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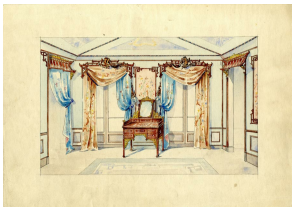

Watercolor from the archives of the Maison des Bambous, circa 1890-1900.

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Plate put on a furniture on which we can read Maison des Bambous. Courtesy LV Antiquités.

“La Maison des Bambous” plays a very important role in the history of Far East inspired French furniture. It was founded in 1872 by Alfred Perret and Ernest Viber, whose lives still tend to be overlooked.

Alfred Perret appeared on his own in the Trade Directory of Didot-Bottin of 1879, under the category “bamboo articles”. Situated in the second arrondissement in Paris, he specialised in “luxury basketry, bamboo furniture and garden features”, and in 1880 he was classed as a manufacturer. We know that Alfred Perret was present at the Universal Exhibition of 1878, which proves that he must have been active before this date. However the Didot-Bottin doesn't talk about his work during the preceding years, making it hard to retrace the history of this company “La Maison des Bambous”.

As noted in the directory of 1882, Perret moved from number 30 of rue du Quatre-Septembre to number 33 of the same street, which stayed the historical headquarters of the company until after the First World War. From 1881 the company seemed to diversify its production but was still predominantly focused on “arm chairs, chairs, and sofas made out of bamboo, rattan and wicker (...) wicker entrances for parks, gardens and beaches, and bulrush deck chairs”. From this date it seems that the company also started to import goods as it began to offer Indian and Japanese furniture. From 1884, the company's activity continued to expand with the production of lacquer furniture and “fancy furniture”. We believe that this is also when the company started to produce carved wood furniture.

In 1886 Albert Perret's son and Vibert became the heads of the company. The company's activity continued to expand, but as well as presenting their own furniture, they started to offer true works of art of Far East origin, several of which were bought by the Duke of Montmorency in 1895.

In 1889 the Didot-Bottin classed the company as producer of “Chinese and Japanese furniture and items”. The company also took part in the Universal Exhibition of that year and won two gold medals.

In 1894 the company featured in the Didot-Bottin under the name of “Perret and Vibert”. We believe that this is thus when Albert handed the running of the company over to his son and Ernest Vibert.

In 1894 the company exhibited a diverse range of works of art of Far East origin at the Universal, International and Colonial Exhibition of Lyon.

At the Exhibition of Horticulture of Tuileries, that took place in May during the same year, Perret and Vibert were awarded first prize for “their garden and greenhouse furniture”.

Towards the end of 1894, Perret and Vibert changed their shop at rue du Quatre-Septembre by creating ten new rooms, which were used to exhibit their Japanese and Chinese inspired furniture.

In May 1895, Perret and Vibert organised an “exhibition of campaign furniture and seats for castles and villas”, which was visited by Melle Marsy, an actress in French comedy, and by Empress Eugénie in order to furnish her villa. Eugénie in fact was a regular client of la Maison des Bambous, since she bought several pieces of furniture from them for her villa.

In October of the same year the King of Greece, George the first, paid a visit to rue du Quatre-Septembre, and “chose a variety of these little pretty pieces of furniture and seats made out of carved wood and decorated bamboo” as well as several pieces of bronze furniture and furniture made out of porcelain from Japan, and some embroidered screens intended

to decorate his winter palace near Athens. Perret and Vibert also produced seats and tables made out of Bamboo for the most prestigious yachts like the Eros or the Britannia.

In 1896, la Maison des Bambous received visits from the Field Marshall Prince Yamagata and the queen of Portugal, Amélie d'Orléans.

In 1900 Perret and Vibert once again exhibited their work at the Universal Exhibition of Paris, under the category of “luxury and cheap furniture”. They were rewarded with a silver medal for their “high quality lacquered and marquetry furniture”.

In 1910 la Maison des Bambous already had a “branch” at 170 Boulevard Haussmann. The company permanently moved to this address at the end of 1917 and stayed their until the company closed its doors in 1994. The building at 170 Boulevard Haussmann continued to specialise in Far East furniture because it then became the building for la Compagnie de l'Orient et de la Chine (COC).