Chapter IV

How was Fashionable Furniture Made in the 18th Century?
On the Cover:

- A Cabinet-Maker’s Office, painting, unknown artist, ca 1770, Great Britain. Picture was obtained from the Victoria & Albert collection from the websitethe http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78662/painting-a-cabinet-makers-office/, Accessed on 07/10.

A. Introduction

The production of furniture needs an organised system, which locates the materials, develops the necessary skills and protects the individuals involved in the business of making of furniture. The modern approach to this industry is through companies which source materials, the manpower and to a large extent provide necessary training. However, how England and France solved these problems in the C18th was very different, even though some of the concepts relied upon were similar. England had what one could label a remarkably modern approach although at that time they did not have the kind of large companies with which we are familiar today to provide the organisational structure, training and direction; they were, it seems, at the beginning of the development of this type of structure.

C. Edwards defines four types of furniture businesses one can see evolve into a recognisably modern type of furniture or design company.\(^1\) However, before looking at the C18th business models in England and France, consider the C21\(^{st}\) approach to the production of furniture which conforms to a standard consumer business model. Product development is consumer driven through the use of marketing research; production is tightly constrained by costs. In general, furniture production and marketing is run by very large multinational companies with established worldwide networks providing them with essential materials and/or services through which they market their products - and like most packaged goods, furniture is promoted through sales and discounts. Furniture is designed primarily to meet consumer needs (as identified through market research) and targeted at a specific market (also identified through market research). Designs are costed to find optimal methods of production (materials, manufacture, quality standards, etc.) and tested across relevant

---

\(^1\) While only speculative examples; A working master, who only make and sell furniture to other companies who in turn sell them to consumers or other businesses, could easily be seen as the first step toward evolving into the modern factory producing furniture for retail outlets. The integrated manufacturing firms could be seen as evolving into something like a Heals or a Liberty, offering a full range of both products and decorative advise to its customers.
consumer groups. Designs are frequently computer-generated and production is generally outsourced to developing economies before being shipped back to the developed world where it is promoted via the mass media and distributed though a network of retail outlets.2

While it is not intended to compare the C18th production and distribution approaches to those used in the C20th, it does appear that this is when there were major steps taken toward a C20th approach. In the C18th, the production and selling of furniture was definitely different, but it was starting to evolve. As noted earlier, for example, shopping was becoming the fashionable way to purchase furniture and those employed were becoming more than just cabinetmakers; they were designing fashionable pieces of furniture to meet their individual customer’s needs, they were looking for efficiencies and they were looking to grow their businesses - in both England and France.

One must remember that the production of ‘fashionable’ furniture during these times was aimed primarily at the very wealthy3; this included the Royal family (particularly in France), the aristocracy and the increasingly affluent middle classes. Servicing the fashionable and wealthy was (in many ways) a distinct process.4 Chippendale and Riesener often visited clients and certainly corresponded. A few clients no doubt visited Chippendale’s workshops on St Martin Street but he did not appear to have an actual storefront.5 By contrast, in

---

2 That is not to say that there are not exceptions to this, in both modern England and France (as well as other countries.) there are a number of very high end custom furniture ‘designer makers’ who develop their own style or borrow from the designs of older styles. These furniture makers will either have small workshops (e.g., Lillyfee Workshops in Beaconsfield, Berks, UK) or a network of workshops (e.g., David Linley).

3 This is unlike today when most furniture businesses are trying to sell their products to a broader group of consumers. This, like the idea of fashion, has evolved over time to involve more people in the process of buying furniture.

4 While at times the differences between the ‘fashionable’ portions of the market with the other portions of the market will be brought out, these differences will not be the focus of this chapter. These differences will only be used to illustrate the process for producing fashionable furniture. For an excellent discussion of the general process for making furniture in the C18th England - see C. Edwards, Eighteenth-Century Furniture, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996.

5 By looking at the layout of Chippendale’s workshop there was no area specified as a storefront or display area (See Figure 4-6). One can assume that there was an office, like the one on the front of this chapter, but it would not be likely that they would leave off a shopping area off this diagram. It is possible, if not likely that people did come to an office to review designs, etc. Furthermore, it could be that some came to tour his
France, prospective clients would tour the fashionable shops of the Marchands Merciers of the Rue St. Honoré area of Paris, though apparently few visited Riesener’s workshops in the Arsenal near the Faubourg Saint Antoine.⁶

B. Selling to the Customer

Chapter 2 (p. 44) described how fashion began to be marketed through elegant new stores during the late C18th. Shopping was becoming a social event and there was a greater inclusion of women in the shopping process. The C18th was also to see an ever greater demand for more goods and the ‘moving forces behind high-consumption capitalism’ became the catalogue and the showroom.⁷ As will be shown for example, the Chippendale Director provided a definitive catalogue for his customers, which remains to this day a privileged icon of historic significance.

In both England and France, the showroom was an important factor in selling products to more and more people.⁸ Interestingly, one of the innovations that allowed for having glass workshops. There were people who considered visiting workshops as a fashionable. In the Diary of Sophie Von La Roche, Sophie discusses her visit much like one would describe visiting an art gallery. It can only be assumed that such educational tours would take place in Chippendale’s workshops at times.

⁶ Another difference that was driven indirectly from the compartmentalization of the different functions in France related to where the cabinetmaker’s workshops. While many of the English cabinetmakers were located in fashionable areas of London because they were also the sales outlets, this was not the case with the French ébénistes. The ébénistes were located a fair distance from this fashionable areas of Paris. While St. Honoré was in what is currently called the 8th Arrondissement (to this day this is a fashionable area close to the Champs-Élysées), the ébénistes were primarily located in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine area close to the Bastille (in what is now known as the 12th Arrondissement-and still not a very fashionable area of Paris.) Riesener’s workshops were fairly close by in the Arsenal de Paris. Taken from: Hughes, P., (date unknown) Notes for a speech on guilds for The Wallace Collection, from their files as obtained via Paul Tear, obtained 07-2008, p. 2


⁸ It is interesting to note that while it is evident that England was slightly ahead of France in developing the storefront in the late C18th, it was the French who first developed the modern department store (the Bon Marché which was started in the 1850’s). See: S. Bayley, Shops, in S. Bayley (ed and author), Commerce and Culture: From Pre-industrial Art to Post-Industrial Value, pp. 45-52 and d’Avenel, G., The Bon Marché in S. Bayley (ed and author), Commerce and Culture: From Pre-industrial Art to Post-Industrial Value, pp. 57-60.
windows in on the storefront was the development of the techniques to make sheet glass. It was the English stores who started this trend that the French were quick to copy – as C. Sargentson notes.

In France, furniture was rarely made on the premises in which it was retailed, with the result that French workshops tended to be darker and crowded. In England, stores were set up and operated by the craftsmen themselves in the premises occupied by the workshop. By contrast, in France, furniture was marketed by a special group of ambitious traders referred to as the Marchands Merciers – not the cabinetmakers. The Marchands Merciers were a special group of guild members who did not make anything themselves, but designed products and commissioned their production. While a Marchand would sell a variety of decorative items, they would not become directly involved in the production of furniture or porcelain plates, etc. The many different guilded and non-guilded craftsmen (artisans libres is the name that was applied to the non-guilded craftsmen) who supplied...
the *Marchand Merciers* would be very specialized.\textsuperscript{16} Because a cabinetmaker, for example, would not make chairs or undertake upholstery, this meant that the Marchands Merciers had to go to the different craftsmen for different elements of a scheme or design before arranging for them to be assembled from the different components - the person usually assigned to the function of putting the different parts together was the *ébéniste*.\textsuperscript{17}

In England, in addition to marketing and selling their own products, furniture makers frequently offered a variety of different products and services. Some were directly related (e.g., furniture maker and chair maker, chair maker and upholster) while others were not (e.g., funeral service director).\textsuperscript{18} As C. Edwards observes:

> “Due to the developments of major metropolitan centres, new forms of business organisation developed. These were often based on the amalgamation of trades, for example, a cabinet-making business might grow to include chair-making and glass-dealing, a carver might include gilding in his repertoire, and chair-makers and upholsters often developed into highly successful businesses.”

\textsuperscript{16} While it is thought that the *Marchand Merciers* primarily went to the guilds for their products, there was a loophole in the legislation that allowed them to sell furniture that did not have a stamp. Obviously, this was fought by the other guilds and it created a number of complications. For example, guilded craftsmen could sell, probably at a lower cost, unstamped furniture to the *Marchand Merciers* (they were not supposed to but it is thought that they did anyway.) and it allowed the mostly immigrant population outlets for their furniture. J. Augard, *Marks on French Furniture and the Decree of Parliament of 1749*, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{17} As stated elsewhere, there were exceptions to this, first of all the cabinetmakers who worked in the Royal workshops could expand their trade to different areas such as producing their own ormolu. There is also a good chance that the non-guild shops in the *Faubourg Saint Antoine* district stretched the rules by performing services beyond their primary skill set.

