





It was Auburtin who, with a rather academic meticulousness, completed the overall plans for the house. Messiah then proceeded to go back to Auburtin's work and change everything. This situation was probably brought about by Béatrice herself as she enjoyed these constant changes. In addition, as she acquired new items, such as panelling, this often led to a change of plans and made the task nigh on impossible. Auburtin and his fellows may either have been forced, or relieved, to hand the project over to others.⁵

After the completion of the structural works in 1911, the Villa and its illustrious occupants enjoyed several years of splendour, with lavish parties, and visits from society figures.⁶ Following the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 and even after the death of Maurice in 1916, Béatrice continued working on her ambitious building projects in St Jean Cap Ferrat albeit at a slightly less frenetic pace. Indeed, her sights turned to a new adventure: the acquisition of a number of adjacent villas in Monte Carlo. These were renovated and partly rebuilt and surrounded with themed gardens linking them to one another. One of the main reasons for choosing this spot seems to have been the proximity of the casino, a favourite haunt, sparing the late-night journey home to Cap Ferrat. This new project still occupied her throughout the last few years of her life. When she died in 1934, in Davos in Switzerland, extension and decoration works were underway in her houses and gardens in Monte Carlo.

As far as decorating and furnishing her houses were concerned, Béatrice was true to her family's taste for period furniture and decorative elements from the eighteenth century. While the Villa Ile de France formed the backdrop for Béatrice's entertaining, surviving drawings of the Monte Carlo villas indicate that these would have lent themselves to rather more intimate events. A few details perfectly exemplify Béatrice's exacerbated interest for aesthetic exploration and prove that she was a genuine creator: in the Ile de France, mirrors reflect the sea as well as giving to the Temple of Love a magical effect; in Monaco, she planned the construction of a canal complete with pink marble steps, light and water effects, and a mirror reflecting the whole garden. Towards the end of her life however, she moved away from this concept focusing on the outdoors, and converted her gardens in Monte Carlo by creating a series of small spaces with different themes, patios and walled gardens, thus creating an intimate atmosphere very much focusing on the interior.

As well as being art enthusiasts, collectors, and sumptuous hosts, the Rothschilds were also great commissioners, and they created enchanting atmospheres. Béatrice was true to this heritage, which she handled in the same way as her parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins did: Ferrières, Mentmore, Waddesdon Manor, Vienna, and in Paris the private hotels of rue Laffitte, Faubourg Saint Honoré, avenue Foch, rue de Monceau, rue Berryer, to name but a few.⁷

In the Villa Ile de France, beyond family traditions, Béatrice's personality was an essential and fundamental factor in the choice of the architects, landscape gardeners, and in the much more personal decisions relating to the decoration and works of art. The variety and number of items was limitless: they comprised all the most beautiful and precious pieces.

To display her treasures, Béatrice used her vivid imagination, which was thoughtful, detailed, and original, very much reflecting how fond she was of her collection. Along with eclecticism, technical modernity was an additional proof of her originality and determination. A good example of this at the Ile de France is the metal structure supporting the villa's roof, flanked with a suspended, wooden canopy, covered with plaster and held together with hundreds of iron threads, forming an interesting mix of techniques and set-like pieces, and which Béatrice was determined to complete, even if this meant using all the state of the art techniques and means at her disposal to achieve her aims. It was above all, a liking for contrasts as well as a taste for aesthetics and harmony, which led Béatrice to confront all difficulties: lush gardens in the Mediterranean, imported urban environments, a search for airiness, brightness and light in a sunny country where shade and coolness were traditionally sought.

The Rothschild Archive London has been a valuable source of evidence for study of the villas. There is a lack of archival evidence related to the acquisition, payment, or remittances, of work and objects, which limits considerably the possibility of carrying out a detailed analysis. However, as with the study of other famous collections, it is often the pieces themselves which carry information and offer a useful testimony. Consequently, the archives repatriated a few years ago from Russia to The Rothschild Archive in London are a significant source.⁸ Photographs of buildings and artefacts, brought back by Italian merchants of Florence, Rome and Naples, and showing architectural stonework used as models for moulds from castings during the construction of the villa, are of particular interest. As far as the original elements themselves are concerned, they were preserved naturally, and a number of them were part of the stone garden. Even after the war, Béatrice continued to use her network of informers to search for original elements. Thus during the design of the Spanish garden in Monte Carlo, it is Lambert, a merchant from Paris, who sent photographs and sketches for the installation of an ogival window, which was purchased by Béatrice.⁹

