

THE WALLACE COLLECTION ANNOUNCES NEW SEASON CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND WORK OF FRENCH CABINETMAKER JEAN-HENRI RIESENER

As the culmination of a five-year research project, the Wallace Collection announces a new publication, season of online talks, onsite display, digital trail, and a new microsite dedicated to Jean-Henri Riesener, cabinetmaker to Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette



Jean-Henri Riesener, Roll-top Desk (Bureau à cylindre) c.1770 © The Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London.

The Wallace Collection will be reopening the museum after the second national lockdown with a season celebrating the life and work of French cabinetmaker Jean-Henri Riesener, it has been announced today (30 November 2020).

The Riesener Season at the Wallace Collection will encompass a display of Riesener's furniture with an accompanying digital trail, a fascinating new book about the cabinetmaker, a dedicated microsite exploring the life and work of the artist, and a series of free online public events. This season is the culmination of a five-year research project led by the Wallace Collection in partnership with Royal Collection Trust and Waddesdon Manor, two other highly important collections of Riesener furniture that were put together by George IV and Ferdinand and Alice de Rothschild respectively.

Jean-Henri Riesener (1734-1806) was the most important cabinetmaker in France during Louis XVI's reign. From humble beginnings as a German emigrant, he found work in Paris and went on to become the most successful cabinetmaker of his generation. His work was renowned for its floral and figurative marquetry and spectacular gilt-bronze mounts and he was appointed cabinetmaker to Louis XVI in 1774. He was Marie-Antoinette's favourite cabinetmaker, providing furniture for her private apartments in several royal palaces. In the nineteenth century, his name became synonymous with craftsmanship and luxury, and all that was admired in French furniture.

The Riesener furniture in the Wallace Collection is some of the most important in the world. It is also the single largest holding of furniture that once belonged to Marie-Antoinette outside France. Following the fall of the *ancien régime* and the Bourbon monarchy at the French Revolution, many opulent pieces of royal French furniture were sold and made their way onto the art market. One of the most important collectors was Richard Seymour-Conway, 4th Marquess of Hertford (1800-1870), who lived in Paris. An acknowledged connoisseur of eighteenth-century French decorative art, Hertford first started buying Riesener furniture in the 1840s, and by the time of his death owned over twenty pieces either by or believed to be by Riesener, showing his clear passion for the cabinetmaker's skill.

The Riesener Season Display will incorporate two themes. The Private Marie-Antoinette will explore furniture made for the queen, displaying significant pieces on specially-designed plinths in the centre of the galleries, allowing visitors to see them in the round for the first time and ensuring that every detail can be explored. The second theme is that of Riesener's Legacy. Displayed as they were in the nineteenth century by Sir Richard and Lady Wallace, two magnificent roll-top desks will be shown alongside each other in the centre of the Great Gallery. One is Riesener's masterpiece made for a French aristocrat, the comte d'Orsay, in 1770; the other is a copy commissioned by Lord Hertford in the 1850s of the most famous piece of French furniture in the world, the *Bureau du Roi*, or King's Desk, delivered by Riesener to Louis XV in 1769. These two desks will feature prominently in the forthcoming one-off Channel 4 documentary, about royal restoration, to be broadcast over the Christmas period in a primetime evening slot.

Jean-Henri Riesener. Cabinetmaker to Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, published by Philip Wilson Publishers (Hardback £50), is now available from the Wallace Collection shop and showcases the findings of the five-year Riesener Project. Edited by Dr Helen Jacobsen, Curator of French 18th-century Decorative Arts at the Wallace Collection, the book is the first major monograph on Riesener, tracing his career, his workshop, and his techniques. It also sheds new light on the collecting of Riesener furniture in the nineteenth century and catalogues the furniture in the three major British collections. Lavishly illustrated with new photography, it includes contributions from Christian Baulez, former Curator at the Château of Versailles, and curators and conservators from the Wallace Collection, Royal Collection Trust, Waddesdon Manor, and other experts. A visual glossary by Alexander Collins, former Riesener Project Leverhulme Research Fellow, provides an invaluable resource for anyone interested in Riesener furniture.

An open access microsite has also been launched by the Wallace Collection, offering a wealth of information on Riesener as a cabinetmaker, his materials and techniques, his furniture in the Wallace Collection and the 4th Marquess of Hertford as a collector. Conceived as an interactive learning resource, it is a unique repository of knowledge available to anyone anywhere in the world. The microsite utilises integrated 3D digital technologies to explore the complexity of these pieces in a way that has never been seen before, and marks a new way forward for furniture studies.

Additionally, a digital Riesener Trail has just launched on Royal Collection Trust's website. This brings together digital models and animations for all the 30 pieces in the three collections – including furniture from the Wallace Collection and Waddesdon Manor - that were part of the Riesener Project. There will also be a physical trail to see the 11 pieces of Riesener at Waddesdon opening in Spring 2021.

The series of free online talks starts on Monday 30 November with speakers from across the three partner institutions including Dr Helen Jacobsen (Curator of French 18th-century Decorative Arts, The Wallace Collection), Rufus Bird (Surveyor of The Queen's Works of Art, Royal Collection Trust), Dr Mia Jackson (Curator of Decorative Arts, Waddesdon Manor), and Alexander Collins (former Riesener Project Leverhulme Research Fellow). The talk series is in collaboration with the Furniture History Society.

