The diversity of the selected case studies—including large cities such as Lille and its pentagonal citadel, the mountain site of Besançon, where he first experienced bastioned towers, the ex-novo urban creation of Neuf-Brisach, the networks of forts of Joux in Franche-Comté, the seaports and arsenals of Toulon and Dunkerque—shed full light on Vauban’s ability to create and adjust specific schemes according to each site’s natural qualities and constraints. Considering fortifications as “large immobile machines without other actions or virtues than the ones given by the men employed to their defense,” Vauban demonstrated all his talent and skill at finding appropriate solutions for each case, often rethinking their urban layout and composition to allow for more ordonnance and fluidity.1 Constantly adapting the principles of flanking and deflanking to defend against artillery fire, he was also free and inventive enough to unearth and adjust, when pertinent, long-forsaken shapes such as the round medieval tower. Attentive to detail, he paid great attention to the construction of buildings and to the sculpture adorning city gates, bastions, and bartizans, which he considered instrumental in symbolizing “the King’s magnificence.”2 Several drawings exhibited, such as the one for Neuf-Brisach dating from 1699, received his signature of approval after having been the subject of long discussions with the king and his ministers. Sometimes influential royal architects were consulted, such as Jules Hardouin-Mansard, who was asked to design Lille’s gates.

Vauban’s important legacy was discussed in the fourth section of the exhibition, “Vauban and his Successors.” It showed how his followers, neglecting to pass on his spirit of constant adaptation and invention, contributed to the reduction of his flexible conceptions to mere systems. While Vauban persistently upheld that “the art of fortification does not consist in rules and systems but only in good sense and experience,” the documents exhibited, including wooden models created for the students of military schools, show various attempts at classifying his work for the sake of education. Even experienced military engineers such as Louis de Cormontaigne or Bernard Forest de Bélidor, whose models were also displayed, followed this general trend toward taxonomy.

“What Future for Vauban’s Heritage?”—the exhibition’s fifth and last section—was designed by another curatorial team, and it was a somewhat disappointing conclusion. Rather awkwardly separated from the rest by a large glass wall, its scenography fell far short of matching the dense displays of the previous sections. Composed of eight white contemporary models of recently rehabilitated forts and fortified cities—including Bayonne, Briançon, Gravelines, and Maubeuge—it was supplemented by texts and video interviews with those in charge of the projects. Although aiming to convey the spirit of a “contemporary architecture workshop,” the minimalist and repetitive display of documents failed to express the fascinating conservation and adaptive-use potential of a military heritage that was often only restored by Vauban.3 Having mended or reshaped almost all the existing French fortifications during his career, Vauban’s legacy today presents a colossal urban and architectural national challenge, consisting of large masses of earth, stone, and bricks subtly incorporated in the landscape and often buried under wild vegetation—in other words, “large immobile machines without other actions or virtues than the ones given by the men employed to their restoration.”

The show was complemented by a comprehensive catalog comprising thirty-eight essays by French and foreign scholars. This is an essential reference text concerning the engineer’s activity and work in the fields of town planning, fortification, and architecture.

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Publication Related to the Exhibition

Notes
2. The most important investigation is the publication in 2007 of the unabridged annotated publication of his Ouvrages (Edle Trifles), Vauban wrote these twelve volumes on war administration, siegework, economics, and politics during his “moments of leisure.” See Michèle Virad, ed., Les Ouvrages de Monsieur de Vauban. (Seyssel, 2007). Other recent publications include Emile d’Orgeix, Victoria Sanger, Michèle Virad, Isabelle Warmoes, Vauban. La pierre et la plume (Paris, 2007); Guillaume Monsaingeon, Un militaire très civil (Paris, 2007); and Philippe Prost, Vauban. Le style de l’intelligence. Une autre source pour l’architecture contemporaine (Paris, 2007).

