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Mme. de Pompadour: Self Promotion and Social Performance through Architecture and the Decorative Arts

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**MME. DE POMPADOUR: SELF PROMOTION AND SOCIAL PERFORMANCE
THROUGH ARCHITECTURE AND THE DECORATIVE ARTS**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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“Furnishing, although largely women’s work in the direction, is really no trivial matter...Its study is as important as the study of politics; for the private home is at the foundation of the public state...; and the history of furniture itself, indeed, involves the history of nations.

- Harriet Spofford, *Art Decoration Applied to Furniture*, 1877.

Table of Contents

Introduction :	5
Chapter 1. Invitation and Intimidation in the Upper Apartments:	10
Chapter 2. A Newly Political Pompadour:	27
Chapter 3. Beyond the Walls of Versailles:	41
Conclusion:	55
Figure List:	60
Figures:	61
Bibliography:	74

Introduction

Beauty, talent, and taste. Mme. de Pompadour, the mistress of Louis XV, was the eighteenth-century embodiment of these qualities, which she would use in service of her own social advancement during her nearly twenty years at the court of Versailles. Her rapid rise to favor may have been precipitated by her legendary beauty, but she maintained her position through the strategic deployment of her talents, particularly in the social realm, and a sense of aesthetic taste that was distinctively *à la Pompadour*. A member of the bourgeoisie, Mme. de Pompadour became “titular mistress, a presence at court, and lady-in-waiting to the queen through her flawless social performance,” a fact that was deeply unsettling to the blue-blooded aristocracy that dominated Versailles.¹ Her success at court symbolized the erosion of class distinctions, undermining the entire system of etiquette upon which the court of Versailles had always functioned. A former actress, Mme. de Pompadour created a role for herself at court, an “aristocratic – and eventually a courtly identity,” that she then performed for nearly two decades.²

Her upward social mobility represented that of the rising bourgeoisie, “as they acquired the appearance, manners, and notional symbols of the aristocracy.”³ At the court of Versailles, appearances were everything, and for Mme. de Pompadour to have succeeded on such a grand scale, it was crucial that she appropriate the signifiers of nobility. She began this process after receiving her title from Louis XV, *Marquise de Pompadour*, and the coat of arms that accompanied it. However, merely having a title was not enough to gain acceptance, to truly belong at Versailles. It was therefore

¹ Melissa Hyde, *Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), 129.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

necessary for her to enact a social program of patronage that advanced her vision of herself. This program encompassed the fine and decorative arts, as well as extensive architectural projects. Mme. de Pompadour placed particular emphasis on furnishing her personal apartments, creating total environments that facilitated and supported her social goals. Her distinctive style evolved over the course of her life to shape and reflect her changing roles at court.

Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, the future Mme. de Pompadour, was born on December 30th, 1721, and her background was in question from the start. Ostensibly the daughter of Louise-Madeleine de la Motte and her husband, François Poisson, there are serious doubts regarding her paternity. Madame Poisson was known to have been a woman of flexible moral values, and she conducted several acknowledged affairs with the wealthy *financier* Pâris Montmartel, and the royal tax collector, Le Normant de Tournehem, among others.⁴ It is Tournehem who is especially suspected of being Jeanne-Antoinette's true father, and he would ultimately take a marked interest in her that would prove to be advantageous.

After an early marriage to a wealthy aristocrat, Mme. de Pompadour caught the eye of Louis XV, separated from her husband, and was granted titles of nobility before being installed in her own apartments at the court of Versailles. It was here, in 1745, that she launched her first phase of reinforcing her social legitimacy through architecture and décor. Upon her arrival, Mme. de Pompadour moved into her upper apartments, a cozy attic space located on the third level of the palace of Versailles. These rooms, which she inhabited from 1745-50, demonstrate a mixture of relaxed and informal elements

⁴ Evelyne Lever, *Madame de Pompadour: A Life*. Translated by Catherine Temerson (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002), 25.

alongside objects that were recognizably hierarchical. In this way, Mme. de Pompadour was able to convey a subtle message to her visitors, namely that she was both the private, intimate companion of the king and a woman who commanded respect from courtiers.

Mme. de Pompadour was able to sustain a nineteen year relationship with a notoriously fickle monarch by making herself indispensable to him. Although many at court predicted her fall from favor, it became increasingly clear that “Pompadour’s power over Louis XV was not simply sexual, since that part of their relationship cooled within the first five years or so.”⁵ In fact, the end of their sexual affair, believed to have come around the year 1750, marks the beginning of Mme. de Pompadour’s rise to greater political power at Versailles. She yielded considerable influence, despite the fact that she did not hold a political office. As her role changed from that of traditional mistress to a more publicly involved persona, Mme. de Pompadour was relocated within the palace of Versailles.

In 1750, Mme. de Pompadour moved from her private attic suite to a larger and more public apartment on the ground floor of Versailles. This location was highly sought after due to the prestige of its proximity to the *Salons de Mars, Venus and Diane*. One floor above her, the king and his ministers shaped official policy, and Mme. de Pompadour was conveniently on hand to offer her opinions to the monarch who relied on her. For her new apartment, Mme. de Pompadour pursued a more public and official style of décor that indicated the importance of her favor. These rooms became the setting in which she could enact business, both official and unofficial. It is her unofficial business that was most enhanced by the atmosphere of the lower apartments, as her greatest powers lay in her ability to work outside of court channels and established etiquette. In

⁵ Hyde, *Making up the Rococo*, 129.

these lower apartments, Mme. de Pompadour served as an access point to Louis XV, controlling who had the privilege of meeting with him.

Her influence was felt far beyond the palace walls of Versailles; Mme. de Pompadour was a prominent landowner in her own right. She acquired these properties through royal gifts, the ancestral lands associated with her titles, and her own investments. Although she constructed homes throughout her tenure at court, her architectural patronage increased as her intimate relationship with the king waned. However, architecture became a medium through which the couple could express their platonic affection for each other, as they collaborated on numerous projects. Furthermore, Mme. de Pompadour used architecture in much the same way as she did the decorative arts and furnishing of her apartments. These sites allowed her to develop an alternative definition of what it meant to be a royal mistress.

These self-definitions were often part of a necessary effort to respond to the criticisms of courtiers and the general populace. Accusations of excessive luxury, moral degeneracy, and physical disease were met with a calculated architectural program associating Mme. de Pompadour with health, Enlightenment ideals, and officially sanctioned patronage. Her projects were therefore not merely reflective of her social environment, but intended to shape that environment in her favor.

The objects explored in this thesis are conventionally thought of as being *à la Pompadour*, or in the style of Mme. de Pompadour. Although some of them are attributed to her collections, the majority of them were not her personal possessions. Mme. de Pompadour owned a staggering number of pieces of furniture, decorative objects, and paintings, which she was constantly re-arranging within her numerous properties. Some

of these items were absorbed into the French state upon her death in 1764, and the rest of her collections were bequeathed to her brother, the *marquis* de Marigny. While it is sometimes possible to trace the provenance of these items, this thesis is more concerned with the creation of total environments, and how Mme. de Pompadour lived within them. For that reason, objects that represent the kind of furniture she would have owned and lived with have been used in many of the examples presented here. An exhaustive search through the posthumous inventories of her belongings was not central to this research.

The structure of this thesis relies on the physical locations of Mme. de Pompadour. Although the chapters are roughly chronological, beginning with her arrival at Versailles in 1745 and ending with her death in 1764, this work makes no attempt to comprehensively chronicle the entirety of her involvement in the decorative arts. Rather, it focuses on several specific aspects of her patronage, with the goal of illuminating her social position and public image, and how she worked to control the two. Chapter One deals with the first rooms Mme. de Pompadour inhabited, from 1745-1750. These upper apartments characterize her early attempts to convey meaning through décor and to shape social interactions within a constructed environment. Chapter Two follows Mme. de Pompadour's move downstairs, to the lower apartments in 1750. This move parallels an important evolution in her role at court and seeks to explore how her newly political functions were expressed through these interior spaces. Chapter Three is more expansive, examining three architectural projects undertaken by Mme. de Pompadour and Louis XV on her behalf, over the course of her nineteen years at court. These independent homes represented an opportunity for Mme. de Pompadour to actively work to change public perception of herself and her role, an opportunity that she did not waste.

Chapter One: Invitation and Intimidation in the Upper Apartments

Born a member of the bourgeoisie, Madame de Pompadour masterfully overcame her origins to become the official mistress of King Louis XV. During her nearly twenty years at Versailles, Mme. de Pompadour was regarded as the unofficial tastemaker at court, as well as an important patron of the fine and decorative arts. Décor and decorative objects represent some of the tools she used to mold her public and private images. Her interests in these areas were part of a calculated effort to create and manage those images, positioning herself as a woman of acknowledged influence at the court of Versailles while remaining inviting to the king. She was not a selfless patron in service of the arts; rather, they served her, disseminating the image she wished to project.

In eighteenth-century France, Versailles operated as a vast stage for the performance of highly fraught social interactions and Mme. de Pompadour ensured that her rooms cast her in the best possible light. Her apartments were paragons of style and elegance, total environments that both invited intimacy with her favorites and served to intimidate those who could threaten her socially.⁶ The layout, lighting accessories and matched furnishings of her rooms illustrate her conflicting requirements from décor. Her rooms and their contents were at once informal and intensely hierarchical, which gave Mme. de Pompadour the flexibility in atmosphere that was crucial to a woman of her social position.

With serious doubts about the identity of her father, Jeanne-Antoinette relied on her access to benefactors such as Le Normant de Tournehem to facilitate her *entrée* into Parisian society. At the age of 16, Jeanne-Antoinette acted in several plays, and

⁶ “Favorite” is a word used in eighteenth-century France to denote a relationship of particular intimacy. Mme. de Pompadour’s close friends could therefore be termed her favorites, and she was the acknowledged favorite of the king.

demonstrated a great capacity for opera and the theater.⁷ Tournehem also introduced her into several of the important literary and social salons of the time. Although she was admired for her many cultured qualities, and was described by Président Hénault as “one of the prettiest women [he had] ever seen,” Jeanne-Antoinette was not universally welcomed in the upper echelons of Parisian society.⁸ Nevertheless, Jeanne-Antoinette made an excellent marriage to Tournehem’s nephew, Charles-Guillaume Lenormant d’Etiolles, on March 4, 1741. Her background continued to be questioned however, as her husband’s parents resisted the match and their objections were overcome only by her very considerable dowry, offered by Tournehem himself. Jeanne-Antoinette was now Madame d’Etiolles, “the undisputed star of Parisian society and a happily married woman.”⁹ She began to participate in salons with great success and her marriage conferred on her an aura of respectability that she had previously been denied. She now circulated within a more sophisticated milieu comprised of the wealthiest bourgeois and the quasi-aristocracy. Her popularity and reputation rising, it was even said that “word began to filter back to court of her charms and graces,” and “her ability to dazzle made its way to Versailles.”¹⁰

Louis XV was indeed aware of her many charms, having encountered her several times while hunting in the forest of Sénart, on her husband’s ancestral lands. Then, in February 1745, Mme. d’Etiolles received a sought-after invitation to the masked ball at Versailles celebrating the marriage of Louis XV’s son, Louis-Ferdinand, to Maria

⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁸ Lever, *Madame de Pompadour*, 12. In fact, Jeanne-Antoinette and her mother were coldly received by Madame Geoffrin, hostess of one of the most prestigious salons in Paris. Hénault was a close friend of Queen Marie Leczinska, wife of Louis XV. Mme. de Pompadour would eventually take pains to be courteous to the Queen, observing etiquette scrupulously in her presence.

⁹ Rosamund Hooper-Hamersley, *The Hunt after Jeanne-Antoinette de Pompadour: Patronage, Politics, Art, and the French Enlightenment* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 70.

¹⁰ Ibid., 70, 72.

Theresa, the Infanta of Spain. Here, the king appeared disguised as a yew tree, Mme. d’Etioules as Diana, and their public conversation was noted by everyone present. This act, though seemingly innocuous by today’s standards, sent shockwaves through the court; the king traditionally chose his mistresses from the aristocracy. Nevertheless, it was clear by the following April that the bourgeois Mme. d’Etioules had a firm hold on Louis XV, as “she appeared at the theater seated in full view of the king,” and had begun to associate with his inner circle, even dining in his private apartments.¹¹ In June of the same year, Mme. d’Etioules legally separated from her husband. However, a major obstacle remained to her permanent installation at Versailles; without noble blood she could not be formally presented at court. It was the king who provided the solution to this problem; he purchased the defunct title “*marquisat de Pompadour*” and bestowed it upon his new favorite.¹² Mme. d’Etioules was now eligible to live at court in an official capacity, as the titled mistress of the king. All that remained was the meticulously detailed ceremony of an official presentation at court.

Technically, aristocrats were required to demonstrate noble ancestry dating from as far back as the fifteenth-century. However, by the eighteenth-century, the practice of buying titles was well established among the nobility. Still, it remained a considerable affront to convention that the possibly illegitimate daughter of a bourgeois would be inducted into the court at Versailles. Yet the king was determined to have his way, so he found a suitable sponsor to present his lover, henceforth Mme. de Pompadour.¹³ When

¹¹ Ibid., 89-90.

