

The Badminton Cabinet: the most expensive piece of furniture... ever!

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS: We follow up on Randy Cygan's suggestion to present an interesting picture to close each issue. Our first submission is from Ian Parsons. Readers are invited to submit interesting pictures, with a caption, to the managing editor.



of art ever. It is 3.86 m high and 2.33 m wide. The cabinet, of unsurpassed richness and splendour, was commissioned by Henry Somerset, 3rd Duke of Beaufort, whose family seat was at Badminton in southwest England, when he was only nineteen. It was made at the Grand Ducal workshops (Ufficio delle pietre dure) in Florence from 1720 to 1732. It remained in Badminton until 1990 when it was sold (again for a record price, £8.58 million) to the collection of the American philanthropist Barbara Piasecka Johnson (of the baby-powder family, another mineralogical connection!). In the recent auction, the cabinet was purchased by the Director of the Liechtenstein Museum in Vienna, on behalf of Prinz Hans-Adam II of Liechtenstein. It will be on permanent display in Vienna from spring 2005. I am indebted to Norman Butcher for drawing my attention to this spectacular contribution of mineralogy to the art world.

Ian Parsons



Detail of cabinet construction. PHOTOGRAPHS COPYRIGHT CHRISTIE'S 2005

This fabulous cabinet, constructed of ebony and gilt-bronze and incorporating lapis lazuli, agate, red and green Sicilian jasper, chalcedony, and amethyst, as well as a variety of polished rocks, was sold in December 2004 at Christie's of London for £19,045,250 (US\$36,662,106; Eu27,463,250), making it the most expensive nonpictorial work



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