

The Porte Cochère of the Hôtel Pussort, Paris

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AMONG THE MANY WORKS of art in J. Pierpont Morgan's gift to the Metropolitan Museum in 1906 was a pair of carved oak panels (Figures 1 and 2). Each contains an oval molding framing an allegorical figure, Justice and Force. Garlands of flowers bound by ribbons surround the moldings at the top and sides. Morgan had acquired these panels as part of his purchase of most of the collection of French decorative arts formed by Georges Hoentschel in Paris. Their dimensions led the cataloguers of the Hoentschel collection, Pératé and Brière, to suppose that the reliefs had once formed the top of the double doors of a *porte cochère*, a gateway large enough to accommodate a carriage;¹ during the seventeenth century these imposing carriage-entrances grew in popularity and became virtually status symbols in Paris.² The weathered condition of the wood also indicates an emplacement out of doors. Currently the panels are dated "Period of Louis XIV, end of the seventeenth or beginning of the eighteenth century."

An engraving from a series entitled *Portes cochères de menuiserie des plus belles maisons de Paris* confirms the opinion of Pératé and Brière (Figure 3). Two panels with identical subjects and compositions appear bracketed by scrolls within an elaborately ornamented pair of doors. These are surmounted by a medallion with the monogram LP doubled and mirrored.³ The print and the series to which it belongs are also included in the compendium *L'Architecture à*

la mode ou sont les nouveaux dessins pour la décoration des batimens et Iardins . . . published by Pierre Mariette in the early eighteenth century. Both Jean Francart and Pierre Le Pautre have been proposed as the author of the print; until recently Le Pautre has seemed the most likely candidate.⁴

The oak reliefs differ slightly from the panels represented in the engraving. Their allegorical figures stand on blocklike bases, an addition which would occur to a sculptor transforming a design into three dimensions. They contain more pictorial details than the print—for example, buildings and trees in the distance. The carved garlands, dense and ropelike in the engraving, are light and frilly; their tendrils and flowers stretch out over a wider surface and overlap the molding.

These differences suggest various explanations. Either the carver and printmaker both followed the same drawing, the former adding details he thought of during the execution, the latter simplifying pictorial features for expediency. Or else the engraver made his own drawing on the spot from the finished door, completing it from memory or fancy when back at the shop, with details like the garlands.

The wood panels are due to an accomplished, if anonymous, architectural carver. The stocky figural canon possibly indicates the hand of a Flemish sculptor working in France, such as a follower of Philippe de Buyster or Gérard van Obstal. The heavy, grave,

1. A. Pératé and G. Brière, *Collections Georges Hoentschel* (Paris, 1908) II, p. 21.

2. H. Havard, *Dictionnaire de l'ameublement et de la décoration depuis le XIII^e siècle jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1894) IV, p. 537, notes: "et comme leur présence semblait attester que le propriétaire ou le locataire de l'immeuble était en possession de l'un de ces majestueux véhicules, les portes cochères devinrent comme une enseigne de fortune."

3. Whether the initials stand for the Pussort family—Henri

Pussort evidently commissioned the residence to which the *porte* gave access—or for Pierre Le Pautre, who possibly engraved the print, or for someone else altogether, is unclear.

4. T. A. Strange, *An Historical Guide to French Interiors . . .* (New York, 1904) p. 156, credits Francart. D. Guilmard, *Les Maîtres ornemanistes* (Paris, 1881) p. 98, and *Katalog der Ornamentstichsammlung des staatlichen Kunstbibliothek, Berlin* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1939) no. 3867 (2) attribute the print to Pierre Le Pautre.