¹² When aristocrats died with no heirs, their estates were ceded to the monarch who could then sell or bestow the titles, land-holdings and coat-of-arms as he saw fit. Ibid., 91.

¹³ The Princesse de Conti, a member of the house of Bourbon Condé and a princess of the blood, was pressed into this role by Louis XV. The king paid off a portion of her significant gambling debts in return for this service.

the time came, Mme. de Pompadour performed her role perfectly, likely drawing on her stage experience to steady her throughout the nerve-wracking procedures. Any breach of etiquette, however minor, would have made an irreparably negative impression on a court already predisposed to be disdainful toward her. The etiquette established by Louis XIV had, by this point, evolved into a rigid ritual of social performativity. It involved projecting a carefully cultivated grace and refinement, observing protocols fastidiously, and maintaining a fashionable and elegant appearance, all with an apparently natural ease. This ease was essential because “conduct that betrayed effort and awkwardness suggested a worker’s lack of cultivation or the laboriously acquired pretensions of a newly wealthy bourgeois.”¹⁴ For Mme. de Pompadour, learning to navigate these patterns of social interaction was crucial to her success at court. Though her reputation depended on her observance of court etiquette, her relationship with the king was grounded in discreet intimacy. It was therefore necessary to create environments that could accommodate the disparate requirements of her social interactions. Her rooms would become arenas of calculated transgressions against, and adherence to, established codes of behavior and décor.

After her official presentation at court on September 14th, 1745, Mme. de Pompadour and Louis XV took a small tour of the royal châteaux at Choisy and Fontainebleau. When they returned to Versailles in November of the same year, the new *marquise* moved into the former quarters of Madame de Châteauroux, which had been

¹⁴ Mimi Hellman, “Interior Motives: Seduction by Decoration in Eighteenth-Century France,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 17.

recently renovated for her.¹⁵ These rooms, located in the attic above the private apartments of the king, would function as a private domestic haven for the couple while they were intimately involved. In fact, Mme. de Pompadour would not vacate these rooms until the end of their sexual affair, around the year 1750.¹⁶

Mme. de Pompadour's suite was situated in the north-western corner of the palace, with views of the *Parterres de Nord* and *d'Eau*, as well as of the fountain of Neptune. It consisted of two antechambers, a bedroom, two interior parlors, two wardrobes and a bathroom.¹⁷ While the number of rooms may seem to indicate spaciousness, the apartment was in fact a cozy retreat, quite the antithesis of the public lifestyle that Louis XIV had established at Versailles during the seventeenth-century. It is not known if Mme. de Pompadour was personally involved in the architectural design of her suite. Later in her career, she took a marked interest in architecture, but at this early stage it is unlikely that she influenced the architect's plans. However, the apartment was specifically renovated to accommodate her tastes, which she had formed during her years socializing with the wealthy bourgeois of Paris.

According to Joan Dejean, before the eighteenth-century and particularly during the reign of Louis XIV, "all French palaces and grand residences had a single goal: to make the daily life of the home's inhabitants into a perpetual demonstration of wealth and power."¹⁸ The homes she describes were designed around the *enfilade* model, where each room opens directly into the next, with the doors in perfect alignment. All the public

¹⁵ Madame de Châteauroux, former mistress of Louis XV, had died suddenly from an unexpected illness in December of 1744.

¹⁶ Lever, *Madame de Pompadour*, 47-59.

¹⁷ Lorenzo Crivellin. "The Versailles Castle: Madame de Pompadour's Upper Apartments," accessed November 1, 2011, http://www.madamedepompadour.com/_eng_pomp/home.htm.

¹⁸ Joan Dejean, "A New Interiority: The Architecture of Privacy in Eighteenth-Century Paris" in *Paris: Life and Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Charissa Bremer-David, (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum Getty Publications, 2011) 35.

rooms in a house were visible at a glance, allowing visitors to easily evaluate the wealth of a home's owners. To reach the final rooms, one had to pass through all previous rooms, observing and potentially disrupting their occupants. The consequences of this system were such that "in the seventeenth century, when the sequential or *enfilade*-based system of architecture reigned supreme, the concept of a private life could have no meaning."¹⁹ The *enfilade* trend is apparent in the public apartments of Louis XV. Arranged on the south and west sides of the marble courtyard, the king's guardroom, antechambers, state bedchamber and council chamber all demonstrate the practice of aligning doors to maximize the sight-lines between the rooms. In Figure 1, rooms 15 through 18 represent the layout of these public spaces. Even the King's private chambers, particularly rooms 19, 20, 21, and 24, north of the marble courtyard, demonstrate fidelity to *enfilade*.²⁰

By contrast, the layout of the suite belonging to Madame de Pompadour demonstrates a distinctly bourgeois influence and does not hold rigorously to the rule of *enfilade*. While several of the rooms are connected by a series of aligned doors, others can only be accessed by turning corners and proceeding down narrow hallways (See Figure 2). Furthermore, the apartments belonging to Mme. de Pompadour are located in the third floor attic of Versailles, above the more public first and second floors.²¹ The modified layout was therefore even more intimate. Despite the fact that some of her rooms adjoined via a series of aligned doors, her apartment itself was not open to the surrounding rooms. Her suite functioned as a more self-contained unit when compared

¹⁹ Ibid., 35.

²⁰ Jean Pierre Babelon and Claire Constans, *Versailles: Absolutism and Harmony*, trans. Daniel Wheeler (New York: The Vendome Press, 1998) 262.

²¹ Crivellin, "The Versailles Castle."

with those on the lower floors, where the rooms are completely open to the surrounding spaces. Examination of the floor-plan of Versailles reveals several of the king's public chambers are even visible from the Hall of Mirrors, one of the most highly trafficked areas of Versailles.

This new, private style of architecture demonstrated by Mme. de Pompadour's suite was, at the time of its invention, described by Augustin-Charles d'Aviler as the "apartments of comfort."²² This indicated that the apartments were intended to be places of comfort and seclusion, rather than the endless performance of life in the "apartments of show."²³ Interestingly, the most enthusiastic advocates of the new style were the wealthy bourgeois living in Paris. Entire neighborhoods were remade according to the newly valued principles of privacy and discretion. As a member of this social class, Mme. de Pompadour would have been exposed to these new architectural practices and would have visited homes designed around these intimate principles. The adoption of this bourgeois trend at Versailles is suggestive of Louis XV's acceptance of his new favorite's origins. Apparently, Mme. de Pompadour's bourgeois background was not the drawback it had been anticipated to be. It was even remarked by the Abbé Bernis, a confidante of the *marquise*, that the king had become "weary of the intrigues and the ambition of the court women; he hoped a bourgeois would think of nothing but loving and being loved."²⁴ It appears that, to the king, her humble roots were part of the

²² "Appartements de commodité," Dejean, "A New Interiority," 35.

²³ "Appartements de parade," Ibid.

²⁴ Abbé Bernis instructed Mme. de Pompadour in the etiquette and regulations of life at Versailles, and as well as teaching her comportment and pronunciation. This tutoring took place privately, the summer before her installation at court. Hooper-Hamersley, *The Hunt after Jeanne-Antoinette de Pompadour*, 91.

attraction; Mme. de Pompadour represented his fantasy of the intimate lifestyle of private citizens, free from the constraints of court etiquette.²⁵

This fantasy was partially realized through the private staircase that connected his second floor apartments with those of Mme. de Pompadour. Their life together was a curious amalgam of court etiquette and cozy domesticity. At the end of their evening entertainments, Louis XV would proceed to his state bedchamber and complete his ceremonial *coucher*. Courtiers would watch with rapt attention as he slipped into the gilded, formal bed, observing the ritual in detail. After their departure, the king would then change into more comfortable bedclothes and go “back to his private apartments and up the stairs to be with Madame de Pompadour [...]. His nights were spent with her.”²⁶ In the morning, he would return to his state bedchamber for the *lever*, or ceremonial rising. The staircase that adjoined their chambers facilitated this charade. The ability to pass unseen between their respective rooms gave them privacy at a public court and pre-figured the ways Mme. de Pompadour would control political access in the future.

Access to the king is crucial to understanding the eighteenth-century power dynamics at the court of Versailles. The court of Louis XV traded on a currency of intimacy with the monarch; the servants and courtiers involved in his most personal affairs were informally recognized as power brokers. Access was also structured around the literal spaces one was required to traverse when attending an audience with the king.²⁷ Physical proximity to the king indicated a very real privilege, and no one had a

²⁵ Etiquette at Versailles had been established by his predecessor, Louis XIV. Unlike his great-grandfather, Louis XV did not relish his public role but nevertheless performed the rituals scrupulously, out of respect for tradition.

²⁶ Lever, *Madame de Pompadour*, 65.

²⁷ For a larger discussion of the politics of formal receptions and their architectural frameworks, see M. Chatenet, “The King’s Space: The Etiquette of Interviews at the French Court in the Sixteenth Century” in

closer proximity than Mme. de Pompadour. The direct route from her private apartments, by way of private staircase, to his rooms was an architectural manifestation of their closeness.

Throughout eighteenth-century Paris, architects promoted this new architectural model, in opposition to *enfilade*, which protected the inhabitants of a house from the prying eyes of visitors. The “insides” of the house were intended to be seen only by invited guests, generally the most intimate of friends. Likewise, access to the apartments of Mme. de Pompadour was a highly sought after privilege. She lived and entertained in the privacy of her suite, holding dinner parties for her personal guests and those of Louis XV. This style of private entertaining was highly attractive to Louis XV, who chafed under the constraints of his public life at Versailles. Previously, the king was known to have held private gatherings in his own apartments, hosted by earlier mistresses.²⁸ While these gatherings continued after the arrival of Mme. de Pompadour, she also began to play hostess to the king and his companions in her own quarters. Consequently, it was important that her apartment provide an appropriate context. Her rooms were arenas of social seduction, mysterious and inaccessible to the majority of the court. Their furnishings served to enhance the aura of intrigue that she cultivated, while also allowing her to adjust the formality of her rooms as required.

This ambience was affected by the lighting and the furniture and decorative objects associated with it. In “Enchanted Night: Decoration, Sociability and Visuality after Dark,” Mimi Hellman argues that light, specifically candlelight, played a key role in shaping social interactions in the eighteenth-century. She expands on this theory, writing

The Politics of Space: European Courts. George Gorse and Malcolm Smuts, introduction to *The Politics of Space: European Courts*. (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2009), 21-29.

²⁸ Lever, *Madame de Pompadour*, 52.

that “elite sociability was very much about seeing and being seen, but the play of vision involved knowing how to manipulate, navigate, and make sense of both illumination and darkness.”²⁹ The lighting of interiors represented a deliberate choice on the part of the host, seeking to encourage a particular mood or atmosphere. Indeed, “by controlling light, hosts determined what visitors could see, and lighting patterns shaped guests’ navigation of a room.”³⁰ Brilliantly lit rooms with gleaming chandeliers denoted festivity, formality and wealth. Not only was a bright environment expensive to produce, requiring huge quantities of candles and the staff to care for them, light allowed guests to better examine the decorative objects, furniture and art within the space. Dimmer light was not without its advantages, however. Discreet lighting suggested intimacy, romance and intrigue; it provided the shadows that encouraged secretive activities. Cloaking the contents of a room in semi-darkness, it suggested privilege of a different sort, a privilege that did not need to assert itself.

In eighteenth-century France, candles were one of the only true means of illumination. However, they were far from ideal, producing smoke, dripping wax, and requiring frequent attention. Nevertheless, a thoughtfully lit room was considered a hallmark of taste and elegance. The type of candle, from the cheaper tallow version to the high quality white wax, was a particularly important choice; no self-respecting courtier would deign to use candles made from animal fat in his or her home.³¹

The aesthetics of lighting were developed beyond the choice of candle, a fact made clear by the design of lighting fixtures. Despite their impracticality, expensive gilt,

²⁹ Mimi Hellman, “Enchanted Night: Decoration, Sociability and Visuality after Dark,” in *Paris: Life and Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Charissa Bremer-David (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum Getty Publications, 2011), 94.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

³¹ Hellman, “Enchanted Night,” 97-99.

ceramic and lacquered materials adorned candelabra, sconces, candlesticks and chandeliers. Even the most attentive host could never hope to prevent wax from running off a candle and onto its mount. These decorative objects compromised utility and illustrated the elevated economic position of the owner, who did not need to concern himself with preserving his possessions. A wall sconce, made after a design by Jean-Claude Duplessis around the year 1760 and attributed to Mme. de Pompadour by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is an example of this kind of extravagance³² (See Figure 3).