\textsuperscript{18} A detailed review of the business descriptions included in both the Banks and the Heal collection of cards, advertisements and billings, show that a large percentage of the furniture making shops offered both soft goods (e.g., upholstered chairs, pillows, curtains) as well as case furniture (e.g., tables, library tables, wardrobes, chest of drawers.) Many of them also offered other services such as buying household furnishings from families of those who had recently died (and even making the coffin and performing the service.) Chippendale fell into the former group in that his workshop offered both soft and hard furnishings. The buying of used furniture from patrons also opened the doors to a wide range of services from selling used furniture to running auctions and acting as evaluators for the public at large.
While C. Edwards goes on to cite the example of Ince and Mayhew, Chippendale could just as easily been given, in so much as Chippendale’s workshops offered a variety of services including: cabinetmaking, chair making, upholstery, glass and mirror cutting, etc (see Figure 4-6 which shows a schematic of Chippendale’s workshop indicating all of the services that his shop offered. One can also look at the list of services provided by reviewing the billings that are provided in C. Gilbert’s book on Chippendale 19).

The diversity of services provided by English cabinetmakers is admirably illustrated by the Banks and Heal collection of trade cards which provide stunning evidence of a consumer society in the making 20. While many of these services directly related to furniture making, many were tangential (funeral services, probate etc.). Curiously, while Chippendale’s *Director* lays out his services at some length, his trade card did not - see Figure 4-7.

The type of firm that C. Edwards describes in Ince and Mayhew is what C. Edwards calls an example of the ‘integrated manufacturing firms’ 21. The invoices listed in C. Gilbert’s books on Chippendale also show that a very large

---

20 A review of these trade cards show the variety of services that were being offered by the different businesses and the extreme degree that they were trying to market themselves. As seen in Figure 4-1, this businessman offered services as an undertaker, cabinetmaker, upholsterer, others offered appraisal and auction services, etc. Many cards made such claim as offering ‘the best prices’ and the ‘highest quality’ and other similar commercial/advertising claims. One could conclude that this was the beginning of the furniture business community starting to turn its attention toward the consumer – one step toward expanding to whom they promote their products and toward thinking in modern marketing terms.
percentage of his billings were for activities other than cabinetmaking, including such things as making bedding, curtains and other soft furnishings as well as providing items like wall sconces, mirrors and frames. A review of the trade cards of the Heal Collection shows that this kind of combination was fairly common and that many cabinetmakers provided services for making blinds, paper hanging, turning, carving etc. In addition to these skills, cabinetmakers frequently engaged in probate and inventory; evaluating and buying estates and auctioning furniture as well as making coffins and providing funeral services. Though no office as such is noted on Chippendale’s workshop plans, it is very likely his workshop had the kind of office depicted on the cover page for this chapter, where he would have managed his affairs and occasionally receive his clients.  

C. Gilbert discusses how Chippendale would visit his client’s home to consult with the owner (and perhaps the architect) while taking measurements and observational notes. He would produce small sketches on these visits to obtain initial approval either from the architect or his client. Once approved, he would produce large technical drawings and costings, proceeding with the work once a proposal had been accepted. Chippendale would also take responsibility for delivery, building custom deal crates for his furniture and furnishing instructions as to how they might be best shipped.

P. Kirkham refers to this type of furniture shop as ‘comprehensive manufacturing’ shops and discusses that the important combination is that of cabinetmaking and upholstery and suggesting that the other trades are not as key to the establishment of a solid business. While the combination of two sets of skills is important, it was also important to have the financial support of two individuals to get these businesses started. See P. Kirkham, The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870, p.56.

22 See the individual accounts in C. Gilbert, The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale-Vol 1.

Many of his clients worked in London in their capacity as either members of the House of Lords or members of Parliament. It is likely that some of the planning and visits to Chippendale’s workshops took place during these times.

23 C. Gilbert, The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale, p. 27.
According to C. Edwards, The C18th furniture was increasingly sold through retail outlets frequently described as warehouses.\(^{24}\) In the case of the cabinetmaker Linnell, the workshops were in the back and the retail showroom was in the front on the ground floor.\(^{25}\) However, the trade cards in the Heal Collection suggest that while it was usual to have cabinetmakers selling their own goods, it was becoming increasingly common for retailers to market goods produced by others. As C. Edwards and others have noted, the retail environment of the C18th was becoming increasingly sophisticated, particularly in terms of display and advertising – as any review of the trade cards of the day will reveal.\(^ {26}\) In this sense, Chippendale’s workshop was not wholly representative of this growing trend. In the design of his workshop there is no suggestion of a special display area, nor evidence of storage for keeping an extensive stock of furniture. It appears that his business was largely by commission.

In France, one could argue that because of the guild system enforced specialization; cabinetmakers were prevented from developing the entrepreneurial skills seen in England, leaving the field open to the *Marchand Merciers*.\(^ {27}\) It was the *Marchand Merciers* for example who led the way in putting together the unique and exotic combinations of materials that characterise the furniture of this period and were responsible for the fashion

\(^{24}\) According to C. Edwards, warehouses were ‘often synonymous’ with a shop with a display. He points to the trade card for ‘Warren and Co.’ who described themselves as a ‘Warehouse for all sorts of elegant furniture, pictures, china, etc.’ There are a number of other cards that similarly describe themselves as a ‘warehouse’ but go on to present themselves as essentially what some called ‘sale shops’, which like a modern ‘Heals’ or ‘Liberty’ sold a variety of decorative objects,... including furniture. See C. Edwards, *Eighteenth-Century Furniture*, p. 52.


\(^{26}\) See: C. Edwards, *Eighteenth-Century Furniture*, p. 52,


\(^{27}\) The furniture makers and sellers that are discussed in this thesis, as mentioned before, are limited to those producing the very high quality products. This portion of the furniture market was mostly controlled by the guilds. While it is known that some of the *Marchand Mercier* and even some guilded cabinetmakers did buy furniture from non-guild furniture makers, much of this was under guild control. However, the research for this thesis did not go into the other ways in which these non-guild furniture makers distributed their furniture. While it is likely that they sold through markets or small shops, or perhaps in their workshops, it is only speculation at this time. While information on the entire English market was readily available, similar material for the French market was not located.
for placing a porcelain plaque on the front or top of a small table.28 So, in addition to commissioning and coordinating projects (to use a modern term) the Merciers became involved in design. As Mimi Hellman observes:

_The Marchand-Mercier practiced a mode of making that was conceptual and creative, rather than manual and material, and thus was perceived as more noble than the artisan. His Project was fundamentally aesthetic, emphasizing practices of artful choice, arrangement, and embellishment._29

Despite a number of differences between Riesener and Chippendale, the two were very similar in many ways. For example, despite the fact that Riesener did not publish a design book, according to Verlet, he was somewhat of a celebrity. This is clearly illustrated in his portrait, where Riesener can be seen wearing a powdered wig and an embroidered waistcoat and wearing an air of confidence which suggests he is much more than a simple cabinetmaker. The pencils in his hand, poised over a set of drawings reinforces this image of Riesener the artist and designer, not the artisan and cabinetmaker (See cover of Chapter V (p. 192) for a copy of this portrait).30 Riesener worked in a strict guild system, yet his relationship with his clients was of a very similar kind to that enjoyed by Chippendale. It was unlikely that clients visited Riesener in his workshop, like Chippendale he visited his clients, making trips to Versailles to meet with the Royal family for example or members of the Garde-Meuble. He would take measurements and make notes, then go back make detailed drawings before distributing the work to his employees or subcontractors.31

Despite this personalized service, many of the members of the aristocracy, the Garde-Meuble and the Royal family shopped at the stores on rue St. Honoré. Even Riesener’s best client Marie Antoinette was known to buy furniture from Dominique Daguerre (d. 1796)

---

28 According to C. Sargentson, there were several Marchand Merciers who were credited with designing furniture with Sèvres plaques. These include Dominique Daguerre and Simon-Philippe Poirier. C. Sargentson, _Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris._


31 P. Verlet, (Translated from German by K. Riall), _Möbel von J. H. Riesener_, p.11.
In terms of the wider furniture industry that was beginning to emerge in the C18th, there is evidence to suggest this was becoming international in dimension. Chippendale was known outside of England for example and copies of his Director are known to have found their way to France, the U.S.A. and Russia - a brilliant vehicle to market himself and his business as well as seal his place in history.\(^{32}\) Other workshops in England were becoming quite large and it was known (Seddon for example was reported in 1786 by Sophie La Roche to have 400 employees and that he was producing all kinds of furniture for all levels of customers from the ‘needs of the needy and the luxurious’ and that Seddon worked with ‘all manner of woods’).\(^ {33}\)

One can also look to the C18th for an incipient model of modern marketing. For example Riesener ‘marketed’ himself by taking the very bold step of creating a *Bureau du Roi* and presenting it to Louis XVI – which was enough to ensure Royal patronage\(^ {34}\). The *Marchands Merciers*, on the other hand, were starting to learn how to sell – through attractive signage, elegant shop displays etc. Similarly in England, furniture retailers were making increasing use of signage, display, trade cards and labels, as well as clever promotions – as can be seen in P. Kirkham’s *The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870*\(^ {35}\).

