WADDESDON
Rothschild Collections

Riches of the Earth

WADDESDON
MANOR

National Trust

Riches of the Earth

Waddesdon is full of works of art that celebrate, embody or depict the riches of the earth. There are numerous types of clay, including terracotta and porcelain, spectacular objects made out of metals mined from the earth and surfaces embellished with stones generated under the ground but cut and polished by craftsmen.

This trail explores some of these treasures, from walls covered with rare marbles to the colours in paintings and textiles refined from the realms of plants and minerals. The trail leads you to a special display of Riches of the Earth in the Exhibition Room on the First Floor.

Four Panels Symbolizing the Seasons
French, 1720-1740
Oak

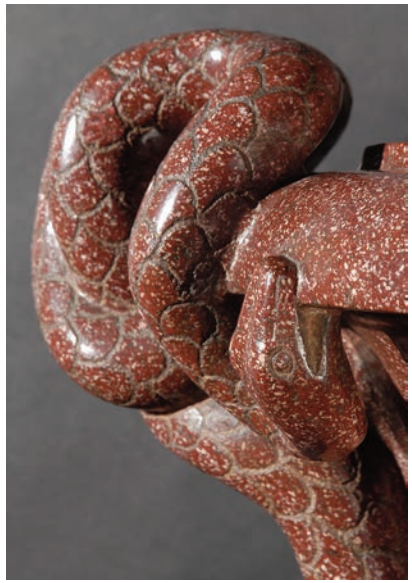
The four carved panels at the ends of this gallery would originally have been painted, but were stripped in the 19th century. The bare wood only amplifies the theme of natural abundance. Spring is represented with garden flowers (including roses, passion flowers, euphorbia and lilies), Summer by ripe wheat, Autumn by twining vines and fat bunches of grapes. Winter's sparse vegetable life is subordinated to the musical instruments and flaming torch that keeps the cold at bay. The seasons were popular subjects in early 18th-century France, bringing the outdoors in. These trophies give prominence to the gardening and agricultural tools, the flasks and vessels that draw pleasure and nourishment from seasonal harvests.

Pair of Porphyry Urns
French, late 17th century

Porphyry is an exceptionally hard igneous rock. You can see the large-grained crystals of feldspar and quartz in a matrix of other mineral deposits, formed when volcanic lava cooled and solidified. Its name comes from the Greek word for purple.

Porphyry was used for sculpture in ancient Egypt and Rome, where it was particularly associated with the sacred aura and authority of the emperor. The desire of Renaissance and Baroque rulers to emulate the porphyry cutting of antiquity stimulated the rediscovery of technologies that had been lost for hundreds of years. In the late 17th century, Louis XIV decorated the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles with 36 porphyry vases.

Stonecutters used chisels and abrasives to carve these monumental vases. Making a matching pair is particularly difficult. The vessels are hollow and the lids can be removed. There is convex and concave decoration and almost all the edges have been rounded. Look at the scales on the snake-handles and the way the carvers created empty space between the snakes' open jaws.



BREAKFAST ROOM

Nanny Goat with Suckling Kid and Turkey Cock
Meissen hard-paste porcelain after models by Johann Joachim Kaendler (1706-1775)
1732-35

Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony (1670-1733) commissioned these animals for a porcelain menagerie that showed off the wealth of Saxon soil and the manufactory's technical know-how.

Europeans had been trying to imitate Chinese porcelain for centuries before the Meissen factory achieved it around 1710. True or hard-paste porcelain is the whitest, most translucent of all ceramics and stands up to enormous fluctuations in temperature. It contains two ingredients derived from granite: kaolin (a particularly fine clay) and feldspar (a mineral that contains silicates of aluminium).

These near life-size animals were extraordinarily difficult to make. Firing cracks on both the *Goat* and the *Turkey* bear witness to the dangers of the kiln. The long high-temperature glaze firing was particularly risky as the porcelain softened before it vitrified and the sculptures often collapsed.

