. He created his eponymous company in 1970 in Saint-Didier, Provence, to repair old organs and make new

ones. Since then, he has built some 75 new instruments throughout France and elsewhere, including the U.S., the site of his biggest project yet.

In the spring of 2011, the sounds of the first French-built organ ever installed in New York floated through the Church of the Ascension on Fifth Avenue. It was a gift of the Manton Foundation, established by a couple of church-goers who loved the music of Olivier Messiaen. The church auditioned organ

makers throughout the U.S. and Europe before choosing Quoirin for the job.

It took the company three years to handcraft this marvel fitted with 97 stops, 111 ranks, 6,183 pipes, two consoles and seven keyboards. The result is an extremely versatile instrument, able to play the entire repertoire from Baroque to 20th-

century music and, of course, everything ever written by Messiaen.

Quoirin employs many different specialized artisans for a project like this, including designers, woodworkers, pipemakers and sound engineers. And sculptors such as his wife, Babou, who carved the wooden peacocks decorating the pipes. [atelier-quoirin.com](http://atelier-quoirin.com)

The versatile new Pascal Quoirin instrument at Manhattan's Church of the Ascension, the organ maker's first U.S. project.

## Fashion & Beauty

### SIEGEL & STOCKMAN

*Founded in 1867,  
EPV since 2012*

- Two factory fires have decimated the archives of Siegel & Stockman, so its history is sketchy. What is known is that Frédéric Stockman, a Belgian sculptor, moved to Paris in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and worked for Alexis Lavigne, a master tailor who founded the ESMOD fashion school (now the oldest in the world) and invented the tape measure. He is also credited with coming up with a standardized dressmaker's form. Until that time, upper-class women had personal dressmakers and, often, personalized busts (originally made of wicker) upon which their dresses were fitted. Lavigne's model was crafted from papier mâché and covered in fabric, making it simpler to pin clothing onto the form.

Stockman opened his own company in 1867 and came up with the idea of providing dressmakers with forms in different sizes—6, 8, 10 and so on. By the turn of the century, he was selling 30,000 busts a year to couture ateliers and department stores. He eventually joined forces with Siegel, whose specialty was mannequins (with limbs, heads and, in some cases, real hair and teeth) and metal structures for displaying accessories.

Today Siegel & Stockman makes some 6,000 dress forms per year—about 60 percent for display, the rest for ateliers such as Zara or Chanel, which use them to create their collections. Thirty-five percent of revenues come from sales to foreign buyers, and a U.S. branch supplies the American market.

In all, the company has created 500 unique plaster molds, an encyclopedia of human shapes from the era when women had tiny, corset-bound waists and inflated “pigeon” chests until now. The newest model is the 497 bust, released in 2006 and based on

detailed studies of the contemporary European body. Destined mostly for couture houses, it has more realistic curves but is still crafted by hand of papier mâché and covered in cream-colored fabric. Model B406—dubbed the “haute couture”—dates back to the 1940s. Its slim, neutral shape with small hips and breasts is the standard in boutique windows, thanks to what company director Caroline Lapeyre calls its “timeless allure.” Today it is generally made of fiberglass and covered in anything from fabric to gold leaf—the company showroom on the Faubourg Saint-Honoré attests to the astounding variety on offer.

In the 1950s, the Stockman factory employed some 1,500 workers to craft its legendary busts. Now its workshop in Gennevilliers, west of Paris, has only about 20. Yet the methods have barely

changed. One worker stands at a table applying eight sheets of papier mâché to a plaster model. After drying in the oven for 24 hours, the bust is cut off the model, stapled back together and sanded. Upstairs, a group of women work with fabric—cutting patterns, sewing them and stretching the cloth and a thin layer of cotton padding over the busts until they fit like a second skin. The final touch: the bust is imprinted with the Stockman logo, the model number and the size. [stockmanparis.fr](http://stockmanparis.fr)

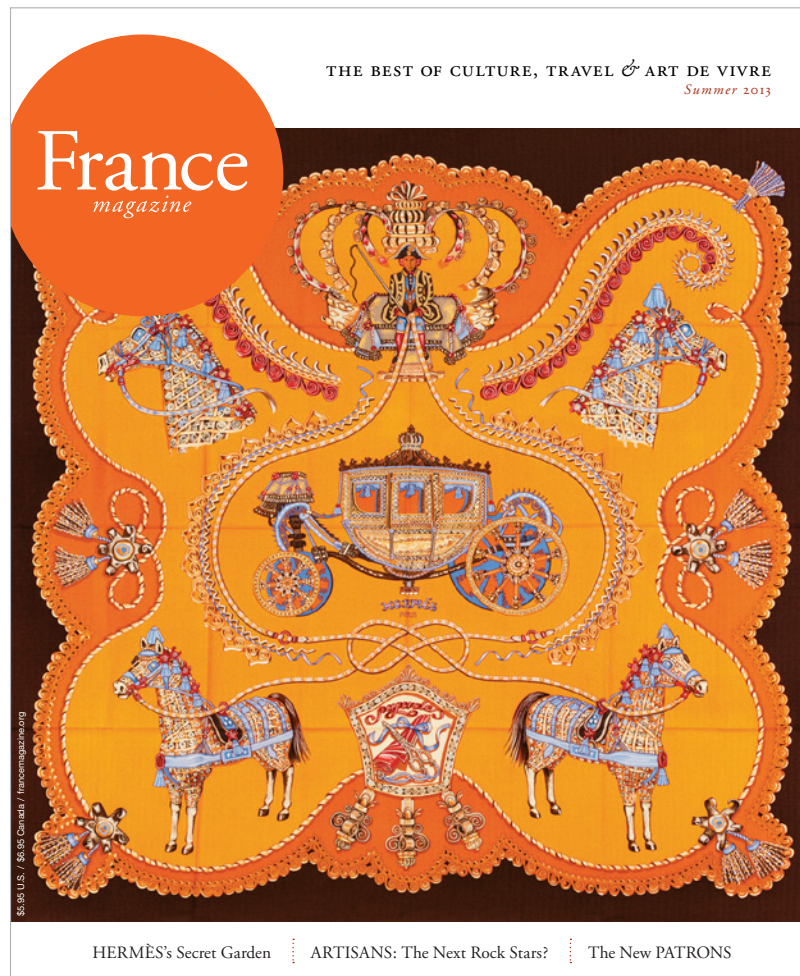


Siegel & Stockman crafts some 6,000 dress forms per year, many used by couture houses. Their plaster molds constitute a veritable encyclopedia of human shapes, from the days of corsets to the present.





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