So, while shopping for furniture was changing in both England and France, albeit in different ways, the process of producing furniture was also changing; planting the seeds of a more modern commercial approach.

---

\(^{32}\) This was despite the observation that advertising by fashionable shops was not looked upon favorably. See C. Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, p.25.

\(^{33}\) See A. Heal, *The Firm of Seddon, Cabinet Makers 1756-1868 Country Life*, Vol LXXV, 1934, pp. 72-73 also S. Von La Roche (translated by Williams, C.), *Sophie in London, 1786*, J. Cape, London, 1933. It is interesting to note that P. Kirkham, reported that this firm had only 80 employees 20 years before the date that Sophie Von La Roche was visiting in London; suggesting a very rapid growth between those two points in time. See P. Kirkham, *The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870*, p. 61.

\(^{34}\) This is evident by the title of *Ébéniste du Roi*, as well as, the high levels of patronage that was reported by the *Garde Meuble* in his journals during the next 10 years. See the introduction to Appendix G that recaps the amount of work that Riesener executed for the Royal households during this period.

\(^{35}\) This series of drawings was in the appendix of P. Kirkham, *The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870*, no page number was given. It should be pointed out that these drawings were of shops a few years after the late C18th, specifically 1838-40.
C. Business Conditions - France

The structure underpinning the structure of the French furniture trade also proved to be interesting. As noted above, Louis XIV set in train a system using a combination of government supported guilds whose members worked for the Royal household and a group of artisans who worked with the world outside of the Royal court in areas that were protected by the church from the encroachment of the guilds and the crown. However, while the primary source of quality, fashionable furniture for most purchasers of such products was guild craftsmen, it is known that occasionally, non-guild craftsmen did sell to the Marchand-Merciers.

The French guild system for making furniture was structured by different craft skills. The two key furniture guilds were (initially) the Menuisiers (who made furniture in solid wood such as beds, chairs and consoles) and the ébénists (who specialized in veneered wood or marquetry and who focused on case furniture such as cabinets, commodes, bureaus and secrétaire à abattants). Eventually, these two guilds combined to form the Corporation des

36 The primary example of this was the Faubourg Saint-Antoine just outside of what was then Paris. There were others areas such as Enclos du Temple, Saint-Jean-de-Latran and Saint-Denis-de-la-Chartre but by far the most know areas are the Faubourg area. See A. Pradere, (Translated by Perran Wood), French Furniture Makers, The Art of the Ebeniste from Louis XIV to the Revolution, pp. 12-13.
37 As background, this reviews the development and the primary purpose of the guilds. Although there were guilds as far back as Roman times and they were quite common in medieval times throughout both Europe and England. Their redevelopment in the approximately the 11th Century, was closely associated with the development of urban life. As populations became larger and more organized, the guilds probably started as a way to provide the craftsman with support and to protect their interests. They provided money and other types of social support for when a member passed away and/or had health problems (e.g., providing payments to the family members.) and in some cases they provided a structure for community support.) See M. Prak, Craft Guilds in North-Western Europe (England, France, Low Countries) Paper for The Return to Guilds, Utrecht University, October, 2006. Over time they developed and provided a system for training new craftsmen and they provided a structure for insuring the quality of the work of its members (through fines and actually destroying improperly produced material). On a more global level they provide the government with a mechanism for communicating with the population of skilled labour, for controlling the production and distribution of goods and hence to some extent regulated the economy. In addition it was a way for taxes to be collected primarily through membership fees, entrance fees and fines. Louis XIV used the guild structure to control and to guide the development of new fashionable pieces of decorative art and to develop industries in France.
Menuisiers-ébéniste (even though there remained rivalry between them). Both groups worked with other guilds; while the Menuisiers often worked with carvers, gilders and painters, the ébéniste of the worked with the bronzers to decorate their pieces. These bronzers were made up of two groups – the fondeurs who cast and finished bronze pieces and the doreurs who subsequently chased and gilded them. The following table presents most of the guilds that worked with the Corporation des Menuisier-ébéniste.

Table 4-1
Main Guilds Providing Support To Ébéniste and Menuisiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guild Name</th>
<th>Function of Guild</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fondateurs</td>
<td>These members cast and finished bronze pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doreurs</td>
<td>Working with the items cast by the Fondateurs, this guild was responsible for chasing and gilding the bronze pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laqueurs-vernisseurs</td>
<td>These guild members made imitations of oriental lacquer for various pieces of furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marbriers</td>
<td>This guild made the marble tops of furniture. These were frequently used on commodes, corner cupboards and cabinets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peintre-doreur</td>
<td>This was the guild member who was responsible for gilding and frequently for painting the item of furniture. Note this person is different from the guild member who gilded metal fixtures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serruriers</td>
<td>These made the locks for the drawers and other functional metal components such as the racks for reading desks and secretaries and the mechanisms for mechanical writing and toilet tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sculteurs</td>
<td>The Sculteurs executed detailed carvings usually on chairs, sofas, beds and picture frames. Note that the Menuisiers would have</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38 Please note that these two classifications were originally part of a single guild - the guild of Menuisiers et Huchers (makers of chests) from which had been a break out of the Charapentiers (carpenters). The Menuisiers later broke into the Menuisiers and the ébéniste. While this officially occurred in 1743, it had been moving in this direction for a number of years prior to this. (See G. Pallot, L’Art du Siege Au XVIIIe Siècle En France, ACR-Gismondi Editeurs, Courbevoi, Paris, 1987, p 14.)
40 The primary source for these was the speech notes by P. Hughes, For a talk titled The Guild System, which was taken from files in The Wallace Collection, however much of this information was also in A. Pradere (Translated by P. Wood), French Furniture Makers, The Art of the Ébéniste from Louis XIV to the Revolution, and from conversations with C. Sargenton.
Table 4-1
Main Guilds Providing Support To Ébéniste and Menuisiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guild Name</th>
<th>Function of Guild</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>constructed the pieces that were to be carved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapissier</td>
<td>These guild members made the stuffing seat furniture, for making feather cushions and mattresses for the beds. They would have also made the top covers of the furnishings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the strict rules of the guilds was that members could not work in other guild area of expertise- a Sculpteur for example could not gild his carvings, frames carved by Menuisiers would be passed over to the Peintre-doreur for finishing. Frequently, as many as four different guilds would be responsible for producing a single piece of furniture.

There were four exceptions to the rules set out by the guilds:

- First of all, as official head of all guilds (the “proprietor of all métiers”), the only person who could interfere with guild rules was the King. At times the King would give someone special privileges; for example he might grant a foreign craftsman the ability to work in France or break guild rules. One famous example was Andre Boulle, who was allowed to work in several different areas such as gilding, bronzing, cabinetmaking and veneering. In addition to guild privileges, foreign craftsmen who worked for the crown could become naturalized Frenchmen after 10 years.
- Sometimes craftsmen were given workspace by the crown – Boulle for example worked in the Louvre and Oeben worked in the Gobelins

---

41 It should be noted that other guilds were suggested in some of the readings. For example, there have been several mentions of ‘turners’ as being a separate guild. It would also be reasonable to assume that glasscutters and grinders would form a guild, leather workers would form yet another. However, research to date has not identified them by name.
42 Given this complicated process and the strict adherence to these rules, it seems inevitable that the Merchand-Merciers positions would be needed. Someone had to take responsibility for the coordination and the motivation for making this system work properly.
44 M. Coutinho, 18th Century French Furniture, and Interview with Hirst, M., Curator, Waddesdon Manor, Nov. 2004.
• The crown could also nominate craftsmen to be *Marchands Suivant la Couver.*46 Baumhouer was an example of someone who assumed this privileged position.47

