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### ANTIQUES

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## Penetrating The Secrets Of Porcelain

Nearly everyone is familiar with blue and white Delft tiles from the Netherlands, but few know much about Delft's original rival in France, the Saint-Cloud porcelain factory, which thrived between 1690 and 1766 in the commune of Saint-Cloud, across the river from Paris.

Now there is an opportunity to see about 300 pieces of Saint-Cloud soft-paste porcelain at a beautifully mounted exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, 18 West 86th Street in Manhattan, through Oct. 24.

"Porcelain was considered a mysterious and magical material in 1700," the London porcelain dealer Errol Manners said.

"There were boatloads of blue and white coming in from China in the 17th century," he explained, "but the Europeans hadn't yet discovered the secret of making it. When Louis XIV saw people pouring out money for it, he sponsored experiments at French factories. For royalty, having a porcelain factory was a great prestigious thing, like having a stable of fine race horses. It was very cutting-edge."

Indeed, in the mid-1660's, several countries in Europe tried to figure out how to make porcelain; the race involved international spying as well as the poaching of talent.

Bertrand Rondot, the curator from Paris's Musée des Arts Décoratifs who organized the Bard show, said France had played a leading role in this contest. He explained that Louis XIV's finance minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-83), took it upon himself to stimulate the production of porcelain by having the King grant a royal privilege to Saint-Cloud.

By 1660, France had been producing faience, or earthenware, for nearly a century. But the story of French porcelain really starts with two brothers, Claude and François Révérend, who had a passion for ceramics. Claude was a successful Paris salt merchant who imported faience from the Netherlands. François had worked in faience factories in Rouen from 1648 to 1653.

In 1664, Claude obtained a royal license to make faience and decided to build a factory in Saint-Cloud, probably because the family had connec-



Bard Graduate Center of Decorative Arts

A vase made at the Saint-Cloud porcelain factory around 1700, at Bard.

tions there with Louis XIV's brother, the Duc d'Orléans, who lived in the town. In 1664, another Révérend brother, Jean, became the duke's chaplain, Mr. Rondot said, pointing out that royal patronage was important in developing a ceramics business.

Claude spent so much money building the factory, an essay in the Bard show's catalogue said, that in November 1666 he was heavily in debt and had to hand over ownership of the factory to François.

François was the director of the business until 1674. He recruited pottery workers from the Netherlands and hired Pierre Chicaneau, a faience painter from Saint-Cloud. The two must have been good friends; François Révérend was godfather to Mr. Chicaneau's daughter.

At the outset, the objective was to make faience that imitated Oriental porcelain. The factory manufactured vases for Versailles and wall tiles and tiles for lining ornamental ponds at the royal Chateau de Marly, Louis XIV's country retreat.

In 1674, Mr. Révérend handed over the directorship of the factory to Mr. Chicaneau, who began a series of experiments. He may have discovered the process for making soft-paste porcelain — that is, porcelain made

without kaolin — before he died in 1677.

"By the end of the 17th century, Saint-Cloud was not the only manufactory engaged in discovering the secret of porcelain production, but it was, in fact, the only one able to actually make 'real' porcelain and to exploit it commercially," Mr. Rondot wrote in the catalogue essay.

In 1678, after Mr. Chicaneau died, his widow, Barbe Coudray, married Henri Trou, a potter from Nevers, France. From that point on, the success of Saint-Cloud could be attributed to Ms. Coudray.

In 1683, Ms. Coudray and her husband bought the factory. By 1697, she, her husband and three of the Chicaneau children had set up a separate company solely to produce porcelain — the first such company in France.

"Barbe Coudray and Henri Trou became masters of the faience and porcelain factory established at Saint-Cloud and would remain so for 17 years," Geneviève Le Duc, who recently died, wrote in the catalogue.

When Mr. Trou died in 1700, the estate inventory of the factory included 3,146 pieces of porcelain. Again, Ms. Coudray came to the rescue.

Although porcelain production had to be halted until another royal privi-

lege was granted, she organized her family to continue making faience in the interim. In 1702, she and her son got the warrant, and she spent the next several years as the primary decision-maker in the family. Sons and daughters-in-law were all involved, but she retained her position almost until her death in 1717.

By then, the factory was established. Her son Henri Trou II and his sister-in-law Marie Moreau took over for the next 24 years. Eventually, a relative leaked the secret of porcelain-making, and the factory went bankrupt in 1766.

Saint-Cloud porcelain can be divided into three categories: blue and white, all-white and colored. It is difficult for amateurs to identify because it is often unmarked. At first, a sun, the emblem of the Sun King, was painted on the bottom; later on, some pieces were marked STCT, for Saint-Cloud Trou.

In the first decades, many of the porcelain shapes show a strong Chinese influence; there are Minglike vases, gourd-shaped pots, pots-pourris, Chinese teacups and big bowls.

Later on, other shapes were added. They mimic silver sugar sifters, inkwells and snuff boxes.

Explaining the appeal of Saint-Cloud porcelain, James Sansum, a partner at the New York gallery L'Antiquaire and the Connoisseur, said: "It has a completely different feel from hard-paste porcelain. It's softer."

David Dalva of the Dalva Brothers gallery on East 57th Street, which sells some Saint-Cloud, said its appeal was in its "charming utilitarianism."

"It's nice, organic and unpretentious," he said.

Pamela Klaber of Klaber & Klaber, private dealers in London ([www.klabe.com](http://www.klabe.com)), likes Saint-Cloud, she said, for "its very soft, creamy look."

She continued: "Porcelain is very tactile; you have to want to feel it. Saint-Cloud makes you want to pick it up. It has an unctuous look, like clotted cream. Meissen porcelain is brittle and has a hard, professional look."

Ms. Klaber is organizing a virtual exhibition of Saint-Cloud on her Web site in January.

"Saint-Cloud has been out of fashion for a long time," she said. "But it's coming back."

Michèle Beiny, a by-appointment-only Manhattan dealer who specializes in 18th-century porcelain, agreed. "There isn't a lot around, but when I get a good piece, it's gone in five minutes," she said.