Dr Xavier Bray, Director of the Wallace Collection, said:

"This has been a hugely important collaboration between three of the finest collections of French decorative art in the world - the Wallace Collection, Waddesdon Manor and the Royal Collection. We are delighted to

be able to showcase Riesener's work in this novel and unique way with our Riesener Season, a combination of open access web resources, a beautifully illustrated print publication, public talks and a display at the Wallace Collection of some of his most celebrated pieces.”

Dr Helen Jacobsen, Curator of French 18th-century Decorative Arts at the Wallace Collection, said:

“The Riesener Project has been a fascinating journey, opening our eyes to the outstanding skills and creativity of this German immigrant in Paris who made his fortune at the court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. The passion for Riesener furniture after his death has ensured that we have an unrivalled collection of his works in Britain, and the activities of the Riesener Season will bring these pieces into the spotlight once more, enabling a new generation to admire and marvel at his work.”

Jürgen Huber, Senior Furniture Conservator at the Wallace Collection, said:

“I am so pleased to see the two Roll-top desks in the Great Gallery where these impressive pieces are shown in a complete different setting. Furthermore having other Riesener Masterpieces displayed as never before gives a unique 360 degree access, allowing the visitor to appreciate aspects of Riesener’s technical ingenuity.”

The Riesener Project was made possible thanks to the support of several donors, notably The NJT Foundation and The Leverhulme Trust. The display has been generously sponsored by the NJT Foundation with Colette and Philip Hubbard. The microsite was made possible through the generosity of The Tavolozza Foundation. A full list of publication and project sponsors can be found in *Jean-Henri Riesener. Cabinetmaker to Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette*.

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Notes to Editors

The Riesener Display at the Wallace Collection runs from 3 December 2020 until 5 April 2021.

The Jean-Henri Riesener Microsite can be found at www.wallacecollection.org/riesener

Full details of the Riesener events programme can be found at www.wallacecollection.org/whats-on

Full details of *Jean-Henri Riesener. Cabinetmaker to Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. Furniture in the Wallace Collection, Royal Collection and Waddesdon Manor* can be found at <https://wallacecollectionshop.org/collections/books/products/jean-henri-riesener-cabinetmaker-to-louis-xvi-and-marie-antoinette-hardback>

For further information about the publication, or to request a review copy, please contact Brittani Davies at Philip Wilson Publishers on Brittani.davies@bloomsbury.com

The Riesener Digital Trail can be found at <https://rct.uk/collection/jean-henri-riesener>

For further press information please contact Kathryn Havelock or Billy Ward on press@wallacecollection.org / 07483 310811

For public information, please print 020 7560 9500 or wallacecollection.org
The Wallace Collection, Hertford House, Manchester Square, London, W1U 3BN

Images

This release and images of Riesener pieces are available for download:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1SfQ9hqYTKMrrcocLqt7mysuk4j5JyDbt>

Social Media

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YouTube: [TheWallacecollection](https://www.youtube.com/TheWallacecollection)

About the Wallace Collection

As one of Britain's preeminent cultural institutions, the Wallace Collection is home to one of the most significant ensembles of fine and decorative arts in the world. Highlights include oil paintings from the fourteenth to the late nineteenth centuries by artists such as Titian, Velazquez, Rubens and Van Dyck; princely arms and armour; and one of the finest collections of eighteenth-century French paintings and decorative arts. Visitors can also enjoy superb medieval and Renaissance objects, including Limoges enamel, maiolica, glass and bronzes. Displayed at Hertford House, former home to Sir Richard and Lady Wallace, this outstanding collection is displayed in a manner designed to evoke the lives and tastes of its founders, creating a special ambiance that remains an essential part of its charm.

Find out more: www.wallacecollection.org

About Royal Collection Trust

Royal Collection Trust, a department of the Royal Household, is responsible for the care of the Royal Collection and manages the public opening of the official residences of The Queen. Income generated from admissions and from associated commercial activities contributes directly to The Royal Collection Trust, a registered charity. The aims of The Trust are the care and conservation of the Royal Collection, and the promotion of access and enjoyment through exhibitions, publications, loans and educational programmes. Royal Collection Trust's work is undertaken without public funding of any kind.

The Royal Collection is among the largest and most important art collections in the world, and one of the last great European royal collections to remain intact. It comprises almost all aspects of the fine and decorative arts, and is spread among some 15 royal residences and former residences across the UK, most of which are regularly open to the public. The Royal Collection is held in trust by the Sovereign for her successors and the nation, and is not owned by The Queen as a private individual.

<https://www.rct.uk/>

About Waddesdon Manor

Waddesdon Manor was built at the end of the 19th century by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild in the style of a French early 16th-century château. Baron Ferdinand was an inspired collector and the house was designed to showcase his exceptional collection of French 18th-century furniture, Sèvres porcelain, English portraits and other decorative arts. When Ferdinand died in 1898, he left Waddesdon to his sister, Alice. Upon her death the house passed to her great-nephew, James de Rothschild, who inherited a substantial part of his father Baron Edmond's great collection. In 1957, in order to ensure its future in perpetuity, Waddesdon was bequeathed to the National Trust. The Rothschild family continues to run Waddesdon through a family charitable trust under the chairmanship of Lord Rothschild.

Find out more: <https://waddesdon.org.uk/about-us/press/notes-for-editors/>