• Greater freedom was also allowed to those craftsmen working in the outlying areas of Paris (e.g. the Abbey of Saint Antoine de Champs in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine area)

Guild members like Cressent who tried to break guild rules were taken to court - Cressent was taken to court three times for making his own bronze pieces.48

What is clear from the above is the pervasive power of the Crown which meant that not only did the Royal household drive fashion by example; they could control the development of new designs. This essentially sets up a quasi-official system for top down diffusion of fashions as discussed in Chapter II (p. 44). It is also generally thought that because guilds held monopolies they served to stifle creativity and to limit competition. However it has more recently been argued that this was not the case; there were innovations that took place in a guild driven economy.49 Setting this aside, it is true that the guilds were generally restrictive; for example they controlled the process of becoming a master or ‘*Maitre*’, a long and difficult business which did not encourage new ideas or techniques.50

To become a full member and to run a shop (to become a *Maitre*) one had to be apprenticed for 6 years (from the age of 12 – 14), during which time the apprentice’s parents had to pay the apprentice’s *Maitre*. After this, the apprentice became

---

46 For example, an *ébéniste* under this program could not make his own brass accessories.
47 Internal documents from the Wallace Collection, by Peter Hughes for a presentation in 1995.
48 Interview with C. Sargentson, on 13/01/05.
49 The following two papers show some recent thinking of how guilds actually provided an environment where innovation did take place despite some restrictive practices.
50 To become a *Maitre*, one had to become an apprentice for 6 years, during which time someone, usually the apprentice’s parents, had to pay the shop *Maitre*. After this, the apprentice became ‘*compagnonnage*’ for anywhere between 3 (if he was related to a guild member) and 6 (if he was not related to a guild member) years, during which time he could earn some money and he could switch shops to which he worked (only with permission and a letter from the prior shop.) He could only become the *Maitre* once the *Jure* had evaluated his work, and he paid his fees AND there was a space available. (See: F. Watson, *Wallace Collection Catalogues: Furniture*, William Clowes & Sons, LTD, London, 1956, p. lvi –lxi).
‘compagnonnage’ for anywhere between 3 – 6 years (3 if he was related to a guild member and 6 if he not), during which time he could earn money and he could (with the permission of his Maître) switch shops. He could only become the Maître once a Jure (a judge) had evaluated his work, he paid his fees AND there was a space available. According to A. Pradere (1989), to become a master, an unconnected journeyman paid 33% more than his annual journeyman’s salary to become a master.

However as noted above, Louis XIV encourage competition between the three groups – the guilds, the Royal Workshops and the protected areas. In addition, while Menuisiers were primarily French natives the cabinetmakers in the Foubourg area and in the ébéniste guild tended to be foreign born. This in itself resulted in competition as the natural born French guild members had an instinctive dislike for immigrants who brought new ideas and skills. Many immigrants also became guild members despite the very substantial cost involved. As F. Watson notes, this system was to produce the most advanced and best-paid craftsmen in the world.

Skilled craftsmen had a far greater chance of making a fortune there (in Paris) than in any other capital city. The great cabinet maker Riesener, for instance, received commissions from the Crown to total of close on a million livres in the decade 1775-1785, and Gouthière, the celebrated gilt bronze worker was able to build himself two luxurious hotels privées in Paris in the years preceding the Revolution. Such wealth, although exceptional, far exceeded anything that a Chippendale or a Vile

---

52 Specifically, those journeymen who were complete outsiders to the guild had to pay 530 livres when his annual salary as a journeyman was 400 livres. (A. Pradere, French Furniture Makers, The Art of the Ebeniste from Louis XIV to the Revolution, p. 13.)
53 Jean-Henri Riesener, his master, Jean-François Oeben, Adam Weissweiller, and Guillaume Benneman are some of the most important examples of guild masters who were born outside of France. According to F. Knothe, 20% of the cabinetmakers in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine area were German. Looking at it from another perspective half of the German immigrants in the area were cabinetmakers. See F. Knothe, French Furniture? Foreign Artisans in Paris during the Ancien Régime, The Magazine Antiques, Feb, 2009, pp. 46-51 for a discussion of this topic.
54 In addition to the money that could be made in Paris, there were probably several other contributing factors to this influx of cabinetmakers to Paris. First of all, Louis XIV encouraged immigration by inviting the most talented artisans from other countries; another possible factor was the fact that Marie Antoinette and several leading cabinetmakers in France were either Austrian or German, which offered some encouragement to the culturally similar 'groups of immigrants. It is unclear as to why the influx of immigrants seemed to have the greatest impact on cabinetmaking and not chair making.
could ever hope to earn in England and in poorer countries like German craftsmen were far worse off.  

Another result of this system was that it produced some of the greatest furniture of this period - what Viaux for example refers to as the “golden age of French furniture”.56 As she notes:

“Other countries were quick to recognize this supremacy; foreign rulers and princes (Catherine II, the Elector of Bavaria, etc.), placed orders with Parisian ébeniste to furnish their castles and palaces.”57

Thus, it seems that the French guild system - though not without its problems - did produce advanced skills, innovation and the opportunity for craftsmen to earn large amounts of money – inevitably this prospect attracted many immigrant artisans. During the Ancien Regime, France had made a very conscious effort to develop the artistic and crafts skills.58 This was inspired by Henry IV who first encouraged craftsmen (circa 1608) to move to Paris, offering craftsmen workspace in the Louvre.59 As noted above, Louis XIV was to follow his example, using the aesthetic domain as a way of establishing France’s pre-eminence on the European stage.60 Again, this represents a systematic approach, in part, to create a top-down diffusion system of driving fashion. Towards the end of the C18th, the influence of the French crown was increasingly overtaken by an affluent bourgeoisie who had the financial means to purchase furniture and other luxury goods.61 At the same time, the

57 J. Viaux, French Furniture, p. 96.
58 Literally this translates to ‘old order’ or ‘old regime’. This is a French description of the social and political system that operated before the revolution in 1789. Primarily, it refers to the era when France was ruled by the Bourbon kings in the C17th and C18th.
59 Henry IV, A Protestant, issued the ‘Edict of Nantes’, which allowed Protestants to work in France without bias on April 13, 1598. Thus, the so-called Huguenots were able to flourish and develop their craft skills. Later (1685) Louis XIV was to revoke this edict, forcing many of these highly skilled workers to move to England where they added to England’s skill base.
stranglehold held by the guild system began to wane in the face of the increasingly elegant and fashionable furniture produced outside of Paris in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine district.\textsuperscript{62} The Marchands-Merciers played an interesting role in this change. It should be pointed out that the Marchands-Merciers were technically guilds but they did not themselves make anything - essentially they performed many of the functions of the modern company. However, the Marchands-Merciers could sell furniture made by craftsmen from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine (non-guild members) and they could sell unstamped furniture made by guild members, the expensive products of the guilds were increasingly undercut.\textsuperscript{63} Several Marchands-Merciers were known to sell to the Garde-Meuble Royal like Simon-Philippe Piorier (1720-1785) and Dominique Daguerre (1740 – 1796).\textsuperscript{64}

While Auslander is one author to argue that Louis XIV set up the rival guild and non-guild groups in order to play one against the other, it is unclear as to whether or not powers allowed the Marchands-Merciers was part of that plan.\textsuperscript{65} There are two other interesting aspects of the Marchand-Merciers that are worth considering. First of all, they were becoming very powerful entities toward the end of the reign of Louis XVI. C. Sargentson for example notes their extensive spending and the considerable inheritances left to their descendants when they passed away.\textsuperscript{66} Secondly, it was the Marchand-Merciers who were to develop the idea of the department store and play their part in developing the democratic culture of consumption with which we are so familiar today.

\textsuperscript{62} This is based on the observation that many of the Marchand Merciers were going to the non-guilded craftsmen to obtain furniture at a lower cost. It is also suspected that even Riesener went to these shops for furniture.

\textsuperscript{63} It has been suggested that the guild members, because they had to pay a duty for each piece they had stamped, that they sometimes sold pieces through the Marchands-Merciers unstamped at a reduced price. Also, the guilds themselves would sell on furniture that they impounded from their members (See P. Hughes, (date unknown) Notes for a speech on guilds for The Wallace Collection from their files as obtained via Paul Tear.) While no official article from an accredited journal was found to confirm this, it does seem logical that these processes would occur.

\textsuperscript{64} C. Sargentson, Merchants and Luxury Markets.

\textsuperscript{65} L. Auslander, Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France.