Produced out of soft-paste porcelain and gilded bronze, this sconce features three sinuously curving branches decorated with leaves. The candle mounts themselves are gilded bronze and are illusionistically shaped to resemble leaves, which cradled the candles they held. Fronds intertwine in the upper part of the sconce, with the bottom depicting leaves and acorns. The sconce is colored blue, green, and white, with touches of gold that accentuate the attractive curves and highlight the finer details. It is clearly a high quality object, produced with luxurious materials. However, the fact that it came from the Sèvres porcelain factory and was designed by Duplessis is even more important than those materials in determining its value. Inspired by the Rococo style that was popular, the goldsmith and sculptor created numerous designs for the factory, but only approximately twenty sets of this particular design are believed to have been produced.³³ This rarity would serve to enhance its perceived value, and thus the relaxed attitude of the owner who dared to use it.

³² “Sconce, Wall (Bras De Cheminée),” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed October 24, 2011. <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/120017514?img=4>.

³³ “Pair of Wall Sconces.” Le Musée du Louvre, accessed October 24, 2011, http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail_notice.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673371699&CURRENT_LL_V_NOTICE%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673371699&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=9852723696500820&bmLocale=en.

In the intimate atmosphere of Mme. de Pompadour's suite of rooms, the lighting would have likely been low, created and maintained through the use of decorative and functional objects such as the Duplessis wall sconce. A dim light, reflected subtly off the glints of gold and bronze that decorate the sconce, would have contributed to an environment of subtle luxury, which welcomed those who were already familiar with it. Entering a dimly lit room from a more brightly illuminated space is momentarily disorienting, especially if one is not familiar with the layout of the rooms. This disorientation could distinguish habitual guests of the *marquise*, such as the king, from those with whom she was on less intimate terms. Because the body was an instrument for social performance in eighteenth-century France, courtiers were highly attuned to the slightest variations in pace, gesture, and tone of voice.³⁴ Therefore, a momentary hesitation at the threshold of a dimly lit room would indicate to all present that the newcomer was not familiar with the space. This attentiveness to the body indicated the tendency to "translate social relations into codes of bodily deportment."³⁵ A visitor's lack of intimacy with Mme. de Pompadour and her companions was thus manifested in his or her physical movements, and accentuated by the lighting of the space. Light was illuminating in a more-than-literal sense in eighteenth-century France because it revealed group dynamics and social standing as well as the material contents of a room. The importance of determining status in the social hierarchy cannot be overstated, and Mme. de Pompadour was not the only woman who used decorative objects and furniture in this way.

³⁴ Hellman, "Interior Motives," 17.

³⁵ Gorse and Smuts, introduction, 29.

The timing of Mme. de Pompadour's installation in the upper apartments coincided with the rise in prominence of Parisian courtesans and their homes. The eighteenth-century marked a period in France when fascination with these elegant and scandalous women was at an all-time high. The parallels between courtesans and the *marquise* are self-evident; these were kept women plucked from relative obscurity, usually the ranks of the chorus at the Opera Ballet. Mme. de Pompadour had enjoyed some success as an actress during her teens, and like the high-profile courtesans, she set trends in fashion and décor at Versailles, attracting a great deal of popular attention.

Parisian courtesans considered furniture to be of utmost importance, because "furniture was what stood between them and sordid prostitution."³⁶ They were very concerned with differentiating their practice of entertaining a select group of high-ranking and wealthy men in their homes from that of the more common-place prostitutes who walked the streets of Paris. One way of doing this was through the careful selection of furniture and decorative objects for the homes they owned or occupied. Mme. de Pompadour had similar objectives in the design of her private apartments; she needed to ensure that visitors accorded her the respect due to a *marquise* and the official mistress of the king. While she may have had no problem referring to her bourgeois past with the king, this casual attitude did not extend to the courtiers of Versailles. In fact, she was known to be "vigilant about people observing protocol with her, dictated solely by her intuition concerning the obligations a royal mistress was entitled to expect."³⁷

³⁶ Kathryn Norberg. "Goddesses of Taste: Courtesans and Their Furniture in Late-Eighteenth-Century Paris" in *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg (New York: Routledge, 2007), 98.

³⁷ Lever, *Madame de Pompadour*, 65.

Questions are often raised about the degree of control these courtesans, Mme. de Pompadour included, had over their decorative decisions and purchases. Two things are believed in this regard: that the wealthier a man was, the less likely he was to interfere in a domestic matter such as furnishings, and that the higher profile the courtesan, the more control she had.³⁸ As mistress to Louis XV, Mme. de Pompadour was both financially secure and well-known, putting her in a position to personally control the decoration of her surroundings.

An essential element of high-end design in eighteenth-century France was seriality. Wealthy French citizens, including courtesans, were noted for their propensity for matching sets of furniture, painting, porcelains, or wood paneling. In an age before mechanical production, the creation of identical objects and materials was an arduous and time-consuming process. Owning an extensive collection of matching objects was therefore a social signifier of wealth and privilege. This “fabrication of sameness” represented a luxury that only the elite could enjoy.³⁹ Entire suites of furniture were upholstered in matching silk or velvet, carved in the same motifs, and uniformly gilded. The renovation of Mme. de Pompadour’s upper apartments at Versailles demonstrates fidelity to this doctrine of sameness (See Figure 4).⁴⁰

The furniture that now fills her upper apartments at Versailles did not belong to the *marquise*; rather, it was donated to the château in the 1980s in support of a planned refurbishment. However, the objects presented at Versailles were selected by the curators

³⁸ Kathryn Norberg, “Goddesses of Taste,” 100.

³⁹ Mimi Hellman. “The Joy of Sets: The Uses of Seriality in the French Interior,” in *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 140.

⁴⁰ “The Apartment of the Marquise de Pompadour.” Château de Versailles, accessed October 16, 2011, http://en.chateauversailles.fr/index.php?option=com_cdvfiche&idf=A63698EE-7806-CCE9-5ED1-7F547CA287F8.

there because they are in line with what is known about the taste and furnishings of Mme. de Pompadour. This furniture has been re-upholstered to reflect the uniformity that she favored. In Figure 5, one can see two side-chairs, an arm chair, wall hangings, a fire screen, and the hangings of an alcove bed, all covered in the same light green silk with floral embroidery. This sort of ensemble set of furniture was known as a *mobilier*, and was generally the most expensive feature of an interior. The identicality of the fabric, the carving, and the gilding on so many items represented the very highest level of craftsmanship, the kind of quality that came at significant cost. Sameness was unusual, and “those who possessed its virtuoso effects must have actively noticed and valued them.”⁴¹ This preference is in contrast with the modern sensibility that values unique objects as examples of creative genius and rarity. In the eighteenth-century, it was in fact rarer to own a perfectly matched set of furniture, porcelains or fabrics than to possess a single, outstanding object.

The aesthetic and social implications of seriality are considerable, and would not have been overlooked by a woman seeking to mold her own image. The *mobilier* in Mme. de Pompadour’s apartment at Versailles would have been quickly recognized as the dominant design feature. Such a profusion of the same silk fabric would have created a visually coherent backdrop against which the *marquise* and her guests could enact their routines of ritualized social interaction. These interactions were fraught with meaning, particularly in the case of Mme. de Pompadour.⁴² Matching *mobilier*s of such high quality generally signaled a need for formality and would have conveyed to visitors that

⁴¹ Hellman, “The Joy of Sets,” 140.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 142-145.

Mme. de Pompadour was a woman of the highest standing, who was owed every courtesy and respect.

The arrangement of furniture was also important to the creation of a formal atmosphere, and it is here that Mme. de Pompadour deviated from the norm. The furniture in her apartments at Versailles is clustered into smaller, more intimate groups, rather than the symmetrical arrangements that denoted a more hierarchical ambience (See Figure 6). Traditional furniture organization stipulated that furniture was arranged around the perimeter of the room, highlighting the regularity of the architecture and re-emphasizing the sameness of the objects. Because Mme. de Pompadour did not adhere to this rule, her interiors conveyed a more nuanced message to her guests than was typical. For Mme. de Pompadour, “the choice of rooms and the arrangement of the objects helped to define the relative formality or intimacy of an encounter before a single word was exchanged.”⁴³ As mistress of the king, she required both formality and intimacy in her encounters with the courtiers of Versailles.

Mme. de Pompadour had complicated specifications for the decor of her upper apartments at the king’s palace. On the vast social stage of Versailles, interactions with courtiers were highly choreographed sequences that either reinforced social norms or strategically transgressed them. Her position at court, while relatively secure, remained ambiguous and existed outside of the accepted social hierarchy. However, this informality remained part of the attraction for her lover, Louis XV. It was therefore necessary for her to assert her social legitimacy through the furnishing and layout of her suite, without compromising the aura of intimacy and privacy that the king valued. Her aesthetic decisions represent a series of compromises that were made to accommodate her

⁴³ Ibid., 145.

conflicting requirements. The floor-plan of her suite established an informal, intimate space for her and her guests. Her lighting and the associated decorative objects fostered an atmosphere of discretion that served to distinguish infrequent guests from her favorites, and the matching furniture of her apartments was at once inviting and intimidating to those present.

This mix of formal and informal elements lent Mme. de Pompadour's rooms a certain flexibility in atmosphere, allowing her to shape the social interactions within them according to her own needs and desires. This flexibility allowed her to present a private image of herself with the king and her personal guests, while maintaining a public image that was appropriately formal. At a court that revolved around constant competition for the favor of the monarch, "even subtle movements became assertions of honor, privilege or intimacy."⁴⁴ She was fully in possession of these privileges, and her décor allowed her to convey that to her guests as well as to assess the degree to which her guests shared them. Mme. de Pompadour grasped the importance of interiors and their decor in shaping an effective persona at Versailles that firmly established her position in the hierarchy, and sustained this position far longer than the five years she spent in her upper apartments.

⁴⁴ Gorse and Smuts, introduction, 29.

Chapter Two: A Newly Political Pompadour

Although such delicate matters are difficult to date with certainty, it is believed that the sexual relationship between Louis XV and Mme. de Pompadour ended around the year 1750. This development did not come as a surprise to the *marquise*, in fact, “she saw it as inevitable.”⁴⁵ However, her influence was undiminished and “by no longer sharing his bed, she became more than ever his companion, partner and advisor.”⁴⁶ Their changing relationship dynamics are reflected in other aspects of their lives as well, notably, the environments inhabited by Mme. de Pompadour.

Because the couple was no longer intimately involved, the traditional apartments of a royal mistress were no longer appropriate for Mme. de Pompadour. Having requested new quarters in Versailles, it was decided that she would move from her third-floor attic suite to a new apartment on the ground floor of the palace that was completely renovated for her. These new rooms, on the *étage noble*, or noble floor, were highly sought after by the king’s close family members and prominent courtiers. The king’s adult daughters, the princesses Henriette, Adélaïde, and Victoire, all objected to Mme. de Pompadour’s new apartments and had sought to obtain them for themselves. In fact, the suite had previously been occupied by the king’s cousin and his wife, the Duke and Duchess de Penthièvre, who were relocated to adjacent rooms in order to accommodate the *marquise*. This triumphant move to such a prestigious location stands in contrast to her more discreet arrival at Versailles five years previously. In 1745, Mme. de Pompadour moved

⁴⁵ Lever, *Madame de Pompadour*, 142.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

nearly invisibly through court, and her actual location within the palace was unknown for some time by members of the nobility.⁴⁷

In these new rooms, Mme. de Pompadour lived directly below the king's apartments, the *Salons de Venus, Diane and Mars*, and enjoyed views of the *Parterres du Nord*. These *Salons* were important places of business for the king and his councilors at Versailles.⁴⁸ While Mme. de Pompadour never enjoyed a formal position of political power at court, her proximity to the seat of the throne speaks to her changing role. The prestige and elegance of her new situation reflected her continued importance both at court and to the king, which only increased after the end of their affair. Her evolution from mistress to political player had begun. Maintaining her position as *maitresse-en-titre* and her presence at court was crucial to her future role, which was in fact an extension and expansion of her previous relationship with the king. Her influence was to reach its apogee in this period, while she lived in her ground-floor apartments.

Mme. de Pompadour took as her role model Mme. de Maintenon, the mistress and clandestine wife of Louis XIV. This earlier woman made herself so indispensable to the Sun King romantically, politically, and religiously, that he married her in secret before his death. Although Mme. de Maintenon's low-ranking birth precluded her from being crowned queen, or even formally acknowledged as his wife, she exerted a marked influence on the political direction of the realm during her tenure at Versailles. While she was not responsible for shaping entire policies, Mme. de Maintenon used her favored position to bestow political patronage on her friends and relatives, and she often reviewed

⁴⁷ Katie Scott, "Framing Ambition: The Interior Politics of Mme. de Pompadour," *Art History* 28, no. 2, (2005): 257.

⁴⁸ Danielle Gallet, "Madame de Pompadour et l'appartement d'en bas au château de Versailles," » *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 118, (1991) : 131.

royal business with the king's ministers before it was presented to the king himself. Like Mme. de Pompadour, she occupied no official political position at court, but her influence was palpable and wide-reaching.⁴⁹ The parallels between the career of Mme. de Maintenon and that of Mme. de Pompadour are clear. Both women rose from relatively low status to some of the highest positions at court and it is little wonder that Mme. de Pompadour sought to emulate the success of her predecessor. While it was obvious, given the longevity of Queen Marie Leszczyńska, that she was unlikely to ever become the wife of Louis XV, the role she filled was strikingly similar to that of Mme. de Maintenon. Both women served as unofficial power brokers at Versailles, their access to the monarch representing the source of their influence.