FIGURE 1

After a design by Jean Marot, *Justice*, ca. 1678. Oak panel from the *porte cochère* of the Hôtel Pussort, Paris, 35½ × 39½ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 07.225.161A



FIGURE 2

After a design by Jean Marot, *Force*, ca. 1678. Oak panel from the *porte cochère* of the Hôtel Pussort, Paris, 35½ × 39½ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 07.225.161B

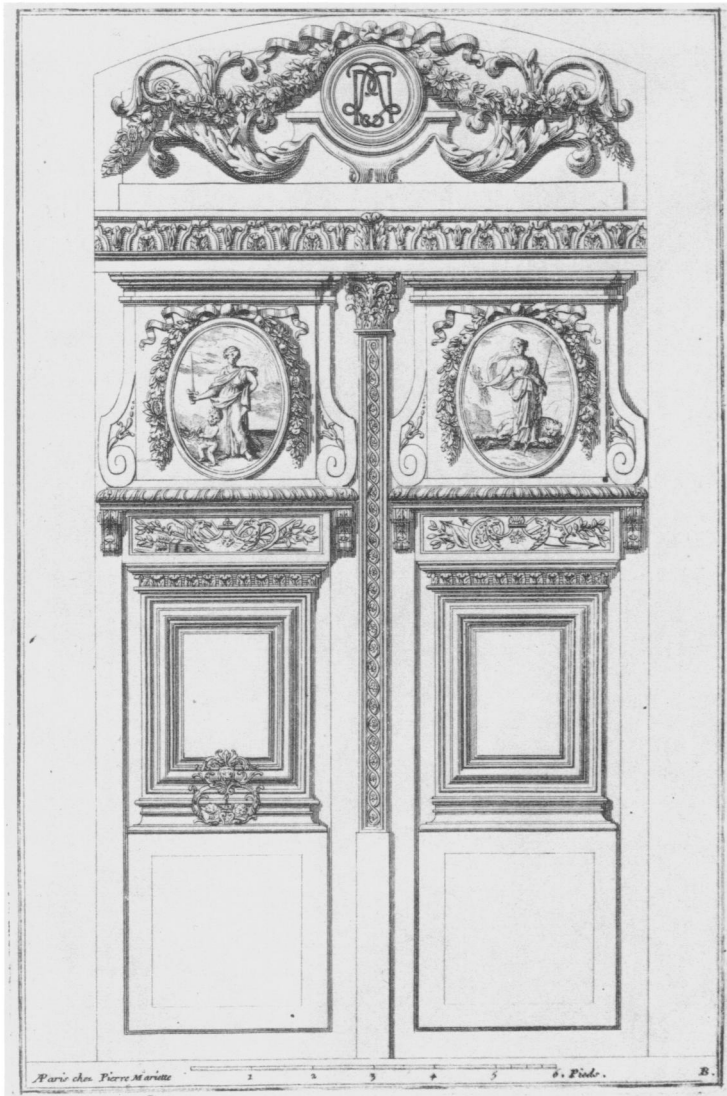


FIGURE 3
Jean Marot (?), Engraving of the *porte cochère* of the Hôtel Pussort. Fig. B from the series lettered A–F “Portes cochères de menuiserie des plus belles maisons de Paris” in the compendium *L’Architecture à la mode . . .* (“Grand Mariette”). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 30.64(1), leaf 16

slightly stiff figures of van Obstal’s *La Vigilance* and *La Force, ou la Stabilité* flanking the portal of the Hôtel Carnavalet or Buyster’s *Cariatides* on the Pavillon de l’Horloge at the Louvre suggest an appropriate stylistic framework.⁵

A drawing formerly in the collection of A. Mauban finally permits the origin of the panels to be pinpointed. Although it has not been possible to trace this sheet and it has never been illustrated, Mauban refers to it in two separate publications. Evidently it resembles the engraving in *Portes cochères de menuiserie . . .* It bears an autograph inscription, identified by Mauban as Jean Marot’s: “Porte de l’Hôtel de Pussort.”⁶ Jean Marot (ca. 1619–79) is remembered for his volumes of engravings, *L’Architecture française*, known as “le grand Marot” and “le petit Marot.” But he was himself the architect of some executed buildings, the Hôtels de Mortemart, de Monceaux, and also Pussort.⁷