Research for a monograph on the Villa Ephrussi¹⁰ has shown that Béatrice was a keen auction enthusiast, which was unusual for a Rothschild. Many of her collections were bought at public auctions and she, in turn, had no hesitation to return to the auction house, not always successfully, in an effort to renew her collections, as was the case for the Louis XVI salon from

The Musée Ephrussi
Rothschild in 1996.
(Lionel de Rothschild)



Parmantier, a workshop from Lyon.¹¹ Additionally we find in the 1934 inventories that apart from a few key pieces there were only a few works of art remaining which stemmed from her father's inheritance; the majority were probably exchanged within the family, or sold in order to purchase others. However, where her favourite areas were concerned, there were no restrictions, and it seems that Béatrice made cumulative purchases, as suggested by the inventories of her porcelain (from Europe and Asia) and textiles collections.¹² Among the documents found in the Fond Laprade, which relate to the setting up of the Monte Carlo houses, there is evidence of orders placed to Jean Dunand, the lacquer artist, which testify that Béatrice was open to contemporary creations.

Béatrice collected wrought iron which often originated in Italy or Spain. Only in 1934 part of it was displayed in the patio. The greatest part of the collection being in deposit, this was only uncovered during the Institute's works to turn the villa into a museum.¹³

The panels incorporated into the villa are but a fraction of the material Béatrice had purchased, and it is not surprising that many stories exist of purchases which cannot be substantiated, and she is often quoted as making purchases for which unfortunately we no longer have any evidence. For example, Hector Lefuel cited Béatrice as having bought the panelling in 'la chambre à glaces' (the mirror room) which Joséphine Bonaparte had installed in her room, located in the attic of her house on the rue Chanteraine.¹⁴ Evidence of a number of other style and period panelling appears when reading documents related to the bequest.¹⁵



left

Béatrice's villa with its original colour scheme, in a postcard from the 1960s.

opposite

The official letter accepting Béatrice's bequest to the Institut de France.

The furniture collection currently exhibited at the Villa Ephrussi today was for the most part put together by Béatrice and her husband but also consists of a few pieces inherited from family members. The origin of the greatest part of this furniture remains a mystery, as the archival sources are lacking. By reading the few documents available at The Rothschild Archive, it is possible to recognise a number of pieces stemming from the paternal inheritance in Paris. It has been possible to identify other objects in the sales catalogues or even publications of the time.