As their romantic relationship waned, it was necessary for Mme. de Pompadour to establish a new niche for herself in the affections of the king. She accomplished this feat by making herself indispensable to him in all other facets of his life at court. It is true that "Pompadour initially became the king's lover thanks to her exceptional beauty, [...] the friendship far outlasted the physical relationship."⁵⁰ Although their affair was over, Louis XV could never bring himself to part with the woman who was his closest friend and advisor. Instead, he installed her in new apartments on the ground floor of Versailles, where he continued to visit her daily. Their private dinner parties and entertainments were uninterrupted by their changed relationship, and Mme. de Pompadour enjoyed greater status and power than ever before.

Perhaps as an insurance policy against future rivals, Mme. de Pompadour installed the Duke and Duchess of Ayen in her vacated attic apartment. Because the suite was

⁴⁹ Hyde, *Making up the Rococo*, 130.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

traditionally reserved for the mistress of the king, their occupation of those rooms effectively put an end to that convention. While the king openly visited the *Parc aux Cerfs* and had minor relationships with several women there, Mme. de Pompadour remained his official mistress until her death in 1764. She therefore never had to see a rival installed in her former quarters.⁵¹

Before Mme. de Pompadour could occupy her new apartments, it was necessary for them to be completely renovated. Several sets of blueprints exist from the time of the renovations, with the final set dated March 11, 1750. The layout consisted of two antechambers, a *grand cabinet*, a bed chamber, a smaller *cabinet particulier*, as well as bathrooms, closets and accommodations for her close servants and personal doctor (See Figure 7). Unlike her former apartments, Mme. de Pompadour likely had a direct influence on the architectural changes made to the suite, and was almost certainly personally responsible for its decoration and furnishing. Her power had grown since her arrival at court in 1745, and she had already established a reputation as a patron of the arts and influential trend-setter. She also enjoyed the use of a private, semi-circular staircase to the king's quarters as well as a mechanical chair that functioned as a sort of proto-elevator. While this chair was sometimes held up by the populace as an example of the excesses of the court and Mme. de Pompadour in particular, it was not installed under her direction and was in fact left over from the apartment's previous occupants.⁵²

These lower apartments differ noticeably from the upper apartments she previously occupied. *Enfilade* is employed to a greater degree; the *cabinets*, antechambers and bedroom are all in alignment. Only the bathrooms and closets are excluded from the

⁵¹ Gallet, "Madame de Pompadour," 131.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 131-134.

formal scheme. Because Mme. de Pompadour and the king were no longer on such physically intimate terms, she required less physical privacy than she had in the past, and the layout of her suite reflects this change. Mme. de Pompadour's role at court was transforming in profound ways and her lower apartment accommodated her changing needs. Between the year 1750 and her death in 1764, the *marquise* would play a far more public role at court. Her rooms on the ground floor of Versailles have a public quality that served to enhance her new responsibilities and functions. The simple fact of their location, in the body of the palace and on the ground floor, indicates these new priorities. Instead of being sequestered above the palace proper in her attic suite, Mme. de Pompadour staked a claim to a prominent apartment in a prestigious and public area of Versailles.

Although the rooms are no longer extant, there are numerous records that indicate the kind of atmosphere that prevailed here. Her suite featured Doric columns dating to the period of Louis XIV, as well as nine windows with views of the *parterres de nord*. The three major rooms; the second antechamber, the *grand cabinet* and the bedchamber, occupy the entire height of the ground floor. These rooms were the most public area of the suite, making the grandeur of their great height appropriate. For their decoration, the king commissioned the very best artisans and artists. The carpentry and paneling were done by Guesnon and Verberckt, the painting by Martin, the marble by Trouard and the mirrors were installed by Chaufour and Dumont. All of these works were paid for by the Crown. While the architect, Ange-Jacques Gabriel, desired to have everything accomplished within a matter of months, this was not possible due to the fact that the teams of artisans hired were already engaged in the construction of Bellevue, a private

residence of Mme. de Pompadour and another gift from the king. Nevertheless, the plaster work and gilding continued in the lower apartment, as did the installation of multiple new fireplaces, plumbing, and heating elements. The rest of the apartment was arranged in duplex, with rooms for her private physician and female servants located above the smaller first antechamber and the *cabinet particulier*.⁵³

Although the wood-paneling in the lower apartments was lost in later renovations to the palace, there are examples of Jacques Verberckt's work in the private bedchamber and adjoining interior *cabinet* of Louis XV, installed after the year 1738.⁵⁴ Verberckt (1704-71) was a Flemish carver, closely associated with the architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel, who worked with him extensively, both for the crown and for Mme. de Pompadour's private projects. He usually carved from designs drafted by Gabriel, although he also enjoyed a fair amount of creative license.⁵⁵ The work in the king's private room, one that attached to those of Mme. de Pompadour via a private staircase, functions as a good example of the quality of paneling that would have existed in her own space (See Figure 8).

In terms of style, these panels fall solidly within the purview of Rococo, while hinting at more subdued neo-classicism that would later develop. Defined generally, Rococo originated in eighteenth-century France and is "characterized by lightness, elegance, and an exuberant use of curving, natural forms in ornamentation."⁵⁶ Featuring a delicate color palette of pastels, ivories and gold, it developed in reaction to the heaviness of Louis

⁵³ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁴ "The King's Interior Apartments," Chateau de Versailles, accessed January 30, 2012, <http://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover-estate/the-palace/the-palace/the-kings-interior-apartments>.

⁵⁵ Pierre Verlet, *French Furniture and Interior Decoration on the 18th Century*, trans. George Savage, (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1967), 37.

⁵⁶ "Rococo Style," The Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed February 3, 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/506448/Rococo-style>.

XIV's aesthetic preference for Baroque art and decoration. Rococo was associated with intimacy and romance, making use of "delicate interlacings of curves and countercurves" on the walls, ceilings and moldings of homes and palaces.⁵⁷ Shell forms were especially favored in these asymmetrical designs, a fact that does not surprise given that Rococo derives from the French word *rocaille*, which indicated the shell-covered stone-work that decorated artificial grottos of the period.

The king's private bedchamber and interior *cabinet*, facing south towards the marble courtyard, represent some of the most prestigious commissions ever enjoyed by Verberckt. The walls and ceiling of the spaces are entirely covered in ivory-white and gold paneling. The frames of the panels are curved, emphasizing the sinuous nature of the designs of shells, leaves, and garlands of flowers. Although the panels present an image of a stylistically unified space, each one is unique, according to the asymmetries required by Rococo. The central medallions are decorated with trophies and vignettes of children playing. Overall, the atmosphere created by these wood panels is one of playful informality. Verberckt has avoided the inclusion of heavy-handed references to the royal iconography, and instead created a suite of rooms that are airy and bright. The significant amount of gilding suggests the prestige of the spaces, and large mirrors, objects of exceptional cost in this era, create the illusion of even greater importance and expansiveness.

The very earliest date for the creation of these rooms, and the wood paneling that lines them, is 1738, when construction began. Within twelve years, Verberckt and Gabriel would be brought back to Versailles to begin work on the lower apartments of Mme. de Pompadour. These favored artisans had evidently completed their earlier work

⁵⁷ Ibid.

to the satisfaction of the king, and the quality of their carving was seen as appropriate for the prestige required by Mme. de Pompadour in her new space.

There are several reasons why it is particularly difficult to identify and attribute the furnishings and decoration of Mme. de Pompadour's lower apartments. After her death in 1764, notaries created an extensive inventory of her possessions, combing through her private residences and meticulously cataloging every object. However, this process did not extend to her royal apartments. The possessions she kept in these rooms were therefore absorbed by the state after her death. The issue of ownership and the provenance of objects is further complicated by the fact the Mme. de Pompadour, described as "eternally unsatisfied" in matters of design, continuously shuffled her furniture between her many houses.⁵⁸ Thus, the furniture originally installed in the lower apartments in 1751 was likely very different from the objects there at her death in 1764. Over the course of her thirteen-year residency on the ground floor, Mme. de Pompadour would have made an uncountable number of changes in décor. Nevertheless, her style remains highly distinctive, and one can easily identify objects that are *à la Pompadour*, or in the style of Pompadour. When it is not possible to confidently attribute works to her personal collection, these objects will more than suffice.

As Mme. de Pompadour's position at court changed from that of lover to that of confidante and advisor to the king, she developed new environments in which to enact different social performances. Of these, the *toilette* bears special mention for its role in her political activities. Mme. de Pompadour did not hold any official political positions at court, but her influence in policy and appointments was subtly pervasive and undeniable. In fact, she was regarded by her contemporaries as "Prime Minister without

⁵⁸ Gallet, "Madame de Pompadour," 137.

the title,” and a woman to be treated with consideration and respect, at least in her presence.⁵⁹ During the parliamentary crisis of 1753, in which the French parliament openly denounced the relationship between the clergy and the monarchy and criticized the king for his clerical support, Mme. de Pompadour urged him to remain firm. Louis XV was “completely free in expressing his thoughts in front of [her]” and her support was widely considered a crucial factor in his decision to exile the troublesome parliamentarians.⁶⁰ Although her role in the matter was informal, she gained a new respect at Versailles due to her perceived influence on the king. According to the Duke de Croÿ, everything, not just “important matters, but even details, [was] cleared with her.”⁶¹ Her morning *toilette* routine played a role in her exercise of royal influence, having evolved away from a simple display of luxury and taste towards an important and informal channel for court business and political dealings.

The furniture and accessories involved in the personal morning rituals were important components of a woman’s *toilette*. Like set pieces in the theater, these objects functioned as props in the elaborate construction of identity and power that was being played out in the boudoir of the *marquise*. As a former actress, she certainly would have understood the value of these pieces’ theatricality. A nineteen-piece silver *service de toilette* by Antoine LeBrun and likely commissioned by Jaime de Mello, the third Duke of Cadaval between 1738 and 39, represents the kind of *toilette* set that Mme. de Pompadour would have owned and used (See Figure 9). While a more typical set would have been made of painted, varnished or gilded wood, elite men and women ordered them in richer materials such as gold, silver and vermeil. Unfortunately, “only five French-made eighteenth-

⁵⁹ Lever, *Madame de Pompadour*, 164.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

century silver toilette sets have survived intact;” the majority of these sets, including at least one belonging to Mme. de Pompadour, were melted down during the Seven Year’s War to raise much-needed funds.⁶² Nevertheless, this example of a complete *toilette* set is indicative of the heights to which the morning ritual of applying make-up and dressing one’s hair was elevated. The range of small boxes and containers for holding powders, pomades, cosmetics, and beauty patches as well as jewelry, small accessories and tools of application is evident in the large ensemble. The mirror, weighing over 24 pounds would have been the centerpiece, and the *service* is completed by a matching set of candlesticks and boar’s hair brushes.

The Cadaval *toilette* is obviously a set, with matching engravings featuring shells, foliage and decorative scroll edges. Furthermore, nearly every piece is embossed or engraved with the Cadaval coat of arms. It is easy to imagine Mme. de Pompadour using such a set, hers, of course, displaying the Pompadour crest, which the *marquise* acquired when she received her titles from the king in 1745. The daily use of such delicate and costly objects was a social performance, demonstrating her mastery of both the often difficult to operate items, and the social situation. A woman at her *toilette* may have given the appearance of nonchalance, but every movement was in fact carefully calibrated, serving to enhance the sitter’s social goals. In the case of Mme. de Pompadour, these goals involved the “various patterns of allegiance, obligation and power,” patterns that she depended on to maintain her position at court.⁶³

⁶²Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, “Dressing to Impress: The Morning Toilette and the Fabrication of Femininity,” in *Paris: Life and Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Charissa Bremer-David (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum Getty Publications, 2011), 56.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 71.

While attending the *toilettes* of fashionable women was a highly sought after social privilege, an invitation to that of the *marquise* could signal more than mere favoritism because “Pompadour’s toilette became celebrated for the amount of business that the *marquise* transacted at it.”⁶⁴ Staged in her bed chamber or *cabinet particulier*, her *toilette* created an informal environment in which to conduct clandestine business and entertain her associates. With a rotating cast including figures such as the Abbé de Bernis, Voltaire, Diderot, and Duclos, Mme. de Pompadour engaged in cultural and political dialogue with some of the most noted intellectuals of the day, all outside formally sanctioned court channels.⁶⁵ Her *toilette* was also an opportunity for her to bestow favors on hopeful courtiers. Frenzied attendance at her morning ritual was a “material manifestation” of her prestige, and an acknowledgement of her power.⁶⁶ Mme. de Pompadour appropriated an established social ritual and the objects associated with it for her own ends, manipulating both the objects and the ritual with the kind of social mastery she was known for.