A few facts and contemporary impressions concerning Henri Pussort (1615–97), the builder and first owner of this residence, may help to explain the subjects chosen for the wood panels. “Avare, dur, austère, riche, très-vieux, très-capable, très-craint, frère de la mère de feu M. Colbert et le Maître dans la famille” are some of the terms Saint-Simon used to describe him.⁸ He won notoriety during the trial of the deposed minister Fouquet in 1664. Acting, one suspects, as Colbert’s hatchet man, Pussort was Fouquet’s most venomous critic at the trial and was the sole judge to call repeatedly for his execution. From 1667 to 1670 he was in charge of drafting ordinances for the king. In 1672 he was appointed to the Conseil Royal des Finances and in 1691 became Doyen du Conseil d’Etat. It was appropriate for such a man to erect at the entrance of his house medallions personifying Force with her spear, thunderbolt, and lion,

5. Michel Gallet and Bernard de Montgolfier, “L’Hôtel Carnavalet,” *Bulletin du Musée Carnavalet* 27 (1974) nos. 1 & 2, figs. 36, 37. Pierre Chaleix, *Philippe de Buyster, Contribution à l’histoire de la sculpture française du XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1967) pl. II.

6. A. Mauban, *Jean Marot, architecte et graveur parisien* (Paris, 1944) pp. 166–168, fig. 53. See also A. Mauban, *L’Architecture française de Jean Mariette* (Paris, 1945) pp. 107–108. On the basis of this identification and by comparison with other *portes cochères* engraved by Marot, Mauban attributes to him the print illustrated in Figure 3.

7. L. Hauteceur, *Histoire de l’architecture classique en France* (Paris, 1948) II (1), pp. 142–144.

8. *Mémoires complets et authentiques du duc de Saint-Simon*, ed. M. Cheruel (Paris, 1904) I, p. 254. See also H. Menu and P. Pellot, “La Famille maternelle de Colbert: I. Recherches biographiques sur les Pussort; II. Généalogie de la famille Pussort,” *Revue d’Ardenne et d’Argonne* (Sedan, 1906) XIII, p. 117.

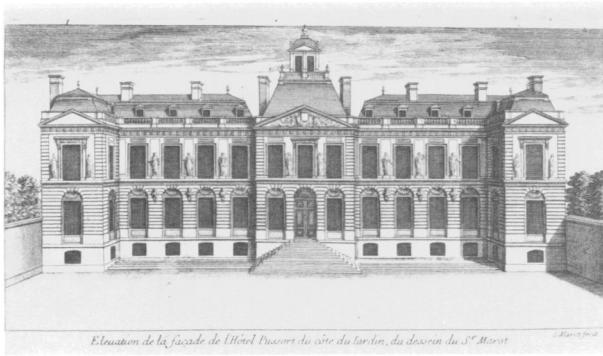


FIGURE 4
Jean Marot, Engraving of the garden facade of the Hôtel Pussort, from *L'Architecture française* ("Grand Marot"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 52.519.185, leaf 89