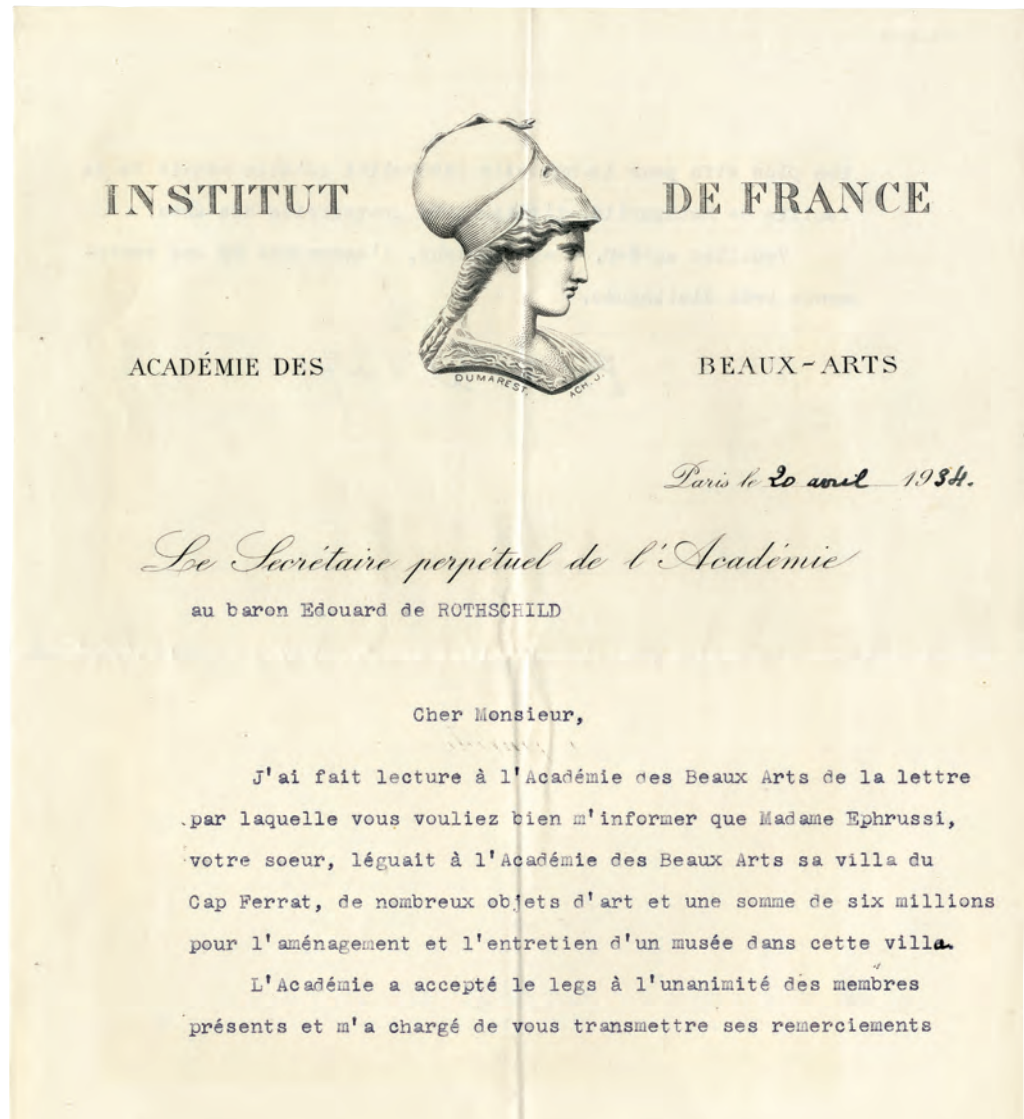
Part of the beautiful collection of paintings which Béatrice assembled during her life as a collector is still to be found in the Saint Jean Cap Ferrat villa.

By contrast to Alphonse de Rothschild, who, throughout his life, put together one of the most beautiful private collections of paintings in France, among which the famous *Astronomer*, by Vermeer, his daughter did not take to collecting works by great masters. It even seems that she discarded most of the antique and Dutch paintings, which she had inherited from her father. These were not recorded in the 1934 inventories, and they are no longer present in the villa.¹⁶

It is very possible, on the other hand, that the few impressionist paintings present in the Baroness's collection, were acquired by her husband, who gained an interest in this genre from his brother. Therefore it seems that Béatrice favoured paintings which were rather decorative and in pleasant colours, characteristic of the eighteenth century, such as works by Lancret or Schall, or drawings by Fragonard.

Béatrice's liking for colours is best illustrated by the extraordinary collection of polychrome arabesque wood panels and dated end of the 18th century, which she put together herself, and of which there exist no equivalent in France. Béatrice really took pleasure in creating these light, easy on the eye environments, and dedicated herself entirely to designing them. The way in which the paintings are placed in the villa, mirrors the way in which they are arranged in the Paris house. Hence the arrangement in the Louis XV salon of the villa, mostly reflects the arrangement of the pink salon in Paris.

Just a year after writing her will, Béatrice de Rothschild died, aged 70, in Switzerland in the Hôtel d'Angleterre in Davos. Her body was carried to Paris by undertakers Henri de Borniod and the burial took place on 11 April in the Père Lachaise cemetery. On the same day, the notary sent a message to the Académie des Beaux-Arts, informing it of the last will and testament of the Baroness. A few days later, on 15 April, the Institut was made aware of the bequest.¹⁷ A handwritten note on a letter addressed to Edouard de Rothschild, Béatrice's brother, by Charles



les plus vifs pour la nouvelle libéralité qu'elle reçoit de la famille de Rothschild, l'inlassable protectrice des arts.

Veuillez agréer, cher Monsieur, l'assurance de mes sentiments très distingués.

Ch. M. W. T. J.

M. Widor permanent secretary of the Académie, reveals that she had made her intentions clear four years earlier. On the same day, Widor went to Faubourg saint Honoré, no. 41, the address of Baron Edmond and Baroness Adelheid de Rothschild, and delivered the news. They had not been aware of their niece's generosity.