Another facet of Mme. de Pompadour’s political intrigues involved her extensive letter writing. The *marquise* was known for her skill in personal correspondence, and she lived in an age where written expression was evolving away from dictation to a secretary to the personal use of a *secrétaire*. A *secrétaire* is a desk, one used for both writing and the storage of writing materials, letters, and personal effects. It is very different from the other primary category of eighteenth-century desk, the *bureau*, which consisted of a large and exposed writing surface with visible drawers (See Figure 10). The *bureau* was seen

⁶⁴ Ibid., 71.

⁶⁵ Elise Goodman-Soellner, “Madame de Pompadour at Her Toilette,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 17, no. 1 (1987): 49.

⁶⁶ Hyde, *Making up the Rococo*, 109.

as a place to transact business, the kind of business one can accomplish in the open.⁶⁷ Conversely, in a *secrétaire*, “the writing surface, drawers, and other storage spaces were all hidden inside the desk, often secured by a lock.”⁶⁸ This aspect of concealment, of hidden-ness, is an important one when discussing desks and their political and personal uses. Because a *secrétaire* did not proclaim itself as a desk to visitors, “the owner of a *secrétaire* could choose to share as much or as little of what went on in it” as they wished.⁶⁹ In the case of Mme. de Pompadour, we might assume that not much was shared with her visitors of the contents of her workspace.

Secrecy and security were therefore inextricably tied into eighteenth-century thinking about *secrétaires* and their uses. Denis Diderot recounted a story from the same period to his lover, Sophie, that his colleague Montesquieu feared for the security of his *secrétaire*. According to Diderot, when Montesquieu believed that his activities were being monitored, “his first movement was to run quickly to his *secrétaire*, take out all the papers, and throw them in the fire.”⁷⁰ His *secrétaire* was therefore the place where he kept his most compromising documents, a common practice among even the casual writer.

Seen in Figure 11, this fall-front desk, or *secrétaire à abattant*, by Bernard Vanrisamburgh was created between the years 1755 and 1760. The tulip-wood piece was one of a series of *secrétaires* created by Vanrisamburgh during that period. Although Mme. de Pompadour did not personally own this desk, she was known to have patronized Vanrisamburgh repeatedly, commissioning pieces by him for her many independently

⁶⁷ Dena Goodman, “The *Secrétaire* and the Integration of the Eighteenth-Century Self,” in *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg, (New York: Routledge, 2007) 188.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 186.

owned homes. Louis XV was also a patron of the popular furniture-maker, and is believed to have owned *secrétaires* of this type, also by Vanrisamburgh. The piece features floral marquetry in kingwood, in addition to the gilded bronze accents that frame the panels. Both the inlaid floral and the bronze patterns are curvingly asymmetrical. The base consists of two doors that close by key, and the folding front also requires a key to access. The writing surface of green velvet is visible only when the *secrétaire* is open, as are the five drawers and some additional shelving. It was not uncommon for there to be even more hidden depths to a piece of furniture such as this; with drawers accessible only by the manipulation of a concealed button or decorative element. *Secrétaires* could then serve as safes, storing precious jewelry as well as sensitive documents and private letters.

There is only space for one person to be seated at this *secrétaire*, unlike the larger *bureaus* that could often accommodate a person on either side. The high back of the piece prevents bystanders from seeing what is written, and frames the writer seated before it. Unlike a working desk, “the *secrétaire* was personal furniture...and was often found in the same personal spaces as dressing tables, jewel cases and worktables.”⁷¹ It was therefore not a part of Mme. de Pompadour’s social performances; rather, it was a space for her to engage in private correspondence of both a political and personal nature. The *secrétaire* represented a private space in a very public court, and it was occasionally privacy that Mme. de Pompadour required to successfully carry out her political intrigues.

Mme. de Pompadour continued to reign at Versailles long after her romantic relationship with Louis XV had faded into memory. No longer his lover, her role at court and the environments she created had to evolve to accommodate her changed needs as the

⁷¹ Ibid., 191.

trusted friend and advisor to the monarch. Her move downstairs in 1750, to the *étage noble* of Versailles was one of triumph, not defeat or resignation. Her new location embodied the contemporary opinion that Mme. de Pompadour controlled access, both literal and figurative, to the king. These “politics of the door” meant that it was necessary to be admitted to the rooms of Mme. de Pompadour if one had a favor to ask of the king.⁷² Like many courtiers, the ambitious and nobly born Emmanuel, Duke de Cröy, understood the dynamics of the court during Mme. de Pompadour’s lifetime, and paid meticulous attention to the symbolic and literal thresholds controlled by the *marquise*. During his campaign to receive the governorship of Condé, he described his rising optimism as he was admitted by Mme. de Pompadour into her “rear, red lacquered *cabinet*,” after traversing a series of ever more selective doorways.⁷³ This conflation of women and doorways was an apt one, because at the time, “women/doors were the power of communication between men – an informal, illegitimate means to a public authority.”⁷⁴ This was the role of Mme. de Pompadour at Versailles, that of power broker and conduit to the crown. Her position was embodied through the physical architecture she inhabited, as well as her use of *toilette sets* and *secrétaires*, which represent her newly political interests and influence.

⁷² Scott, “Framing Ambition,” 260.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Chapter Three: Beyond the Walls of Versailles

In addition to her apartments in the palace of Versailles, Mme. de Pompadour was a prominent landholder in her own right. As the newly ennobled *marquise de Pompadour*, she was technically the owner of the Pompadour estate in the Limousin province of France, to the south-west of Paris, although she would never visit it.⁷⁵ However, one can see that this acquisition did not satisfy her passion for architecture and décor because “between 1746 and her death Pompadour bought, built or leased a total of fifteen properties.”⁷⁶ These properties included hermitages, country houses and a few town houses and châteaux. Mme. de Pompadour played a significant role in the design of several of these homes, often collaborating with Louis XV and his royal architects in the planning stages, and remaining involved throughout construction. Three of these properties have special significance in the life of Mme. de Pompadour and in the context of her relationship with the king. The construction of the hermitage at Versailles, the château at Bellevue, and the Petit Trianon reflect both the king’s depth of feeling towards his long-term mistress and her own desire to “establish an independently powerful identity” in the social hierarchy of France.⁷⁷

It is important to note that Mme. de Pompadour’s architectural program began in earnest around the time that her romantic relationship with the king was being replaced with a platonic, though deeply felt, friendship. Architecture and interior design were therefore more than hobbies for the *marquise*, indeed, “as with her other forms of art and architectural patronage, Pompadour used these sites to shape her identity and consolidate

⁷⁵ Lever, *Madame de Pompadour*, 42.

⁷⁶ Scott, “Framing Ambition,” 263.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

her position at court, as well as to entertain the king and strengthen their relationship.”⁷⁸

Architecture was a particularly powerful form of patronage, because it “organizes almost all aspects of life through the body, while that organization, in spite of its radicality, is rarely subject to the degree of conscious awareness to which even the least unsettling painting is exposed.”⁷⁹ Mme. de Pompadour had therefore found an ideal medium through which she could enact her program of social advancement. Her history of using the arts, both fine and decorative, to construct environments that supported her position at court indicates a deep understanding on her part of the power of artistic patronage. It is not a stretch then to say that Mme. de Pompadour was in a position to take advantage of the fact that “space does not simply map existing social relations, but helps to construct them.”⁸⁰ She intended to construct and shape social relations to suit her own needs, and solidify her place at court.

Immediately following the end of her sexual relationship with the king, it became important for Mme. de Pompadour to establish an alternative definition for the role of royal mistress. While hermitages had an erotic association, and a history of use for clandestine assignations, they also served as sites of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual pleasure. Louis XV was famous for having entertained several of his previous mistresses, including the *comtesse* de Mailly and her two sisters, at his own hermitage at Versailles known as La Muette. However, Mme. de Pompadour’s small and private homes, usually constructed in an idyllically rustic style, became the setting for her artistic and intellectual

⁷⁸ Meredith Martin, *Dairy Queens: The Politics of Pastoral Architecture from Catherine de’ Medici to Marie Antoinette* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 117.

⁷⁹ Helen Hills, “Theorizing the Relationships between Architecture and Gender in Early Modern Europe,” in *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Helen Hills. (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 6.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

interests. Her bond with Louis XV was primarily expressed through “art and architectural projects that had a symbolic resonance for them both.”⁸¹ This shared passion for pastoral architecture and what it represented: privacy, health, and recreation, would bring the couple together in ways more enduring than had previously been common between the king and his mistresses.

Although Mme. de Pompadour maintained a prestigious apartment in the body of the palace of Versailles, she spent much of her time in her hermitage, designed by her personal architect, Jean Lassurance and finished in November, 1749. This property, erected on royal land at Versailles that had been given to her by the king, represented an attempt to “establish strong roots in the royal landscape and convey her authority as *maitresse-en-titre*.”⁸² Mme. de Pompadour was certainly a figure of authority regarding the design of the retreat; her approval was needed on every aspect of the project before the order “*bon à exécuter*” could be given.⁸³ The house does not survive in its entirety, but the main pavilion is still extant, albeit in altered form. This building was originally of a single story, with dining and living rooms, a kitchen, bedroom and library (See Figure 12). The façade is simple and unadorned, described by the *maréchal* de Richelieu as a “farmer’s house” that “wasn’t much to look at.”⁸⁴ The interior décor elicited more praise from the *maréchal* however, for being both “exquisitely simple” and “noble” in its design.⁸⁵ The initial reaction of disappointment concerning the building’s stature likely stemmed from the building type itself, the hermitage. A hermitage was, by definition, a modest retreat from society in the countryside, traditionally for religious devotees. Of

⁸¹ Martin, *Dairy Queens*, 122.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

course, Mme. de Pompadour could not literally retire from the court, but her architectural program at this first hermitage suggests a desire for privacy and self-improvement that is at odds with her persona as the larger-than-life mistress of Louis XV. The plain exterior of her hermitage at Versailles indicates the seriousness of her attempt to position herself within a rusticated mode. The site also included “expansive gardens and [a] small menagerie near the entrance that contained a cow stable and a dairy.”⁸⁶ These out-buildings lent a note of fantasy to the otherwise austere architecture of the site. Mme. de Pompadour and her friends could envision themselves as simple residents of the countryside, engaged in the picturesque tasks associated with their rustic surroundings.

During the eighteenth-century, and especially in France, the idea of a hermitage had particular resonance for elite women. Pastoral architecture and play-acting of this kind was believed to have moral, spiritual, and physical benefits. Mme. de Pompadour was known to have struggled with chronically poor health, and also suffered attacks against her moral character. The two were often related in the eyes of her critics, whose opinions were summarized by the royal biographer Jean-Louis Soulavie, writing, “What decrepitude! What degeneration! Although she regularly attempt[ed] to bury herself under a coat of *blanc* and rouge, her vivacity [was] only a mask.”⁸⁷ However, Mme. de Pompadour and her friends were early practitioners of Enlightenment medical principles. These included retreat to the countryside, fresh air and sunshine, light exercise, and wholesome eating habits. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theories about the benefits of retreat were also influential; he emphasized the countryside as a place of “‘natural’ virtue” as

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 120.

well as healthy living.⁸⁸ However, like Mme. de Pompadour's hermitage at Versailles, the country homes of other high-ranking women were rarely located in the remote countryside. Instead, they were constructed just outside major urban centers and were surrounded by extensive gardens. Their patrons could therefore enjoy the restful benefits of rural life without the inconvenience or time-commitment of travel.

By retiring to her hermitage, Mme. de Pompadour had the opportunity to "avoid, at least temporarily, the pressures of court life and to profess a desire for a simpler and more virtuous form of existence, closer to the land like the *ancien* nobility she emulated."⁸⁹ Because the *marquise* was no longer physically intimate with the king, she could now make a plausible claim to virtue. She even went so far as to make a religious confession, acknowledging her adulterous relationship with the king, and making a symbolic attempt to reconcile with her husband, Charles-Guillaume Lenormant d'Etiolles. Conveniently, he had no desire to accept her back into his life, so she remained at Versailles with the king as his friend and companion.⁹⁰ These gestures represent part of Mme. de Pompadour's social program, a systematic re-framing of her image at court. The significant amount of time she spent at her hermitage served to underscore her self-promotion as an enlightened woman of honor, who valued her home in the "countryside" of the palace grounds for its physical and moral benefits.

Another country home of Mme. de Pompadour, constructed just after her Versailles hermitage, is the château at Bellevue. Louis XV acquired the property on which it is situated during the summer of 1748, as the hermitage was being built. Within the year, he had given the site at Meudon, located between Versailles and Paris, to Mme.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 118.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 117.