\textsuperscript{66} C. Sargentson, Merchants and Luxury Markets.
D. Reisener’s Business

The way in which Riesener obtained his position as Ébéniste du Roi was very interesting. Reisener, a German immigrant, came to Paris to work for the guild maître Jean-François Oeben (1721-1763) who worked exclusively for the Royal family.67 When Oeben died in 1763, his widow took over the workshop. In 1768, Reisener married Oeben’s widow, inherited his workshop and with it his contract with the crown. 68 The first piece that he completed for the Royal family was a bureau à cylindre begun by Oeben in 1760 and completed by Riesener in 1769 (see Figure 4-2). This bureau à cylindre is a very elaborately decorated Rococo designed desk with a number of new and technically sophisticated features. For example, one turn of lock on the roll top locks the roll top, while a second turn locks all of the drawers. It also has writing surfaces that come out of the sides and the back so a number of people could take dictation from the King at one and the same time. The bureau contains (of course) a secret compartment. The decoration is probably more elaborate than anything that Riesener would ever attempt again in his career; marquetry panels cover every surface with symbols representing France, the arts, science, military prowess, as well as floral favours and homages to the King. The ormolu that covers the bureau is bold and ornate with a clock on the top, six vases across the top gallery, garlands

67 Riesener’s assent to become a guilded cabinetmaker was probably not typical. One more common way was to inherit the privilege through ones father. Another more common approach, than Riesener’s is represented by the story of Jean Coulon. Coulon was born near the Faubourg area outside of Paris and was the son of a gardener. However, he was able to work his way from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine to become a Parisian guild member through a series of progressions which involved marrying into good families and he slowly bought shops in the central Paris area in 1716. It was also approximately this time that Jean Coulon became a marchand-ébéniste (both a maker and a retailer of furniture recognized by the Parisian guilds). However, it should be pointed out that the guilds were very strongly controlled by leading guild families or dynasties, which made any strong progression very difficult for Coulon, and most other cabinetmakers. Reisener was unusual in that he was an outsider who broke through the ranks of the guilds dynasties via the death of his shop owner (Oeben) and his subsequent marriage to the owner’s wife. D. Alcouffe, Jean Coulon, Maître Ébéniste and Marchand-Mercier, The Journal of the Furniture History Society, Vol.29, 1993, pp. 11-37. 68 To make this marriage even more important to Riesener, Oeben’s widow was also the sister of the famous furniture maker Roger Vandercruse Lacroix (R.V.L.C. -1750-1789) and the sister-in-law (from her first marriage to Oeben) of another famous cabinetmaker Martin Carlin (d. 1785). This obviously placed Riesener in a very solid position amongst French cabinetmakers. See A. Pradere (Translated by Perran Wood), French Furniture Makers: The Art of the Ébéniste from Louis XIV to the Revolution, p. 372.
on the sides, acanthus leaves on the drawers, together with several candle stands and figures mounted at various points on the bureau.

After completing this masterpiece, the quantity of furniture ordered by the Royal family remained small until the retirement of the Ébéniste Ordinaire du Roi, Gilles Jobert (1689-1775). For the next 10 years Reisener was the only furniture maker to supply the crown – that is until the Garde-Meuble started questioning his prices. There has been some speculation as to how this came about. What is known is that questions were first raised in 1784 when Thierry de Ville d’Avray became the new intendant general des Meubles de la Couronne, replacing Pierre-Elisabeth de Fountanieu whose family had held this position since the time of Louis XIV. Verlet suggests that d’Avray wanted to impress the King by reducing expenditures on furniture (Riesener was known to be expensive).69 A. Pradere suggests that it was also at this time that several younger cabinetmakers - specifically Guillaume Beneman (1750-1811) and Adam Weisweiler (1750 - 1810) - rose to fashion; all of whom were a deal more affordable than Riesener. Roentgen similarly emerged at this time whose meubles à mécanisme were regarded as superior to Riesener’s.70 In any case, in 1786, Riesener lost his title of Ébéniste du Roi after d’Avray wrote a scathing report on Riesener, faulting his quality and criticizing his use of subcontractors.71

---

69 Verlet, P. (Translated from German by K. Riall), Möbel von J. H. Riesener, p.9.
70 A. Pradere (Translated by Perran Wood), French Furniture Makers, The Art of the Ébéniste from Louis XIV to the Revolution, p. 374.
71 A. Pradere quotes a description written by Thierry de Ville d’Avray in a letter which starts by listing the recent acquisitions from Riesener, pointing out problems, lack of quality and the prices of the Riesener pieces. Then Thierry observes:
However, it has been calculated that Reisener delivered approximately 700 pieces of furniture during the time in which Riesener was the Ébéniste du Roi – no mean achievement. Over half of these were pieces of writing furniture, which confirms the importance that writing was during this period (350 were simple writing tables while 51 were secrétaire à abattant). This translated into a very substantial amount of billings during this time; more than 877,000 livre! As this shows, Riesener was kept fairly busy by the Royal household, as he was pretty much the only supplier of furniture for the Royal household – often

I notice with regard to Benneman that Riesener buys his furniture in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and thus, if instead of this they were made in Benneman’s workshop, they would consequently be more robust and need replacing less frequently.

A. Pradere (Translated by Perran Wood), French Furniture Makers, The Art of the Ébéniste from Louis XIV to the Revolution, p. 373. Who is quoting the French Archives National number 01340.

72 This is based on a count of all of the furniture delivered to one of the Royal households during the period of 1774 and 1784. While we know that Riesener delivered furniture to Marie Antoinette after that date, it was not a large number of pieces. Verlet, P. (Translated from German by K. Riall), Möbel von J. H. Riesener, p. 9.

73 These were based on counts of the writing furniture mentioned in the journals of the Garde Meuble between 1774 and 1784. See Appendix H for more details.
supplying furniture for several rooms of a house at one time. Although much of this was very exclusive and very high-end pieces for use by the Royal family, some of his work was for the support staff and therefore was relatively plain and simple in design and decoration. Both Versailles and Nissim de Camondo hold a number of such pieces – see for example the table “pour le service de la Reine” shown in Figure 4-3. This particular writing table was probably made for one of Louis XVI’s personal assistants at the Chateau Petit Trianon. Much simpler than anything commissioned for use by either Louis XVI or Marie Antoinette, it has a solid oak carcass, veneered in Mahogany with a trellis design on the top of trapezoids surrounded by boxwood and black ebony stringing. It is decorated with simple ormolu feet, knobs on the pull out writing surface, and surrounds at the top of the legs. This table is currently to be found at Versailles in the private apartments of the Queen.

Following (See Figure 4-4) is an example of a Bureau plat by Riesener. Like the table described above, it was probably commissioned for someone in the service of Louis XVI: again, note the lack of decoration. However, it can be seen that Riesener was consistent in terms of the quality of all of his work as he took care to cover the dovetails on the main drawer (not shown). Further observation reveals how carefully the drawers were
constructed and the care with which the materials were chosen. The decoration however is very simple with a few brass details only; no ormolu or marquetry work. This piece also has simple locks that only turn once to lock the single drawer.

There is little to know how Riesener’s workshop was run or how it was organized. We do know from Garde Meuble records that he took workmen with him on his trips to Versailles. We can surmise that because the French workshops generally served only one function (because of guild guidelines) their workshops were probably smaller than comparable English workshops. However, Riesener’s workshop was different from most other workshops in that it probably made other items (such as ormolu, metal pieces such as locks, etc.) and (of course) it serviced the crown. As a result it can be assumed that Riesener had more staff than most other French workshops. It has been suggested that David Roentgen had approximately 100 workers in his workshop in Germany and like Riesener, he had people who produced metalwork and ran an extremely successful workshop, we might assume that Riesener had a similar number of employees.

**E. Business Conditions - England**

As discussed above, England’s royal family did not take a lead role in determining the fashionable developments of the late C18th. Whereas in France fashion looked to the Royal family in England.

---

74 As will be shown later (Chapter V, p. 286), these characteristics are common to many of Riesener’s works.
75 As seen in the Bureau du Roi and in pieces discussed in Chapter 5, Riesener used very complex locks in many of his secrétaire à abattants that he made for members of the Royal family.
76 Verlet, P. (Translated from German by K. Riall), Möbel von J. H. Riesener, p.12.
77 The reason that Riesener could perform metal work within his own workshop, contrary to guild regulations, was due to his title as Ébéniste du roi.
78 See Huth, H., Roentgen Furniture, pp. 11-23 for a description of Roentgen’s workshop. In addition to the comparison to Roentgen’s workshop, the large number of pieces that Riesener produced during this time would suggest a large work force. At the beginning of Appendix G: Secrétaire à Abattant by Riesener Mentioned in the Garde de Meuble.
79 Few of the royal family members were leaders in taste or fashion as the French kings were. The only rival to George IV in his knowledge and appreciation of the arts was Charles I. E. Joy, English Furniture: 1800 – 1851, Sotheby Parke Bernet Publications, London, 1977. p. 183.
“Cultural leadership had become dispersed among a multiplicity of designers and craftspeople, manufacturers and shopkeepers, noble patrons and Grub Street Critics”  

As noted earlier (Chapter 3, p. 118), the Neo-Classical period was lead by three architects – James Stuart, Sir William Chambers and (most importantly) Robert Adam. No less influential was the work of Thomas Chippendale (1718-1779) who’s ‘Gentleman & Cabinet Maker’s Director’ was to prove hugely successful. Described by C. Gilbert as a “publicity stunt” designed to attract attention to his business, Chippendale produced three editions of his Director published in 1754, 1755 and 1762. While the first two editions were identical, the third included a number of Neo-Classical designs, showing the influence of Adam and his compatriots.