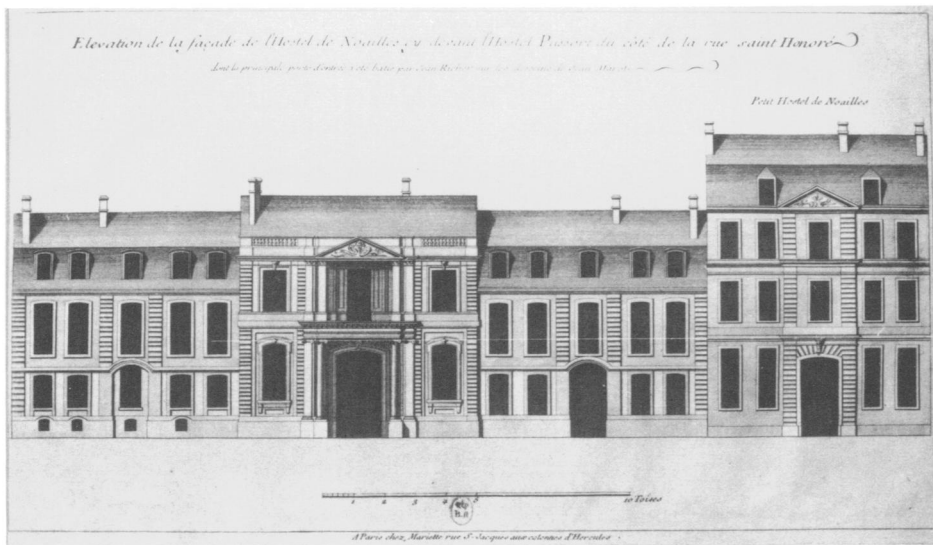
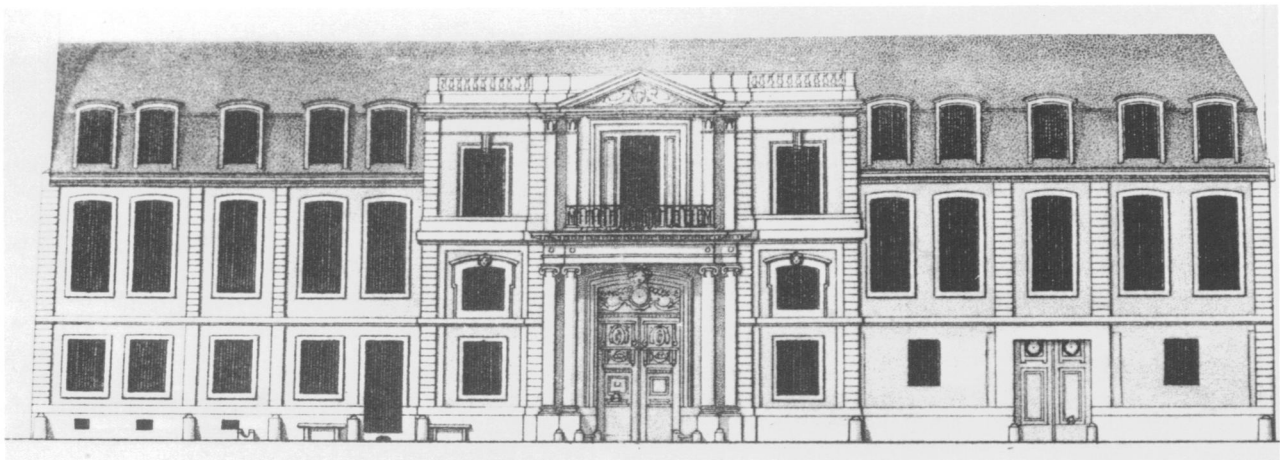


FIGURE 5
After Jean-Michel Chevotet (1698–1772), Elevation engraving of the facade of the Hôtel de Noailles (formerly Pussort) on the rue St.-Honoré, Paris. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Va. 235c (photo: Wardropper, courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale)

FIGURE 6
Charles H. Landon (1791–1841?), Engraving (detail) of the facade of the Hôtel Egerton (formerly de Noailles/Pussort) on the rue St.-Honoré. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Va. 235c (photo: Wardropper, courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale)



and Justice with sword, fasces, and scales held by a putto (attributes borrowed freely from Ripa).⁹

Through the *porte cochère* the courtyard of the Hôtel Pussort gave onto the rue St.-Honoré. Behind the *corps de logis* gardens stretched back to what is today the rue de Rivoli (Figure 4); the entire site abutted on one side of the convent of Les Feuillants. Although most sources cite Jean Marot as architect of the *hôtel*, at least one eighteenth-century writer credits the little-known architect Jean Richer (presumed dead around 1670) with the building and the *porte*.¹⁰ In fact, the inscription on a print of the street facade at a later date, when the residence had become the Hôtel de Noailles, indicates that the *porte d'entrée* was executed by Jean Richer after designs by Jean Marot (Figure 5). If this information is correct, it suggests that Richer may not have died until after 1678, the year that Pussort obtained permission to build on the rue St.-Honoré site.¹¹

Unfortunately, the doors are not shown in the engraving of the Hôtel de Noailles, but they appear in a later elevation of the same facade (Figure 6). Though this is sketchy in parts and variant in certain details from the earlier print, it confirms that the *porte cochère* illustrated in the Mariette compendium was indeed that of the Hôtel Pussort and establishes that it was still in place in the early nineteenth century.