⁹⁰ Hooper-Hamersley, *The Hunt after Jeanne-Antoinette de Pompadour*, 313.

de Pompadour. Jean Lassurance, designer of the hermitage, was then commissioned to build a pavilion, and in 1751, Bellevue was completed. The small château's name referenced its magnificent view of the Seine, which the property overlooked to the east.⁹¹

The home created by Lassurance bore many similarities to his previous work for Mme. de Pompadour. In fact, it “substantially repeated, except on a larger scale, the design of the earlier hermitage” (See Figure 13).⁹² This new, two-story construction featured nine bays to the front and six to the sides, while her Versailles hermitage had five. The tripartite division of the façade was also enlarged proportionally from that of the hermitage, and quietly emphasized the central pavilion which “[breaks] forward under a pediment.”⁹³ The ornamentation was restrained, with smaller pediments repeating over each of the window bays and busts of roman emperors on the ground floor. All four sides of the nearly-square building were essentially uniform in their appearance. These similarities with the hermitage are important, although not because they seem to indicate the involvement of their patroness during the design process. They are instead important because they suggest that “Bellevue was at heart a hermitage, a place where, in Pompadour’s words, ‘I am alone...or with the king and few others, and am therefore happy.’”⁹⁴

Although a château and not technically a hermitage, Bellevue served as another retreat from the demands of court. It was acknowledged to be small, but this quality emphasized its “happy isolation, security and intimacy.”⁹⁵ Conventionally, the size of a home was considered to be directly correlated to the status of its owner. In the case of

⁹¹ Scott, “Framing Ambition,” 264.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Bellevue though, there seems to have been a deliberate attempt on the part of the architect and his patroness to create a home that “stood in determined contrast to the ‘grands châteaux’ and ‘grands voyages’ that constituted the permanent existence of the court.”⁹⁶ Bellevue was conceived of as a place of comfort and privacy, expressive of the values Mme. de Pompadour wished to promote as part of her essential character. Frequently lambasted in the press for her luxurious lifestyle, the *marquise* consciously chose to build a home in a style that put function and comfort ahead of beauty or excess, at least architecturally. A château in the style of a hermitage implied that its owner was more interested in the conveniences of enlightened living than the rigidly codified architecture and décor of the French elite.

However, the Bellevue château does not completely sacrifice the needs of a more formal house or palace. It was still a place where Mme. de Pompadour invited larger groups of guests to banquets and entertainments, and the king was known to visit her there. In fact, “inside Bellevue the conflicting demands of hermitage and palace were manifest in the distribution of ceremonial, social and private spaces.”⁹⁷ In order to accommodate the staff required by Mme. de Pompadour’s social engagements and lifestyle, two smaller structures, in the same style, were constructed to create a west-facing courtyard. These pavilions housed her guards and servants. Because the eastern side of the house faced the Seine, visitors arrived from the west and were initially received in the courtyard created by the auxiliary buildings. This configuration, somewhat predictably, made the vestibule the first room encountered by a guest (See Figure 14). The guard rooms and the antechamber, which usually served as the beginning

⁹⁶ Ibid., 265.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

of a ceremonial tour of a grand château or palace, are shunted to the side and isolated from the other rooms. It is the social rooms that take precedence, including the salon, gallery, music room and dining room. These rooms were used for the private, yet elaborate entertainments she held for the king and their favorites.

Intriguingly, the *cabinets* that played such an important social and political role in her lower apartments at Versailles are nearly absent at Bellevue. Located in the northwest corner of the home, they were arranged on the mezzanine level and were not readily accessible to guests. Instead of serving as places of reception, they could only be reached from the bedchamber of the *marquise*. These rooms were “smaller, beyond the bedchamber, and dedicated [...] to the promotion of the mistress’s physical well-being.”⁹⁸ In short, these were not the kind of *cabinets* in which to conduct an elaborately structured toilette for matters of personal and political business. They were instead places of comfort, designed to offer Mme. de Pompadour all of the conveniences and amenities available. The second floor of Bellevue was reserved for the king’s private suite of rooms. As at Versailles, their bedrooms were above one another, and connected by an interior stairway to protect their privacy. The king was known to spend the night with the *marquise* at the château, with only a few favored friends and courtiers.⁹⁹

The king’s physical presence played a role that was integral to the purpose of Bellevue. While its location within a large garden may have framed the home as a hermitage, it was primarily a space for social entertaining. The king’s enjoyment of these events was crucial to the success of the project and the good spirits of Mme. de Pompadour. After a disappointing inaugural dinner, at which “Louis XV’s obvious

⁹⁸ Ibid., 266.

⁹⁹ Lever, *Madame de Pompadour*, 139.

boredom deeply distressed the *marquise*,” Mme. de Pompadour was able to host a series of successful dinners and theatrical performances.¹⁰⁰ A small theater had been constructed at Bellevue where she could continue her private theater company of friends and courtiers. The king, wishing to save money, had put an end to her performances at court. Bellevue, at its core, was intended to be a place of recreation for Mme. de Pompadour and Louis XV. Mme. de Pompadour built her relationship with the king on her ability to stave off the *ennui* for which he was notorious. Bellevue was a manifestation of her need to invent novelties with which to captivate and entertain the king, in an environment that fostered a relaxation of the strict etiquette of the court. Having seen to every detail of the decoration herself, Mme. de Pompadour created an interior full of enchantingly exotic furniture and accessories, each designed to captivate and seduce the senses of the king, and strengthen their bond.¹⁰¹

In 1762, Louis XV began work on another residence for Mme. de Pompadour, situated in the park of the château of Versailles, and adjacent to the gardens of the Grand Trianon. This project was to be the Petit Trianon, designed by Ange-Jacques Gabriel and not completed until 1768, four years after Mme. de Pompadour’s death (See Figure 15). Despite the fact the Mme. de Pompadour never occupied the Petit Trianon, its construction remains significant to understanding her position as an independent property owner as well as mistress to the king. Like the earlier properties discussed, the Petit Trianon was a royal gift. It was used by Louis XV’s subsequent mistress, Mme. du Barry, and was eventually given to Queen Marie Antoinette by her husband, King Louis XVI.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 141.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 139.

¹⁰² James A. Arnott and John Wilson, *The Petit Trianon Versailles* (New York: William Helburn, Inc., 1929), 2.

Although the Petit Trianon is most strongly associated with Marie Antoinette, it is important to bear in mind that it was not designed for her. The essential architecture of the building was intended to accommodate the needs of Mme. de Pompadour, needs that were physical as well as ideological.

The small and nearly square building, consisting of three floors, is extremely simple in design. Rather than using excessive ornamentation or architectural flourishes, it “depends almost entirely for effect on its good proportions and refinement of detail.”¹⁰³ At the time of its construction, Greek architectural principles were coming back into vogue in France. The Petit Trianon represents a break from the Rococo style, and the beginning of the neoclassicism that would go on to dominate the reign of Louis XVI. Although the hermitage and château at Bellevue both demonstrate neoclassical tendencies, the style is most pronounced at the Petit Trianon. Each façade is unique and intended to complement the views of the structure from each of the four cardinal directions. For example, the West façade is the most elaborate, with Corinthian columns entirely in the round (See Figure 15). Facing the French garden, it echoes the look of an ancient temple. Conversely, the simplicity of the North and East sides indicates that they were not used as entrances and constitute the “back” of the building (See Figures 16 and 17). At the time of construction, these two fronts faced the greenhouses of Louis XV’s botanical gardens, a fact that explains their plainness. The South façade contained the entrance court, and pilasters unite the upper two floors, lending an air of dignity to the reception area (See Figure 18). Approaching the Petit Trianon from the west, through the French formal gardens, was the most scenic route, though the southern approach was more practical because it could accommodate carriages and other vehicles. The exterior

¹⁰³ Ibid., 4.

of the building is constructed in a creamy limestone, and the unevenness of the site is managed by the discreet use of steps and clever positioning of the multiple floors.

The ground floor of the Petit Trianon consists of more utilitarian spaces, including the kitchen, guardroom and offices, although it also contains the billiards room.

Interestingly, the little house makes very few accommodations for the presence of servants; in fact it outwardly seeks to minimize interactions with the staff that was necessary to comfortably run the home (See Figure 19). To that end, the dining room table, located on the second floor, was originally conceived of as mobile – to be lowered and raised mechanically through the floor of the dining room to a service room below. Although this apparatus was never built, lines delineating its placement are still visible on the floorboards of the dining room. The second floor of the house was conceived of as the place of reception and includes the aforementioned dining room, an anteroom, two salons, and the boudoir, dressing room, and bedroom intended for Mme. de Pompadour and used by Marie Antoinette (See Figure 20). The third floor attic space was a suite designed for Louis XV and the necessary members of his entourage.¹⁰⁴ However, the antechamber, *cabinet* and bedchamber were never used by either Louis XV or Louis XVI (See Figure 21). The rest of the level consists of guest accommodations and closet spaces. The oak wood paneling that runs throughout most of the home cannot be evaluated in terms of Mme. de Pompadour's taste and style, as it was redone after Marie Antoinette acquired the property in 1774.¹⁰⁵

For a woman so strongly associated with the Rococo style, the Petit Trianon offers an intriguingly neoclassical counterpoint. Its architect, Angès-Jacques Gabriel, also

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 5.

designed the resolutely neoclassical *École Militaire*, and supervised the construction of both buildings during the same period of time (See Figure 22).¹⁰⁶ Mme. de Pompadour played an important role in the founding of this military academy for nobly-born yet impoverished boys, coordinating its funding and investing personally in the project. It was also Mme. de Pompadour who chose Gabriel as architect for the *École Militaire* complex, engaging his services in 1751. Although the school opened its doors in 1757, it was not altogether completed until 1780.¹⁰⁷ The château of the *École Militaire*, its central building, has a rhythmically classical façade, with Corinthian columns emphasizing the pediment over the central entrance. It is topped by a quadrangular dome. To further underscore the classical references, the original plans included a colonnade reminiscent of St. Peter's basilica in Rome. Although this was not built due to budget constraints, the entire complex was nevertheless intended to be a monumentally neoclassical homage to the power of Louis XV's policies.

By commissioning a private residence from the same architect who designed the *École Militaire*, Mme. de Pompadour and Louis XV were making a public statement about her role in the project. In doing so, they were also attempting to repair Mme. de Pompadour's increasingly damaged reputation. Despite her attempts to position herself, through her hermitages, as a woman of simple tastes and virtues, her name had become firmly associated with luxury and the excesses of Rococo, which were believed to have "softening, dissipating and corrupting effects."¹⁰⁸ All of her activities, but particularly her artistic patronage, were now viewed through the lens of corruption and waste, taken as evidence by the public and press that the *marquise* was out of touch with the reality of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Hooper-Hamersley, *The Hunt after Jeanne-Antoinette de Pompadour*, 82.

¹⁰⁸ Scott, "Framing Ambition," 275.

most French citizens. Bellevue may have been conceived of as a hermitage by Mme. de Pompadour, with a proto-neoclassical façade, but its interior remained resolutely Rococo, and was therefore in line with contemporary criticisms of the *marquise*. Wasteful and decadent describe the popular conception of her tastes and lifestyle, so the Petit Trianon may have been intended to function as a corrective to that. Its sober and tasteful design, enhanced by columns and pediments, recalls that of a classical temple. Its essentially rectilinear character is important; because it was “not the circular *tempietto* familiar from Boucher’s pretty pastorals and landscapes.”¹⁰⁹ By moving away from the delicately picturesque style she previously favored, Mme. de Pompadour was making a claim about the solidity and endurance of her relationship with Louis XV, as well as emphasizing the contributions she had made to the *École Militaire*. The neo-classical tone of the building was meant to demonstrate the sobriety and seriousness of Mme. de Pompadour, at a time when her reputation had suffered considerable attacks. While her previous properties may have showed neoclassical leanings, by 1762 it was necessary to make her connection to neoclassicism explicit.

The architectural patronage of Mme. de Pompadour requires serious consideration due to architecture’s ability to “suggest, indicate and even make necessary an alteration of social relations, rather than simply perpetuating an existing arrangement.”¹¹⁰ A patron had many motivations for commissioning a building, both implicit and explicit, and the same is certainly true for Mme. de Pompadour. The *marquise* circulated in an atmosphere where popular perception and reputation were of the utmost importance, and it was necessary for her to take control of her own image. As her relationship with the king

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 277.

¹¹⁰ Hills, “Theorizing the Relationships between Architecture and Gender,” 11.

evolved over her nineteen years at court, her image required frequent revisions. Her independent architectural projects were a part of that process, because “architectural space is not the container of identities, but a constitutive element in them.”¹¹¹ Her homes are not shallow reflections of her position in French society, but rather part of an active program of self-definition. The hermitage at Versailles seeks to frame the *marquise* as a woman of simple pleasures and virtues by inserting her into an idyllic, pastoral fantasy that was popular with wealthy eighteenth-century citizens. At the château at Bellevue, Mme. de Pompadour created an image of private sociability with a home that appeared modest but in fact accommodated the luxurious and comfortable entertainments she was known for. The Petit Trianon, with its restrained neoclassicism, positions its intended owner as a serious patron and benefactress by linking Mme. de Pompadour with the *École Militaire*.

¹¹¹ Louis Durning and Richard Wrigley, introduction to *Gender and Architecture* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2000), 1.