Quand Versailles était meublé d’argent—When Versailles Was Furnished in Silver
Château of Versailles
20 November 2007—9 March 2008

In December 1689, King Louis XIV startled his court, and one might say the world, by sending all of his silver to the mint to help pay for his war with the League of Augsburg. The last of it was melted down in February 1690. Some years ago, at the time of the exhibition Versailles et les tables royales en Europe,1 Mogens Bencard, then director of the Danish Royal Collections at Rosenborg Castle, suggested the possibility of a show to evoke the era of that lost silver at Versailles by drawing from the substantial collections at Rosenborg.2 His idea followed the approach of the tables royales exhibition, which had drawn from foreign collections to present objects similar to what had been used at Versailles. For years the exhibition remained a dream of the curators, especially of Béatrix Saule, con-
servateur en chef and director of the Center of Research at Versailles, and was further discussed with Nels-Knud Liebgott (successor to Bencard) and Jørgen Hein (now chief curator at Rosenborg).

Queen Margrethe of Denmark suggested that the exhibition should take place during the period when Rosenborg would be closed for repairs. When this unique opportunity presented itself, Christine Albanel, then president of the Etablissement public du musée et du domaine national de Versailles, proposed showing the Danish silver together with other pieces in the Grand Apartment of Louis XIV. Lenders from England, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, and Russia were enthusiastic at the idea of their works being displayed in the splendidly appropriate setting of Versailles, and eventually almost all of the desired loans were approved and sent, including the little-known furniture preserved at the Esterházy castle of Forchtenstein. In November 2007 about ninety large silver objects from European princely collections were displayed in the Salon de l’Abondance and the salons of Venus, Diana, Mars, Mercury, Apollo.

The concept of the show, as developed by the curators, was to evoke the appearance of a major part of the interior of the Château of Versailles during the brief period from 1682 (when Louis XIV made Versailles his official residence) to 1689, specifically the famed evening entertainments offered by the king to the court during the winter from six to ten p.m., Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Famously described in 1683 by the Abbé Bourdelot, these were referred to by the French court as l’Appartement. About them Madeleine de Scudéri wrote in 1684, “I can assure you, without exaggerating, that you have never seen anything comparable.”

Jacques Garcia, the exhibition’s designer, had impressively restored his own château, Champ de Bataille, and was charmed by the idea of showing the silver under candlelight. Describing his approach, he said, “Red and green curtains, the original colors, were put back on all the windows, and kept closed. The exhibition is lit by flickering lights, and each room has about the same number of lights as indicated by the inventories. We placed rows of lights above the doors, in keeping with engravings of the period.”

The decision to use electric candles posed serious problems for the display of the works, since the lights could only reasonably be placed on tables or higher, and many of the silver gueridons and chandeliers could not be wired. If lighting were limited to sources above, the lower parts of the works on display, often of considerable interest, would have been impossible to see. Further, the location of the exhibition was also a major challenge, since the Grand Apartment could not be closed to
the tens of thousands of tourists who visit the château each week. The designer successfully confronted both the lighting and crowd problems, and solved them with barriers that embedded lights in their bases, with the levels of lighting from below carefully attuned to that produced by the electric candles above. Thus the rooms were evenly suffused with a golden glow, to striking effect.

The rooms were furnished the way they appeared during the evenings of the Appartement. This approach meant that not only was a special historical moment evoked, but a wide range of works could be included. The choice of textiles for the installation was also notably successful, even if the fabrics were far less grand and expensive than those of the time of Louis XIV. And paintings and stone sculptures (some in their original locations and many now part of the permanent decor of the rooms) looked even more impressive when shown with the silver than they usually do.

The Venus Salon, originally at the top of the Stairway of the Ambassadors and one of the most lavishly decorated rooms in the Grand Apartment, was (and is) richly embellished with colored marbles appropriate to a vestibule, and its large ceiling of gilded plaster is inset with several paintings. This room was arranged to suggest its use for refreshments, for which it had been used during Louis's evenings. A pair of buffets covered in red velvet with gold braid were introduced, one at each end of the large room. Their appearance was greatly enhanced by candles and garlands of flowers, and also by the architectural perspectives painted by Jacques Rousseau on the walls behind—part of the Salon's original decoration. On one buffet, against the west wall, the plate of Augustus the Strong (of Saxony and Poland) was displayed. All this massive silver from the court of Dresden was made in Augsburg. There was also a table with a white cloth and pyramids of apples, standing against the long (south) wall, opposite the windows and between the buffets, placed in front of Jean Warin’s life-sized full-length marble statue of King Augustus, whose plates and covered dishes were based on the designs of the table service of Louis XIV. (As a young man Augustus had been received in the next room, the Salon of Diana, by the French king.)