In summary, the evidence suggests that Jean Marot designed the *porte cochère* around 1678, but that this and its superstructure were executed by Jean Richer, and that Marot's drawing was the basis of the original

engraving published by Mariette (Figure 3), for which Marot himself most likely handled the burin.

After Pussort's death in 1697 the building was sold to Vincent Bertin, seigneur d'Armenonville. In 1711 it was acquired by Duc Adrien-Maurice de Noailles, after whom it was renamed; apparently the architect Lassurance extensively rebuilt the *hôtel* at this point. The marquis de La Fayette married Marie-Adrienne-Françoise de Noailles in its chapel on April 11, 1774, and fixed his residence at the Hôtel de Noailles until 1789. Lord Egerton, the colorful Englishman known for seating his dogs at his dinner table, subsequently owned the building. In 1830 the property was divided into five lots, and the *hôtel* was cut through to make room for the new rue d'Alger.¹²

By 1830 at the latest, then, the Metropolitan Museum's panels were dismantled. Before this time, however, the merits of the Pussort *porte cochère* had attracted notice. In the early eighteenth century, Germain Brice describes it as "embellie d'un excellent morceau d'Architecture, formé de deux colonnes ioniques avec un Attique audessus, dans lequel sont en grand volume, les armes de ce Magistrat."¹³ A half-century later, the work is described in a dictionary of architecture among models of its kind: "Les plus belles *portes cochères* sont ornées de corniches, consoles, bas-reliefs, armes, chiffres & autres ornemens de sculpture, avec ferrures de fer poli, comme par exemple, les *Portes* des hôtels de Biseuil, de Pussort, &c."¹⁴

9. See, for example, Caesar Ripa, *L'Iconologie* (Paris: J. Baudoin, 1644) II, pp. 56–58, 65–67.

10. J. F. Blondel, *Cours d'architecture* (Paris, 1772) III, p. 114, and Dézallier D'Argenville, *Voyage pittoresque de Paris*, 6th ed. (Paris, 1778) p. 134, state specifically that the *porte* as well as the entire *hôtel* are from Marot's design. F. Le Comte, *Cabinet des singularitez d'architecture, peinture, sculpture, gravure* (Paris, 1702) I, p. xxxvii, credits Marot with the garden facade. L. V. Thiery, *Guide des amateurs et des étrangers voyageurs à Paris* (Paris, 1787) I, p. 154, attributes the design of the entire *hôtel* to Richer.

11. While the date of building has been variously reported as 1672 or 1687, René Pillorget has established the correct date, 1678, in his "Henri Pussort, oncle de Colbert: Sa Carrière, ses demeures parisiennes, son portefeuille," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et l'Ile-de-France* 94–95/1966–67 (1970) pp. 127–128. One learns from the comte d'Aucourt, *Les anciens*

Hôtels de Paris (Paris, 1890) p. 61, that the comtesse de la Foix was the first person known to reside (after 1672) at the address on the rue St.-Honoré. But a "Brevet de permission a M^r Pussort" of Feb. 7, 1678 in the *Registre du Secrétariat* (Paris, Archives Nationales, o¹ 22, fol. 46r) establishes him to be the proprietor of a house on the rue St.-Honoré "qui menace ruine et ne peut plus estre habité sans la restablir presque de fonds en comble. . . ." The formal building permit was delivered shortly after, on April 15, 1678 (A. N., o¹ 22, fol. 60v). Jean Marot's death the following year was evidently the reason why his plans were executed by another architect.

12. G. Pillement, *Paris disparu* (Paris, 1966) pp. 143–146.

13. G. Brice, *Description nouvelle de ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable dans la ville de Paris* (Paris, 1706) I, p. 161.

14. A. C. d'Aviler, *Dictionnaire d'architecture civile et hydraulique et des arts qui en dependent* (Paris, 1755) p. 304.