Chippendale’s Director was followed by those of Thomas Sheraton (1751 - 1806). Starting in 1791 he published four volumes of "The Cabinet Maker’s and Upholsterer's Drawing Book”, followed in 1803 by "The Cabinet Dictionary" (a compendium of instructions on the techniques of cabinet and chair making) and finally by the "Cabinet Maker, Upholsterer and General Artist's Encyclopaedia", published in 1805. These highly successful publications were supplemented in 1788 by “The Cabinet Maker and Upholsterers Guide” by George Hepplewhite (1727? - 1786) published posthumously by his wife Alice. Two further editions were followed in 1789 and 1790, indicating something of the appetite in England for these texts. Interestingly enough, there were books on furniture designs published in France but

Regarding the fashion leadership in furniture by George I to George III:

“...neither George I’s court nor those of his two successors(his son George II and his great-grandson George III) were crucial sites of national cultural display, in the manner of Versailles.”


81 It is interesting to note that not only did this differ from France during this period, but the fact that three architects lead the Neo-Classical fashion was different from the prior Rococo period where architects did not take up the style. Instead it was designers and draftsmen who promoted that style. For example, Chippendale's first book on furniture style was essentially a devise to promote the Rococo style.
these were technical books aimed at the furniture makers themselves and they did not enjoy the wide currency of the English texts described above.\textsuperscript{83}

In England, architecture had (historically) not dictated what the furniture was to look like\textsuperscript{84}. However that began to change during the Neo-Classical period as architects rose to prominence and began to exert increasing influence over furniture and interior decor. For example in package of letters and memos dated 1772 by Sir Rowland Winn to Robert Adam regarding Nostell Priory House, Winn asked Adam whom he should employ to provide the furniture.\textsuperscript{85} In his reply Adam recommended Chippendale – together with Adam himself\textsuperscript{86}. In fact, the close cooperation (and sometimes competition) between architects and cabinetmakers can be seen as a recurring theme in this period\textsuperscript{87}. Interestingly enough, in the decoration of Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire (1760’s) both Robert Adam and John Linnnell submitted designs for sofas for the drawing room - Linnell’s designs were chosen in this instance. Similarly, William Chambers designed the furniture for Albany House in London in competition with Chippendale. Part of Chamber’s argument to the owner, Lord Melbourne was that the architect was better educated and better trained and therefore he had a better understanding of Neo-Classical designs than Chippendale – a mere craftsman. \textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{83} Probably the best known French book on furniture from the C18th was A. Roubo’s \textit{l’Art Du Menuisier} (See A. Roubo, \textit{l’Art Du Menuisier}, Leonce Laget, Paris, 1977 (reprint from original 1765-1775)).

\textsuperscript{84} This statement specifically addresses the decorative elements of the furniture. There were, after the 1666 fire of London, regulations that regarded some constructional elements of the furniture.

\textsuperscript{85} C. Gilbert, \textit{The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale}, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{86} It is known that Adam charged a very high fee for designing furniture, which is probably why many of his clients decided to go directly to the furniture maker for their designs. Chippendale for example did not charge for the designs, in fact it appeared to be part of the process of getting the customer to sign off on the work before it was executed. See C. Gilbert, \textit{The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale}, p. 987

\textsuperscript{87} In addition to Adam, Chambers for example worked with a number of furniture makers and on occasion he was very critical of them and on occasion in competition with them (Harris, J. and Snodin, M. (ed.), \textit{Sir William Chambers: Architect to George III}, Yale University Press, New Haven CT, USA and London, 1997, pp 163 - 185.)


As mentioned before, the architects frequently had exposure to classical designs. Adam, Chambers, and Stuart were three examples. All three took their grand tours to learn about different forms of classical designs and Chambers when to a formal school in Paris. The furniture makers were only possibly exposed to classical themes through design schools or from the architects that worked on the same houses as the furniture makers. Thus, this statement was probably accurate.
Regardless of the system, the first step in the process of commissioning furniture whether it be from the architect or the Garde de Meuble or a leading furniture maker, was the design. This put those with any training in what we now call design at an advantage compared to those without any such skills. The act of preparing detailed plans requires basic mathematical skills as well as the ability to translate two-dimensional drawings to three-dimensional objects. Again this was fairly advanced skill which was part of the basic training of the Academy in France but was only just beginning to being promoted by the government in England at that time.\(^{89}\)

It is not clear how Chippendale acquired his considerable skills, however it is believed that he might have attended schools in London or leaned extensively on the skills of artists resident around St. Martin’s Lane, where Chippendale’s workshop was to be found and the St. Martin’s Lane Academy was established. C. Gilbert suggests that Chippendale may have learned his drawing skills from Matthias Darly, for example.\(^{90}\) Kimball and Donnell argue on the other hand that Chippendale drew inspiration from the work of artists such as Matthias Lock and H. Copland, both of whom produced work in the French taste.\(^{91}\) Although less likely, it is not impossible that Chippendale acquired some training in draughtsmanship during his apprenticeship in Yorkshire.\(^{92}\) However, what is clear is that Chippendale received some kind of artistic training, as he was able to produce so accomplished a book, so early in his career.\(^{93}\)


\(^{90}\) C. Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, pp. 5-6.


\(^{92}\) Little is known about Chippendale’s early training. What is known is that his father and grandfather were either joiners or carpenters. Beyond that is completely speculative, although it seems likely that either he served an apprenticeship or received some kind of training before he traveled to London. See C. Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, pp. 3-5.

\(^{93}\) It should be noted, that there is no information as to the artistic training that Riesener received. Most likely this was part of the training that he received as an apprentice to Oeben. Perhaps he received some training in Germany before he moved to Paris to join Oeben’s workshop. Did Riesener receive additional training either in Germany or France in addition to his work in Oeben’s workshop? While it is not known, it is probably the case that he did receive such training, as it was readily available to Riesener.
In terms of furniture then, the late C18th saw two entirely different modes of production in England and France. While France still adhered to the guild system, in England the old medieval guild system had been in declining for many years and the C18th represents a period of transition, as P. Kirkham notes:

“In 1700, the guilds still retained some control over the furniture-making and journeymen furniture-makers had not yet organized permanent institutions of their own. In the early 18th Century, the owner of a furniture-making firm combined the roles of craftsman and manager, as well as that of designer if the firm originated it’s own designs, whereas by 1870 these three functions were separate. ...Furthermore, the 1870s mark the end of the independence of local trade societies of London furniture-makers and the increasing strength of nationally organized trade unions.”

As they declined in power, craftsmen lost the benefits of the guilds - protection from employers; support in emergencies; the setting quality standards etc. According to C. Edwards, by the late C18th the guilds had ‘faded into fraternal associations’. It was with this in mind that English craftsmen tried to organize themselves into what they called trade societies. As P. Kirkham observes:

London journeymen had begun to form collective organizations outside the companies in order to protect and improve their wages and working conditions, to provide some security against sickness and unemployment and to protect their trade or ‘mystery’.

While these new organisations retained a historical connection with the original medieval guilds, they were generally very different entities despite the fact that some found themselves enrolled in both organisations. In many ways these trade organizations were

---

97 This issue has been debated over time. While some (S and B. Webb in *The History of Trade Unionism*) claim there was no connection, while others point to the fact that in the C18th many Trade Society members had actually been trained under the guild rules (P. Kirkham, *The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870*, p. 148). P. Kirkham also observes that the symbols used to signify the different trade societies were similar or the same as the guilds which suggests that at least the trade societies wanted to draw a connection to the prior organizations, regardless of whether this connection was real or not. P. Kirkham, *The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870*, pp. 147 - 148.
modelled after the guilds but had a more “political” edge to them that was (eventually) to find full expression in the trade union activities of the late C19th and early C20th. The growth of these trade associations mirrored the growth of larger furniture making firms during the C18th. By the end of the C18th the new trade associations had taken responsibility for developing skills, controlling quality and protecting their members. The cabinetmakers strike of 1761 shows just how organised the craftsmen had become. Although the cabinetmakers lost this particular strike, it eventually lead to the establishment of The London Cabinet Makers’ Book of Prices in 1788, which set out the price-rate list for the shop owners to pay the craftsmen.