Conclusion

Mme. de Pompadour's role as patron of the fine and decorative arts has been the subject of much scholarly consideration. However, there has been considerable disagreement as to the exact nature of her role, and the influence she exerted during her nineteen years as the mistress of Louis XV. Her contemporaries credited her with "encouraging artists, interceding with the king on behalf of those she deemed worthy," while commissioning art on an enormous scale.¹¹² Her identification with the arts of her age became so absolute by the end of the eighteenth-century that the style associated with the reign of Louis XV was known as the "Style Pompadour."

This conflation of the figure of Mme. de Pompadour with the art she sponsored reflects the diverse attitudes that have been held regarding the late Rococo and early neo-classical modes. In revolutionary France, Rococo was regarded as self-indulgent in style and degenerate in content. Mme. de Pompadour had suffered from similarly moralizing attacks in her lifetime, so she "seemed the perfect counterpoint and even the cause" of an art that was so poorly regarded.¹¹³ By the nineteenth-century, these fashions regained some of their lost popularity, and the *marquise* was lauded by the Goncourt brothers as "the sponsor and queen of the Rococo."¹¹⁴ Her influence was later recognized as important in the birth of neo-classicism. Regardless of whether her guidance was viewed as a positive or negative force, Mme. de Pompadour has historically been viewed as a female patron of extraordinary importance.

More recently, it has become increasingly common to question the significance of the role that Mme. de Pompadour took in actively shaping the art of her time. Donald

¹¹² Donald Posner, "Mme. de Pompadour as Patron of the Visual Arts," *The Art Bulletin* 72 (1990): 74-75.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Posner in particular argues that the “accepted notions of the significance of Pompadour’s patronage and of her role in fostering the visual arts are vastly exaggerated, and often entirely wrong.”¹¹⁵ Posner takes the position that while Mme. de Pompadour was a patron of taste and means, she lacked the imaginative drive that distinguishes a truly inspired patron of the arts. He cites her limited formal education and demanding lifestyle at court as factors that would have limited her ability to fundamentally shape the course of art history. Posner concludes that Mme. de Pompadour possessed an interest in the fine and decorative arts but not a profound understanding of them. Her close association with prominent artists and architects is therefore not indicative of a deeply considered and influential patronage, but rather a reflection of her status as a prominent woman of the era.¹¹⁶

These two dominant academic opinions about the nature of Mme. de Pompadour’s artistic patronage appear to be constructed in dialectical opposition to each other. She has been viewed as either the creative force driving the late Rococo and early neo-classical styles of the mid eighteenth-century, or as a patron dependant on the advice of others, with no coherent artistic program or influence. These views however, represent limited modes of thinking about her involvement in the arts. Both schools of thought focus primarily on her relationship with the fine rather than decorative arts. Additionally, these perspectives encourage an either/or dichotomy that ultimately isn’t productive in evaluating the real impact of Mme. de Pompadour. It may be true that, as Posner claims, “Mme. de Pompadour was not a true, creative patron [because] she was not inspired to be

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 104.

of service to art.”¹¹⁷ However, this dismissal of her influence overlooks the extent to which the *marquise* used the decorative arts as a means to an end.

Mme. de Pompadour occupied the position of *maitresse-en-titre* at the court of Versailles for nearly twenty years. While the length of her tenure may seem to indicate stability, she was in fact often the subject of intrigues intended to oust her from her position of favor, and she frequently suffered attacks on her reputation in the popular press. Because of the precarious nature of her situation, completely dependent on the affection of the king, Mme. de Pompadour had to actively work to maintain her power at Versailles. One way she strengthened her role was through the creation of total environments that supported her social activities and legitimized her presence. The furnishings of her personal apartments, as well as the construction of private homes, demonstrate her attempts to appropriate the signifiers of nobility and establish herself within the social landscape. Her rooms functioned as stage sets, allowing Mme. de Pompadour to act out the ritualized codes of behavior that governed life at Versailles. Within the environments that she created, the *marquise* could establish herself as a woman of stature, taste, and power. Visitors to her spaces could recognize the significance of their contents, and respond appropriately to the messages encoded into them through their layouts, furnishings, and décor.

When Mme. de Pompadour arrived at Versailles in 1745, she moved into the traditional apartments of the royal mistress, in the third floor attic apartment above Louis XV's private rooms. Formerly occupied by Mme. de Châteauroux, the space had been renovated to accommodate her tastes as the new favorite of the king. It was in this suite that Mme. de Pompadour enacted a program of décor that both intimidated those who

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

could threaten her socially, while encouraging the easy intimacy and privacy that Louis XV valued in their relationship. By 1750, this relationship had evolved into platonic affection, and Mme. de Pompadour moved from her attic suite to the ground-floor apartment that she would occupy until her death at Versailles in 1764. This move coincided with a marked rise in her political involvement, and the rooms and their furnishings created an atmosphere that fostered the sort of intrigues and political maneuvering for which she would become famous. Finally, Mme. de Pompadour applied her efforts to the construction of independent residences that sought to shape the popular narratives surrounding her moral character and relationship with the king. The hermitage at Versailles, the château at Bellevue, and the Petit Trianon all reveal her social priorities and represent part of her program of self-definition.

The “Style Pompadour” is not a static approach to décor, applied uniformly to all of Mme. de Pompadour’s personal spaces. Instead, it was a flexible mode of furnishing and architecture that allowed Mme. de Pompadour to shape her environments in order to reflect her needs. The careful curation of interior spaces enabled the *marquise* to frame her own identity and covertly promote her social agenda. By controlling her physical space, Mme. de Pompadour was able to manage how visitors interacted with her. This control lent stability to her position and also accommodated her changing role at court. Her personal apartments and residences functioned as both the agents of change, and reflections of these changes. During a period of history when women were often unable to direct the course of their own lives, Mme. de Pompadour created a compelling and enduring persona that she embodied for nineteen years. Through architecture and the decorative arts, the *marquise* was able to take control of her image, and pursue a path of

self-promotion on an unprecedented scale. Mme. de Pompadour was a self-made woman in every sense of the term, and her success at Versailles was no accident; it reflected a lifetime of continuous and conscious adjustments to her public and private representations, carried out in the domestic sphere.

Figure List

1. Schematic of Versailles, King Louis XV's Private and Public Apartments, 1722-74.
2. Madame de Pompadour's Upper Apartments, 1745-50.
3. Jean-Claude Duplessis, Wall Sconce, 1761.
4. The Apartment of the Marquise de Pompadour, ensemble of matching furniture.
5. The Apartment of the Marquise de Pompadour, ensemble of matching furniture, second view.
6. Plan of salon at hôtel de Nivernais, Paris. From Pierre Verlet.
7. Charles Lécuyer, Blueprints of the lower apartment of Mme de Pompadour, 1750.
8. Jacques Verberckt, Paneling of the Private Bedchamber of Louis XV, c. 1738.
9. Antoine Lebrun, *Toilette Service*, 1738-39.
10. Joseph Baumhauer, *Bureau Plat*, 1745-49.
11. Bernard Vanrisamburgh, *Secrétaire à abattant*, c. 1755-60.
12. Jean Lassurance, Mme de Pompadour's hermitage at Versailles, 1748.
13. Jean Lassurance, Château de Bellevue, 1751.
14. Jean Lassurance, Ground floor-plan of the Chateau de Bellevue, 1751.
15. Ange-Jacques Gabriel, West Façade of Petit Trianon, 1768.
16. Ange-Jacques Gabriel, North Façade of Petit Trianon, 1768.
17. Ange-Jacques Gabriel, East Façade of Petit Trianon, 1768.
18. Ange-Jacques Gabriel, South Façade of Petit Trianon, 1768.
19. Ange-Jacques Gabriel, First floor-plan of Petit Trianon, 1768.
20. Ange-Jacques Gabriel, Second floor-plan of Petit Trianon, 1768.
21. Ange-Jacques Gabriel, Third floor-plan of Petit Trianon, 1768.
22. Ange-Jacques Gabriel, École Militaire, 1780.

Figures

Figure 1: Schematic of Versailles, King Louis XV's Private and Public Apartments, 1722-74.

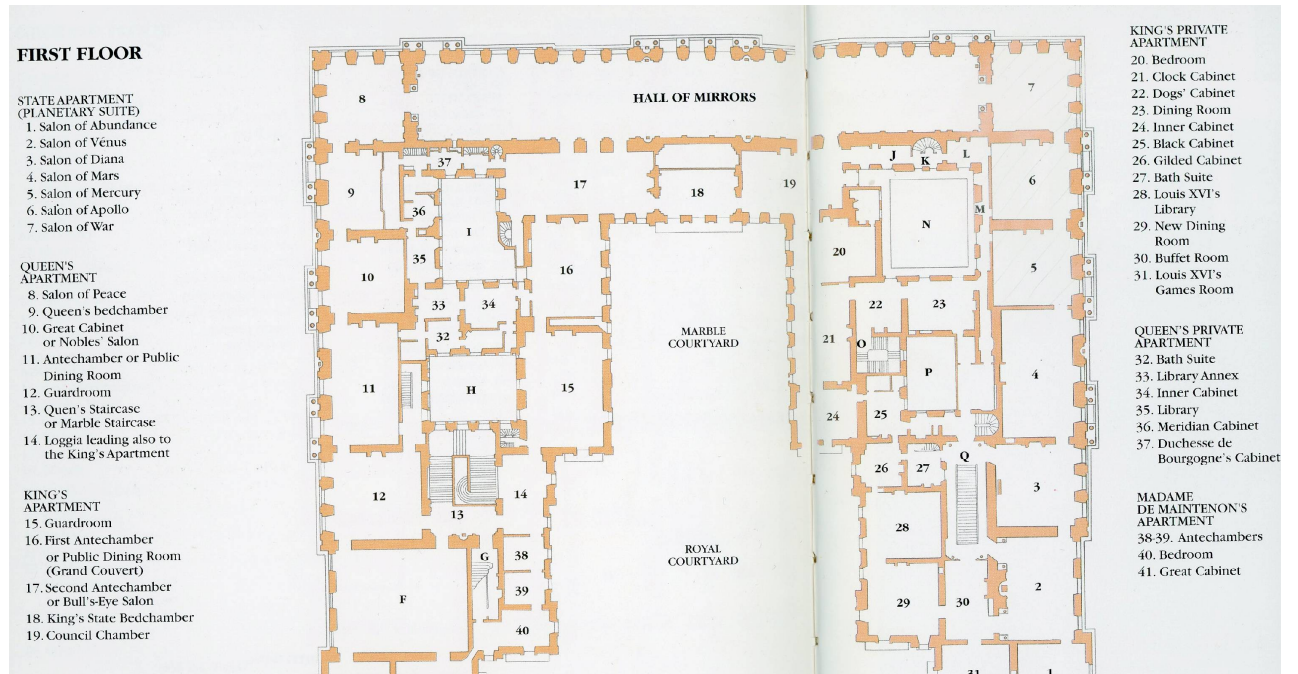


Figure 2: Madame de Pompadour's Upper Apartments, 1745-50.

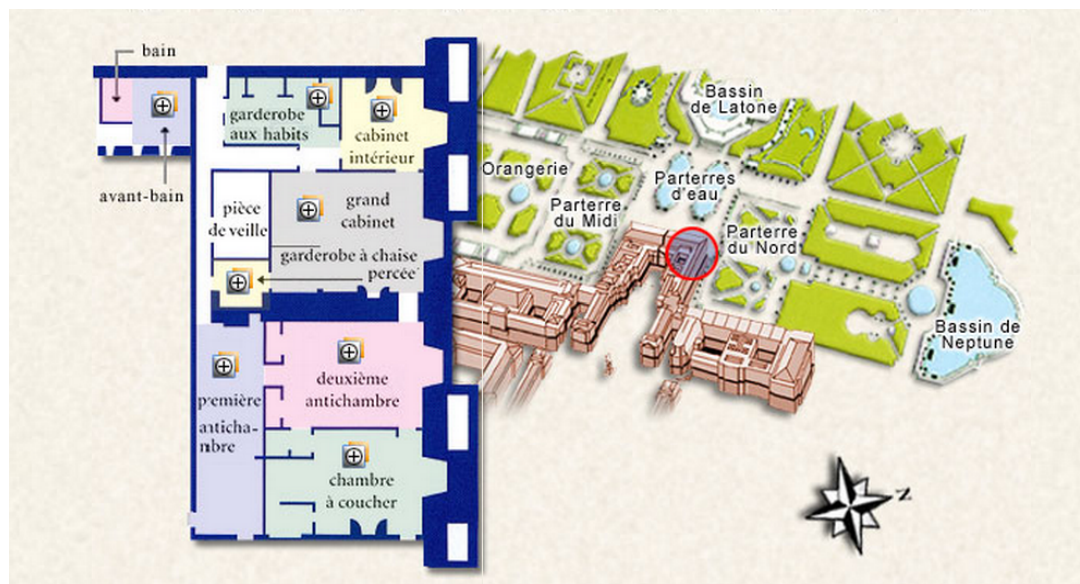


Figure 3: Wall Sconce, Jean-Claude Duplessis, 1761.



Figure 4: The Apartment of the Marquise de Pompadour, ensemble of matching furniture.