Major pieces of furniture dominated the Salon of Mars, a long room with a central fireplace on the interior wall. It is the largest interior in the Grand Apartment, decorated with a theme of war and arms that is developed in paintings and gilt plaster sculptures, and its walls are covered still with red textiles. It had originally been intended as a room for guards, but by the 1680s it had been transformed into a ballroom with the addition of two small balconies (now gone) for musicians. Since no special furnishings were needed to reflect the use of the room for dancing, and since period card tables that would have been appropriate were unavailable, the exhibition designers took the opportunity to display a number of diverse large silver pieces, among the most striking of which was state furniture from the residence of the prince of Hanover at Marienberg: two tables, four gueridons, two mirrors (more than two meters tall), four chairs, and an armchair. No less impressive was the silver contribution from Rosenborg: two tables réchauds, a fireplace screen, and a pair of firedogs with globes. Two famous paintings flank the fireplace today as they did in the 1680s: Charles Le Brun’s Alexander and the Women of Darius and Paolo Veronese’s Supper at Emmaus (the latter, now in the Louvre, was represented by a seventeenth-century copy). The Danish grouping around the fireplace, enhanced by six tall gueridons (from Rosenborg), became the visual climax of the room. The whole display from Marienberg and Copenhagen was lighted by three English silver chandeliers (newly electrified), which had been made for King George II, and it was in this room that the effect of the glowing candlelight reflected from the silver was to be most completely experienced.

The Apollo Salon, with its ceiling depicting the sun god riding through the heavens on his chariot (by Charles de La Fosse), was the last in the show in which silver furnishings were displayed. It was, appropriately, made up as Louis’s throne room, for it was there (or in the Hall of Mirrors) that he held audiences of the very greatest importance. A modern dais was in place for the show, and a silver throne was returned to the spot. The throne was the silver coronation throne of Queen Sofia Magdalena of Denmark, brought from Rosenborg. Although far less massive than Louis’s, it stood eight feet tall and was surmounted by similar reclining allegorical figures. A life-sized silver lion, one of three that are usually placed near the thrones at Rosenborg Castle, while not entirely appropriate for this place at Versailles, worked nicely in a room furnished with other lavish decorations. Among these was a two-meter high mirror lent from the Prussian royal collections, decorated with an allegory of the goddess Minerva as Protector of the Arts and well suited for this salon dedicated to Apollo, the patron of the muses.

The theme that provided the title of the exhibition, Louis XIV’s own silver, was represented by exhibits in three areas at both ends of the Grand Apartment. In the Hercules Salon a red velvet wall was built in the center of the room to display, on one side, the tapestry Histoire du Roy : King Louis’s Visit to the Gobelins, based on a cartoon by Le Brun, which depicts some of Louis’s silver at full scale. On the reverse were all of the drawings and prints currently considered to represent the king’s silver, including several of Le Brun’s studies for lost works. In the Salon de la Guerre, Claude Guy Hallé’s enormous canvas Apology Made to Louis XIV by the Doge of Genoa in the Hall of Mirrors, May 15, 1685 was shown. This picture of 1710 contained a life-sized, though inaccurate, recreation of the setting for an event when much of Louis’s greatest silver was on display. A correction of Hallé’s colorful image was fully visible from the Salon de la Guerre through the arch of the doorway toward the Hall of Mirrors. At the far end of the gallery stood an accurate full-scale model in painted wood and textiles of the throne itself, with large silver objects as arranged for the Siamese Embassy of 1686.

It was only in Louis XIV’s own rooms that a satisfactory evocation of the original.
ambience of the palace could be realized, and the organizers were successful in doing this. Some might object that the silver was not quite given its full due, shown as it was in the semidarkness of electrical candlelight and placed sometimes too far from the visitors (though it was given full value in the catalog), or that this exhibit lacked authenticity, because it used foreign material, but all of the works shown were great princely pieces, and there were few complaints from the large crowds, said to have been twice the usual number of visitors. A DVD was available for purchase at the château at the time of the show, one that was devoted to preserving a sense of the making of the exhibition—the packing up abroad, the unpacking of the objects as they arrived at Versailles, and their placement in the rooms. A tour of the exhibition was also included on the DVD.