The system of skills training also changed with the advent of the new trade societies. Prior to the C18th, the basic way to teach craft skills was through an apprenticeship system established by the Statute of Artificers’ in 1563, whereby a young apprentice (approximately 14 years of age) would train for 7 years. The apprentice signed to a craftsman and a contract was worked out between the apprentice, his parents and the master – like the French system described earlier. Usually the parents would pay for the training, the youth would be placed under the masters care for nearly all matters, often living in with the master and his family. In England, monies paid to the master reflected

---

98 This strike was not the first organized effort by the trade societies, but it was one that solidified this organization. The strike was for the production of new piecework prices, which was related to reducing the number of hours they worked and increasing their pay. The owners had firm support by the government and beat the journeymen through several legal proceedings such as fining pub owners who allowed trade meetings to take place at their facilities. See P. Kirkham, The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870, p. 150.

99 See P. Kirkham, The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870, p. 150. It is interesting to note that no French version of this type of book has ever turned up in the research for this paper, however, it was discussed in Roubo’s L’Art de Menuiser that a workshop should develop some kind of standardized approach to costing out work. While this discussion is related to how much to charge the client in order to insure enough profit to keep the workshop in business, it strongly suggests that some kind of standardized approach to pricing work would also be needed. (See A. Roubo, L’Art Du Menuiser, p. 1259. This is also discussed in M. Strümer, ‘Bois des Indes’ and the Economics of Luxury Furniture In the time of David Roentgen, The Burlington Magazine, Vol 120, No 909, 1978, pp. 799-807.)

100 Through this period, the late C18th this system was changing. Toward the end of this period some craft skills stopped participating in the guild apprentice system all together, some reduced the time to five years, etc. All of this was further indication of both the changes in the businesses (shifting from craft based businesses to manufacturing businesses – the latter requiring lower skilled labor.) and See P. Kirkham, The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870, p. 40.

his standing, although on occasion the master would not charge for a relative’s child or the son of a close friend.\textsuperscript{102}

The system of production in England had certain commercial advantages. Unlike France, if one was a cabinetmaker and work was scarce, one could turn to making chairs, carving or gilding. There are numerous examples of craftsmen and companies diversifying their work. Giles Grendey for example (1693-1780) was known for both cabinet work and a chair making, Benjamin Goodison (active from 1727 to 1767) was both a cabinetmaker and a carver-gilder. Of course Chippendale provided another example of these ‘\textit{integrated manufacturing firms}’.\textsuperscript{103} Others included Ince and Mayhew, Gillows, Vile and Cobb, Linnell and Seddon.\textsuperscript{104} Furniture workshops at this time even incorporated such skills as metal work and glass cutting and grinding - Sophie Von La Roche reported that she saw metal workers in Seddon’s workshop.\textsuperscript{105} Usually such skilled workers would be hired in.\textsuperscript{106}

There follows a summary of the primary divisions of the English furniture making craft trades with a description and comments about each one. Several thoughts come to mind in reviewing this.

- The first point that should be made is that unlike France with its guilds and sharply demarcated crafts, England did not have such delineation. Many historic sources such as dictionaries or trade listings do not even mention many of these crafts, thus this list represents a collation of different sources in combination with this authors own interpretations.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{102} Besides how well known the shop was there were other reasons for the variations in the prices charged to taking on an apprentice. Apprentices in London paid more than those outside of London, certain crafts demanded higher payment such as upholstery received the highest payments and larger firms could ask for more than smaller firms. See P. Kirkham, \textit{The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870}, pp. 43-44.

\textsuperscript{103} C. Edwards, \textit{Eighteenth-Century Furniture}, pp. 18-19.

\textsuperscript{104} There were two primary sources for this list that was P. Kirkham, \textit{The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870}, pp.11-39 and C. Edwards, \textit{Eighteenth-Century Furniture}, pp 33-47.

\textsuperscript{105} S. Von La Roche (translated by Williams, C.), \textit{Sophie in London}, p. 173.

\textsuperscript{106} P. Kirkham, \textit{The London Furniture Trade: 1700-1870}, pp.64-65.

\textsuperscript{107} In the 1829 listing of occupations, \textit{The Book of Trades}, defines the “cabinet-maker”as one who:
Many of these craft categories experienced change during the C18th. For example, carving appears popular at the beginning of the C18th (the Rococo era) but less so at the end of the period (the Neo-Classical era). There were probably more specialized workers than ‘officially listed’ in France. Even with this extensive list of artisan skills there were almost certainly further specialisms (such as Japanning) which tended to come and go as the fashions changed.

Table 3-2
English Furniture Worker Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frame Maker/Joiner</td>
<td>This was the main wood working furniture maker in the 17th Century, but as specialties split off this became more and more doing jobs such as making window shutters, wall paneling and other non-furniture work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair Maker</td>
<td>This specialization remained closest to the original Joiner group. They simply made the frames of chairs, which were then upholstered or caned and/or decorated by another specialist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cane Chair-Maker</td>
<td>These became so popular in the early part of the C18th and the specialty built up as a separate group, however as the desire for these items waned, this group was folded back into chair making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinetmaker</td>
<td>This job was first developed in Germany, they were expert at veneering, dove-tailing and ‘refined techniques’ to make luxury cabinets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinetmaker Small-work/Fancy</td>
<td>Specialized in small items such as ladies’ work tables, work-boxes, ladies’ desks, portable desks, writing-tables, jewel boxes, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inlay, Marquetry and Boulle Work</td>
<td>This group grew out of cabinetmakers and actually was officially part of that group, however it is clear that some cabinetmakers did specialize in this area of work. In the 18th Century, this group did separate itself from Cabinetmakers (e.g. Furlohg, Linning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clock-Case-Making</td>
<td>Again, it is unclear whether this was a separate group of workers from ‘cabinetmakers’ however some did specialize in this area although clock cases were made by those who did not claim such a specialty (e.g. Gillow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upholstery</td>
<td>This was a very respected group of the furniture making community. While the primary function was to stuff and cover chairs, upholsters also performed work in fitting beds, hanging window curtains, etc and this remained true until the mid 19th Century.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilding</td>
<td>The gilder used one of two methods to decorate primarily picture and mirror frames. The two methods were water and oil gilding. Toward the end of the C18TH, this profession was being executed by a large group of semi-skilled labor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carving-Gilding</td>
<td>Because these two functions were so tightly related to each other, they slowly began to be combined into one profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair Carving</td>
<td>These craftsmen carved everything except frames. This included chairs, bed column, and other decorative elements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...furnishes chests of drawers, desks, scrutoires, bureaus, chairs, tables, book-cases, sofas, and bedsteads. Indeed, the business of a Cabinet-maker and that of an Upholsterer are now generally united.


Table 3-2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frame Carving</td>
<td>Worked mainly in softwoods such as lime, pear, or beech. These were considered the most artistic and skilled of all furniture-makers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning</td>
<td>It is interesting to note that the Neo-Classical style returned to favor the work of the turner. Instead of heavily carved decorations, furniture makers were looking for simple columns. The uses of increased mechanization lead to the making of turned handles, and other items (chair legs, bed pillars, etc) which could be made less expensively than before.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of these changes go along with the increases in the sizes of the workshops. At the beginning of the C18th shops comprising one wareroom and one workshop with just a handful of workers were common, by the mid C18th these premises had grown and the average number of employees increased to 40-50. By the early 19th Century firms were often employed twice that number and increasingly included semi-skilled or unskilled workers.\(^\text{109}\) The trade societies were a natural corollary to these changes.

In summary, there are several key differences between England and France that can be noted here.

- In France guilds were well established while in England the equivalent organisations were struggling to accommodate issues emerging around training, pricing, wages and benefits during this period. While guild members in France received much better protection and benefits, those outside of the guild system were not well served and probably worse off in many cases than craftsman in England.
- While in France, the guilds were part of the regal system; it was quite different in England. In England, the legal system supported workshop owners (as clearly demonstrated by the laws passed to frustrate the trade societies – as witnessed by the strike of 1761). While guilds in France were part of ‘the system’, in England they the trade associations represented a political struggle against ‘the system’.