Figure 5: The Apartment of the Marquise de Pompadour, ensemble of matching furniture



Figure 6: Plan of salon at hôtel de Nivernais, Paris. From Pierre Verlet.

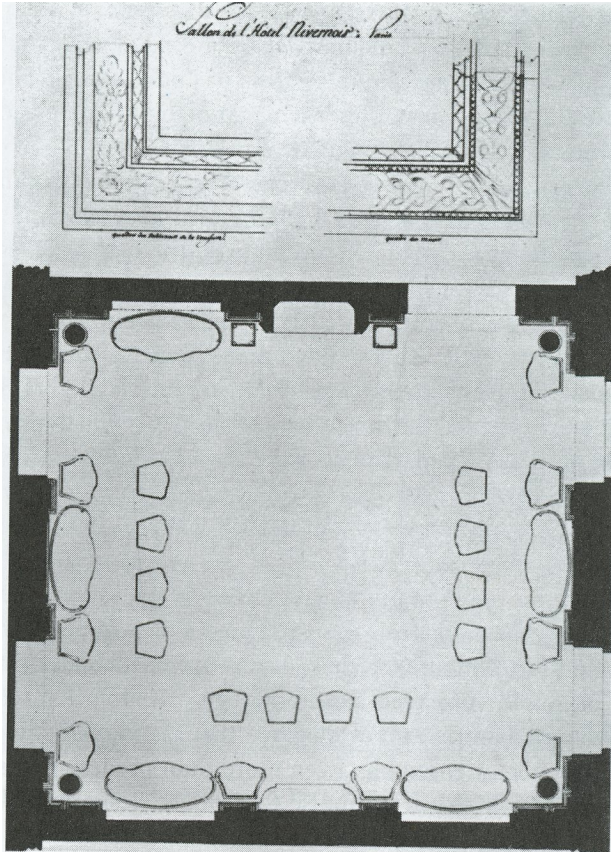


Figure 7: Charles Lécuyer, Blueprints of the lower apartment of Mme. de Pompadour, 1750.

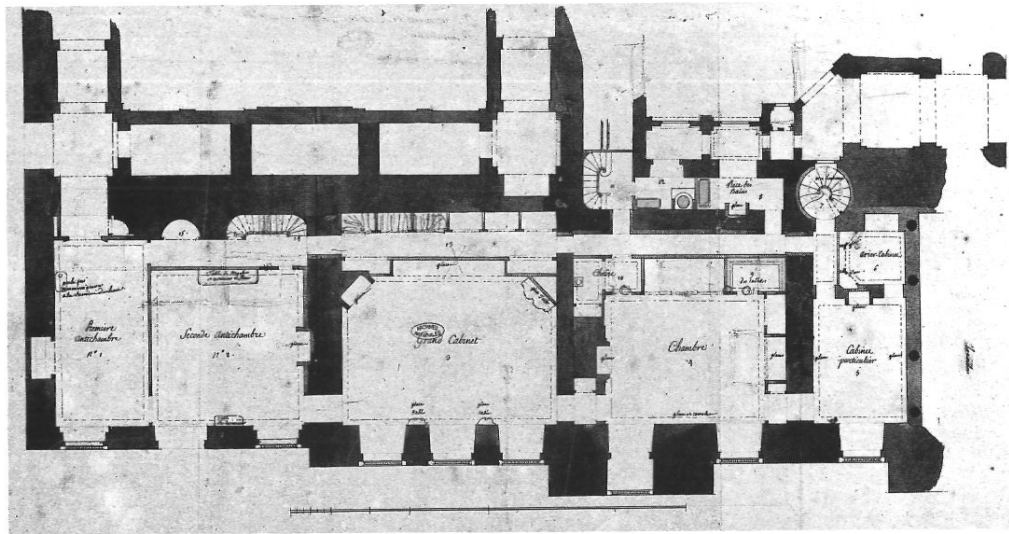


FIG. 4. – Plan définitif de l'appartement de M^{me} de Pompadour, au rez-de-chaussée, 11 mars 1750. (Arch. nat., O¹1772¹ n^o 8).
Phot. Archives.

Figure 8: Jacques Verberckt , Paneling of the Private Bedchamber of Louis XV, c. 1738.



Figure 9: Antoine Lebrun, *Toilette Service*, 1738-39.



Figure 10: Joseph Baumhauer, *Bureau Plat*, 1745-49.



Figure 11: Bernard Vanrisamburgh, *Secrétaire à abattant*, c. 1755-60.



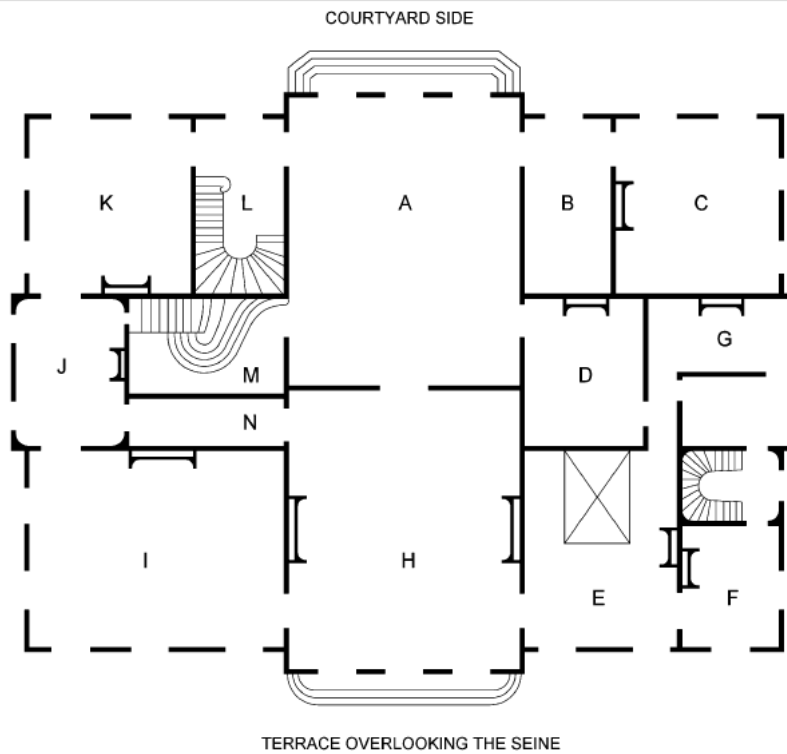
Figure 12: Jean Lassurance, Mme. de Pompadour's hermitage at Versailles, 1748.



Figure 13: Jean Lassurance, Château de Bellevue, 1751.



Figure 14: Jean Lassurance, Ground floor-plan of the Château de Bellevue, 1751.



6.11 Plan of the château of Bellevue: A vestibule; B guards' room; C room of the Swiss guards; D antechamber; E Pompadour's bedchamber; F cabinet; G library; H dining room; I salon; J small gallery; K music room; L back stairs; M grand staircase; N closet.

Figure 15: Ange-Jacques Gabriel, West Façade of Petit Trianon, 1768.



Figure 16 : Ange-Jacques Gabriel, North Façade of Petit Trianon, 1768.



Figure 17 : Ange-Jacques Gabriel, East Façade of Petit Trianon, 1768.



Figure 18 : Ange-Jacques Gabriel, South Façade of Petit Trianon, 1768.



Figure 19: Ange-Jacques Gabriel, First floor-plan of Petit Trianon, 1768.

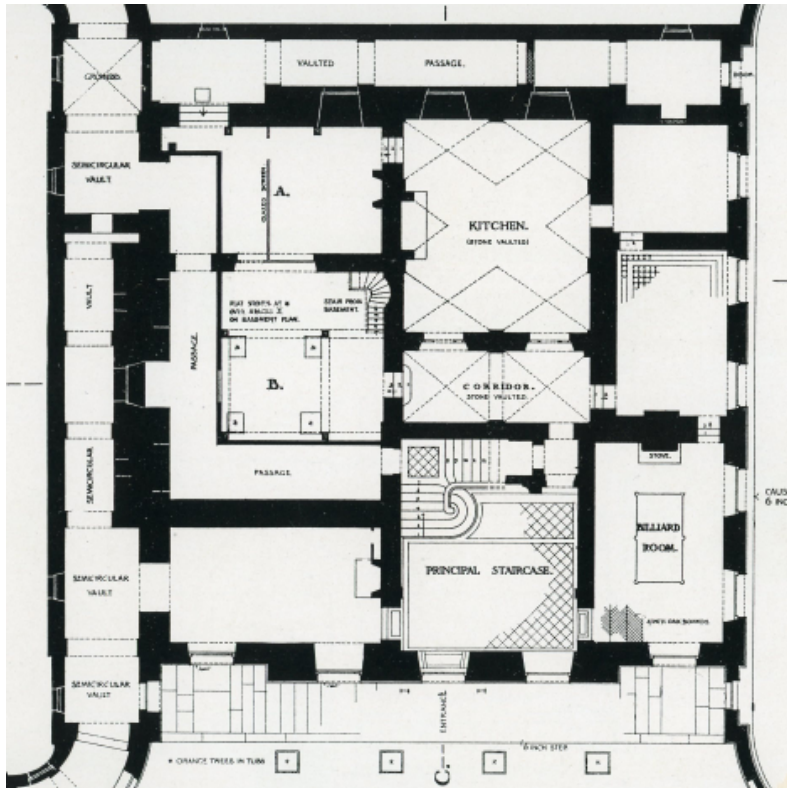


Figure 20: Ange-Jacques Gabriel, Second floor-plan of Petit Trianon, 1768.

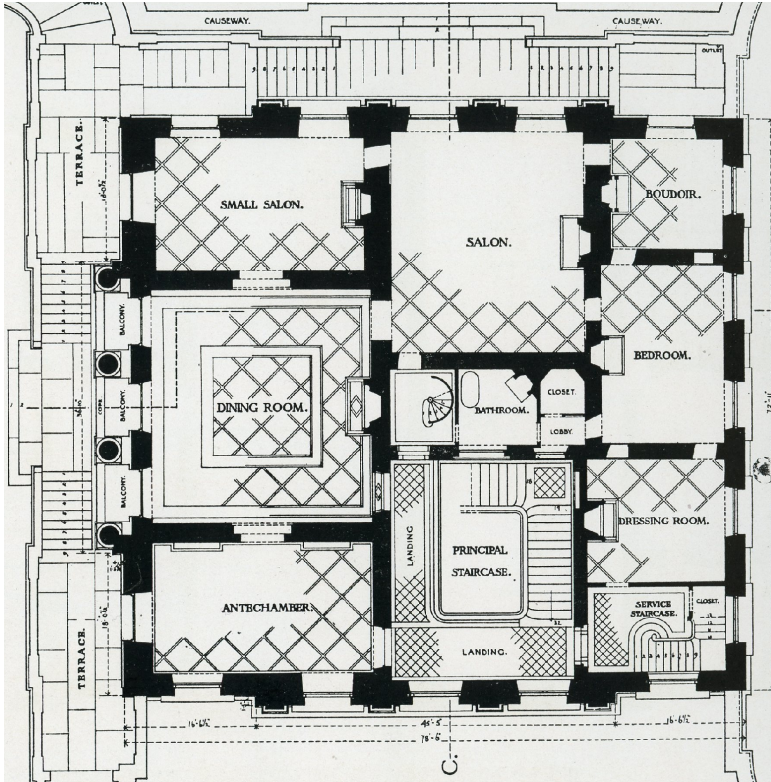


Figure 21: Ange-Jacques Gabriel, Third floor-plan of Petit Trianon, 1768.

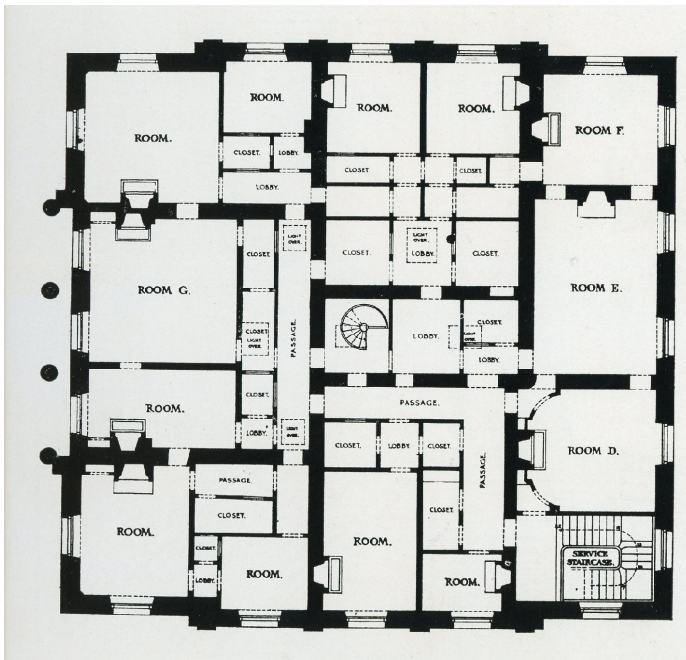


Figure 22: Ange-Jacques Gabriel, École Militaire, 1780.



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