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Publications Related to the Exhibition


Petrine Farenc and Jean-Christophe Claude, eds. When Versailles was Furnished in Silver, special issue of Beaux Arts (2007), 66 pp., 57 illus., €9

Notes
2. Mogens Bencard, Silver Furniture (Copenhagen, 1992). Two exhibitions that have substantially covered the subject of silver furniture have taken place in the recent past: Bencard’s Silver Furniture, and Lorenz Seelig, Silber und Gold. Augsburger Goldschmiedkunst für die Hase Europas (Munich, 1994). Many objects shown at Versailles were exhibited at these venues.

6. A drawing from the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm included in the show, THC 1554, shows one of the hangings for one wall of the Apollo Salon from the period of the Appartement. See Nicodemus Tessin the Younger, Travel Notes 1671–77 and 1687–88, ed. Merit Laine and Börje Magnusson, from Nicodemus Tessin the Younger, Sources Works Collections (Stockholm, 2002), 198–201. Tessin noted that the gold embroidery appeared like sculpture and was up to 5 inches deep.

Architectural Shades and Shadows: The Continuing Tradition of the Beaux-Arts
The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Philadelphia
7 April–30 May 2008

This exhibition at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia was titled Architectural Shades and Shadows, although it could have been called Two Classicists, referring to John Frederick Harbeson and John Blatteau, whose architectural renderings comprised this small but interesting presentation.

Harbeson (1888–1986) is not much remembered today outside Philadelphia, but in the first half of the twentieth century he played an influential role in the dissemination of the teachings of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in the United States. He was born in Philadelphia and received his architectural education at the University of Pennsylvania. Although he did not attend the Ecole, his education was the next best thing, for among his teachers was a notable ancien élève, Paul Philippe Cret. Cret had been brought to the university from France in 1903 to be professor of design. In time, his presence made Penn the leading architecture program in the country. Only twenty-seven at the time of his arrival, Cret had already distinguished himself at the Ecole, and in 1907 he won a national competition for a temporary building to host a meeting of the Pan-American Union in Washington, D.C. (The competition jury, headed by Charles Follen McKim, was so impressed by the design that they recommended the building be permanent.) Like practitioner-teachers then and now, Cret recruited employees from among his most talented students, and he invited Harbeson to join his office, eventually making him a partner. The Cret firm produced many first-rate buildings such as the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Federal Reserve Board Building in Washington, D.C., the Detroit Institute of the Arts, the Rodin Museum and the Barnes Collection in Philadelphia, and several World War I memorials in France. After Cret’s death in 1945, Harbeson joined with younger associates to found Harbeson, Hough, Livingston and Larson. The firm, which was obliged by changing fashions to make the transition from Cret’s stripped classicism to what turned out to be a rather tepid modernism, never achieved its previous high standard.

Like Cret, Harbeson combined practice with teaching, and taught at the University of Pennsylvania for twenty-three years, including eight years as head of the Department of Architecture. In 1927, he summarized the experience in The Study of Architectural Design, a comprehensive textbook based on a series of articles that he had written for Pencil Points magazine a few years earlier. The book was widely used by students, especially those without direct access to a formal Beaux-Arts program, and together with the New York-based Beaux-Arts Institute of Design, contributed to the high quality of American architecture during that period. Blatteau and Sandra L. Tatman, the Athenaeum’s executive director and curator of the exhibition, who together have written the introduction to a new edition of The Study of Architectural Design that was published by Norton last year, discuss Harbeson’s book as “the best text in English to describe, step by step, the system of architectural education termed the Beaux-Arts method.”

Drawing, especially watercolor rendering, was a key ingredient of the Beaux-Arts method: students learned to stretch paper and apply graded washes to create the requisite “shades and shadows.” The Athenaeum exhibition contains several of Harbeson’s student renderings, including