On 20 April 1934 Widor informed Edouard de Rothschild of the acceptance of the bequest by the Académie and the nomination of M. Albert Tournaire as a curator of the collection. After the opening of the coffers and the inventory of the silver, the general inventory was carried out.

In the beginning of the twenty-first century, the collection, in all its originality and unique character, deserves a new light to be cast upon it. It would be wonderful if this brief exposé generates an interest in revisiting Béatrice Ephrussi de Rothschild's bequest.

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NOTES

- 1 The author only knows of a few portraits of Béatrice, in addition to that which most commonly appears in publications. At the villa Ephrussi, a relief portrait of Béatrice (posthumous) is also to be found; it is in a Louis XVI frame and was made by sculptor Paul Belmondo (1898–1982), MS 2842.
- 2 On marrying Maurice, Béatrice acquired Russian nationality, which she renounced in 1917 following her husband's death.
- 3 The couple first lived at rue de Berri and then at 19 Avenue du Bois (later renamed Avenue Foch.)
- 4 Elisabeth de Gramont, 'Au Cap-Ferrat, Un lieu plein de noblesse et de magnificence domaine la Côte "L'Île de France"', in *Nice – Matin*, Friday 24 December 1948, p. 5.
- 5 Changing projects while they were still underway was common within the family. Indeed, we know that Ferdinand de Rothschild changed his project for the red salon in Waddesdon Manor as he bought new pieces which he thought were more suited to the theme, a tribute to Louis XIV. Bruno Pons, *Architecture and Panelling: The James A. de Rothschild Bequest at Waddesdon Manor* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 1996), cat. 48–53, p. 357.
- 6 Research on great parties at the villa is still to be carried out using the local press of the time. A memorial stone located on the terrace in front of Madame Ephrussi's apartment commemorates the King of Sweden's visit in 1912.
- 7 Pauline Prevost Marcilhacy, *Les Rothschild bâtisseurs et mécènes*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1996).
- 8 RAL OE 313, 405.
- 9 RAL OE 405.
- 10 Michael Steve, *Béatrice Ephrussi de Rothschild* (Nice: Andacia Editions, 2008), p. 121.
- 11 Pierre-François Dayot, *Suite de huit fautenils ...*, *La Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild* (Paris: Les Editions de l'Amateur, 2003), p. 196.
- 12 RAL OE 341.
- 13 RAL OE 405. Reference to 83 wrought iron pieces.
- 14 '... paintings on a yellow background enlivened by light lilac foliage, and au naturel butterflies'. Hector Lefuel, *François-Honoré-Georges Jacob-Desmalter, Ebéniste de Napoléon 1er et de Louis XVIII*, (Paris: Editions Albert Morancé, 1926), p. 52. Another description is known of it, showing the ultimate refinement of her conception, comparable to the that which existed at the end of the Ancien Régime: '... this room with an alcove, all decorated with mirrors used as [tenures – should this be 'tenTures'?]: these would go from the floor to the ceiling, framed by a series of small columns topped with birds, which created a genuine, circular, facettes mirror enabling the visitor to view themselves from all angles ... the inside of the alcove was decorated with paintings featuring tropical flowers and birds.' Aubenas 'Joséphine' Paris 18 ...; I would like to thank Monsieur Bernard Chevallier and Monsieur Guillaume Seret for letting me have this piece of information.
- 15 A series of Renaissance sculpted panels, 'dans le box' Avenue Foch in 1934, and panelling purchased by Baron Edouard de Rothschild in 1941. These consist of five series of panelling comprising three Louis XVI series, an Italian piece of panelling, and Louis XVI-style panelling purchased from the Maison Jansen. List: Pieces belonging to Baron Edouard de Rothschild and acquired by the Beaux-Arts in 1941, (copy RAL).
- 16 Paintings bequeathed to Madame Ephrussi, *Paturage*, by Paul Potter, *Cavaliers*, by Ph. Wouwerman, *Vue de ville* by Van der Heyden, a painting by Gérard Dou (untitled), Codicil, Alphonse de Rothschild 29 December 1897, RAL OE 341.
- 17 To the Beaux Arts, Madame Maurice Ephrussi bequeathed her Cap Ferrat villa, together with a capital of six million francs, to turn it into a museum, in *L'Intransigeant*, 16 April 1934, RAL OE 341.