• It is clear that England was in the process of moving from a craftsman-dominated industry to more industrial modes of manufacture. There were continuous efforts by managers to hire cheap unskilled and semi-skilled labour while the makers were fighting to retain their status as skilled craftsmen. The French approach to getting cutting costs was to use the protected craftsmen who operated outside of the guild system.

• Both England and France were moving towards a society of consumption and the modern phenomenon of ‘shopping’.

• Consistent with the move from a guild system to a manufacturing system, the English training programs were starting to change from an apprentice system to a system dependent on semi-skilled labour.

F. Chippendale’s Business

Thomas Chippendale’s business was a London furniture making company that first made its name by offering fashionable furniture in the Rococo style. As described above, in a very astute marketing move, Chippendale published a book of designs called The Gentleman and the Cabinet-Maker’s Director, which would set the standard for all of the design books to follow.

In many ways, the Chippendale workshop was exceptional. First of all, he was a cabinetmaker, who ran a workshop and who also possessed a remarkable gift for design.
While it would be many years before furniture-making companies would routinely hire specialist designers, at this moment in time many companies merely copied designs or followed instructions from architects. John Linnell was another cabinetmaker that was an accomplished designer and Ince and Mayhew were also interesting; though both had trained as cabinetmakers, Ince took on the role of designer while Mayhew retained responsibility for the cabinetmaking.

Chippendale’s workshop (See Figure 4-6) shows just how integrated his production was. We can see he employed carvers, gilders, upholsters, glass cutters/grinders, metal workers polishers as well as chair makers and cabinetmakers. He was also known to have hired local workers when needed. At Harewood House for example he was known to have hired a local man who worked for

---

Chippendale at Harewood for nearly a year as pieces of furniture were delivered, making small repairs and in one case applying brick dust to the finish, to colour and fill the grain and polish the surface. It is assumed that he also performed some assembly work and helped to set up the furniture. \(^{112}\)

We do not know precisely how many craftsmen Chippendale employed, however we do know that on one occasion when fire broke out that 22 craftsmen lost their tools - as he advertised the affair in the London papers to try get people to contribute to the effort to replace them \(^{113}\).

Given the different trades his workshop housed, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the number Chippendale employed was in the range of 30 – 40. Also, we know that he had very few apprentices, which again suggests a relatively small workforce. \(^{114}\) Thus, the Chippendale workshop was probably a small to medium size shop relative to other furniture shops in terms of the number of employees – and certainly much smaller than the operation at Seddon’s \(^{115}\).

---

\(^{111}\) See A. Mullins, Local Furniture Makers at Harewood House as Representatives of Provincial Craftsmen, *Journal of the Furniture History Society*, Vol 1, 1965, pp. 33-37. While it is just speculation, it could be the case that local workmen produced the Harewood Dressing Table that is discussed in some detail in Chapter V.

\(^{112}\) Internal document at Harewood House files, draft presentation – No date or author was given.


\(^{115}\) C. Gilbert describes Seddon as having reached ‘tycoon proportions’ because of the large size of his workshop. See C. Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, p. 24.
Despite Chippendale’s celebrity, he did not end up wealthy. In fact, on several occasions during his career he required financial help and called upon the support of three investors at different times during his business life - and clearly after the workshop fire of 1755, Chippendale did not have the funds to replace the tools lost by 22 of his employees. This qualified level of financial success was probably typical of furniture making in England and contrasts sharply with the fortunes of Chippendale’s French counterparts.

It is interesting to note that Chippendale together with other high-end cabinetmakers like Ince and Mayhew, imported furniture from France - incidentally both of these companies were fined at one time or another for importing furniture without paying the proper import duties. In such cases, this imported furniture would have been finished in England. This furniture often took the form of unfinished chairs. This was certainly so in the case of Chippendale - which would suggest that the prices of such chairs were less in France than in England, which perhaps suggests that they were purchasing from non-guild makers.

G. Moving Toward Mechanization

The late C18th represented changes in many different areas. Booths and street pedlars were making way for store fronts with glass fronts; small furniture making businesses were evolving into larger operations producing a plethora of different types of furniture; design was evolving from Rococo to Neo-Classical etc. This was evident particularly in the growing industrialization of work and of the use of machinery to perform tasks previously done by hand – a phenomenon that will be examined more closely in the following chapter. While some ‘machines’ had long been employed in furniture making (pole lathes and water and wind powered saws for example\textsuperscript{116}) the C18th saw a steady increase in mechanisation.

\textsuperscript{116} Referring to correspondence with the U.K. The Tools and Trades History Society (TATHS) and to P. George, Les Bois de Placage it le Débit Mécanique de Bois, \textit{La Conservation du Bois dans le Patrimoine Culture, Journées D’Études de la S.F.I.C, (conference)}, Besancon-Vesoul, 1990, pp. 15-26 both water and wind powered saw mills had been around since the C17th. There were multiple blade saws that theoretically could cut multiple sheets of veneer at one time; they appear to have only been used to cut timbers.
although the wholesale industrialisation of the furniture would have to wait until the C19th. C. Edwards for example, explains that mechanised saws, and planning machines had been developed as early as 1776 (invented by Leonard Hatton) but it is hard to judge how rapidly such inventions were taken up by the trade.\footnote{C. Edwards, Tools and Techniques: 1600-1840.} Take the cutting of veneers for example, where both Roubo and Diderot still shows veneers being cut by hand in France circa 1765.\footnote{See A. Roubo, L’Art Du Menuisier and see the pictures on the following pages.} The first date established by this author for a saw set in a moveable frame to cut veneers operative in France was 1799 (see Figure 4-8). In England it was Brunel in 1805 who first developed a mechanical saw to cut veneers in 1805.\footnote{C. Edwards, Tools and Techniques: 1600-1840.} While it is theoretically possible that mechanized saws were employed to cut veneers before that date, there is presently no evidence to substantiate this. Similarly, for other mechanical processes, it was 1791 and 1793 respectively that a mechanized approach to cutting joints was first patented but it was not introduced commercially until the mid C19th. It was also 1808 before the first band saw was invented but even this required the development of a reliable blade before it became a useful commercial tool.\footnote{C. Edwards, Tools and Techniques: 1600-1840.} So it seems that throughout this period, the use of machinery to help make furniture
faster and more efficiently was barely developed. According to P. Kirkham, the only real advances that were made in the furniture trade of the C18th was in regard to the preparation of the timber; improvements in cutting the wood into planks and in planning and preparing the wood for use in furniture. All of this took place at the mills where the wood was prepared.121 As shown in the images that follow taken from books published between 1750 and 1770, workshops were almost exclusively dependent upon hand skills (See Figure 4-9 and 4-10).

Figure 4-9: In the upper drawing, two sawyers cutting veneers from a log using a large clamp to hold the log, and a double handled saw to cut it. On the lower left is someone using a clamp to hold the veneer to allow for the use of a skill saw to cut marquetry patterns, on the lower right is someone using what is described as a molding plane.
As discussed in this chapter, furniture production was to undergo a radical change in the late C18th. This is exemplified by both the German furniture maker Roentgen and the French *Marchand Mercier* Dominique Daguerre, who sold furniture to fashionable customers in both England and France. In England, the emerging shops and warehouses were frequently being opened up by furniture makers themselves while France saw the emergence of the *Marchand Merciers*. In both cases, furniture played its part in the increasingly sophisticated wares on offer to an increasingly affluent clientele. Shopping became a democratic phenomenon where goods were displayed and the purchase of fashionable goods became the measure of new codes of social behaviour. Despite these
changes, furniture was still largely made by hand by increasing numbers of craftsmen and industrialisation would have to wait for the new century.\footnote{S. Baley, in \textit{Shops} suggests that the stores and the catalogues used to entice people created demand for furniture that was not there before this period. Thus, while the shops were only designed to meet needs, they in fact created needs leading to an upward spiral in sales. It could be that this progression created the need for people to look for more efficient and faster ways to make furniture resulting in the development of new machines to use within the shops.}

Ironically nothing indicates that either Chippendale or Riesener (the subjects at the heart of this thesis) made use of the newly emerging stores to sell their furniture; they relied upon a much more personal approach instead, meeting with clients, discussing their needs and designing furniture to meet their needs\footnote{It should be pointed out that, as seen in Figure 4-6, there was what was called a counting room. This appears to be too small to be a display room for furniture and is most likely a small office like that which is shown on the cover for this chapter (A Cabinet-Maker’s Office, painting, unknown artist, ca 1770, Great Britain. Picture was obtained from the Victoria & Albert collection from the websitewhere the cover was found.) Access to the site was lost.} However Chippendale did create one of the earliest catalogues and he clearly understood the importance of advertising – arguably the main engine of the consumer society we see emerge in the so-called \textit{age of elegance}.