ANTE ROOM

Marble Panelling
Designed by Gabriel-Hippolyte Destailleur (1822-1893)
c. 1883

The use of marble on the walls of this room - and of the Dining Room beyond - is inspired by the state apartments in the château de Versailles, in which Louis XIV's wealth and power was declared through the manipulation of rare and precious stone from several countries. The grey-veined white stone here is called 'Sicilian' marble, but comes from Carrara in Tuscany. It is partly overlaid with *Campan vert*, a net-veined greenish marble from the Pyrénées in France. The main panels on the upper part of the walls are *Rouge Royal de Hautmont*, a coarsely mottled brownish-red and grey limestone from southern Belgium. They are laid out in a way that draws attention to the size of the individual panels and to the precision with which they were cut from the rock face and split into sheets that were then arranged in contrastingly parallel (on the left of doorto the Dining Room) and symmetrical patterns (on the right).

DINING ROOM

The Fountain of Love and The Flageolet Lesson, from the
Noble Pastorale series
Beauvais Tapestry, after designs by François Boucher (1703-70)
1755-1778

The tapestries in this room conjure up an idealised vision of a pastoral life - at once nostalgic and fantastical - in which men and women take pleasure in each other's company and in the natural abundance of the earth. The tapestry on the left is slightly better preserved than the other and it is easier to see the details of the animal, mineral and vegetable life depicted. There are figures, sheep, a dog and a dove. Water gushes from a fountain from whose damp stone plants and flowers grow. Roses tumble from a basket.

The tapestries are woven from wool (from sheep) and silk (harvested from the cocoons the larvae of silkworms). Most of the dyestuffs are derived from plants and trees, including European sawwort and South American brazilwood. The blues produced from the indigo (or woad) plant were particularly admired. Some reds, purples and oranges, are derived from the root of the madder plant, but the reds in these tapestries probably come from the cochineal beetle. Weld produces good greens. Some dyes are fixed to the fabric with a mordant, most commonly alum, which is hydrated potassium aluminium sulfate.

RED DRAWING ROOM

Table
South German
c. 1710-20

The top of this splendid table is decorated with a public square peopled by men and women who are walking, talking, driving in carriages and buying and selling. The man-made setting and human activity are depicted in materials from the earth and sea. The tortoise-shell and mother-of-pearl, some of which is stained and engraved, are from animals. The metals - pewter and brass - are both alloys (metals mined from the earth, then melted and mixed together).

The design exploits the colour and internal structure of cut and polished stones. These include agates, carnelian and several different marbles. The sky is made of thin panels of lapis lazuli, arranged so that the striations suggest the movement of clouds. Some of the buildings around the piazza are raised on platforms of orangey-brown aventurine - a variety of quartz with inclusions of mica, hematite or goethite that make it glister.

GREY DRAWING ROOM

The desire for bright, lasting colour has stimulated all kinds of artisanal experimentation with materials found in the earth. Textile dyes are mostly plant-based, but most pigments for painting are derived from minerals. For example, the whites in the eighteenth-century portraits in this room contain lead. Some blues were ground from lapis lazuli (from Afganistan) until the alternative Prussian Blue, derived from iron oxide, was invented in the early 18th century. Orpiment, an arsenic sulfide, was used for yellow pigments and, like cinnabar, which is found in mercury-bearing rock and is used to make vermillion, it is highly poisonous. All the reds in the *Duchess of Cumberland* (1772-3) - the painting you can examine more closely - containd vermillion.

While the colours in textiles and paintings fade and change over time, the enamel colours on porcelain do not. In this room you can see some of the ground colours for which the Sèvres manufactory is famous, including blues derived from cobalt, greens and turquoises based on copper and pinks formulated using gold. Applied gilding on pink glaze reacts with the gold in its chemical make-up to produce a fuzzy outline.
If you look closely at the gilding on the three pink pot-pourri vases (1763, Sèvres soft-paste porcelain) you will see carmine outlines around the edges of the gilding, giving them better definition.

WEST GALLERY

Soft-paste porcelain is a pseudo-porcelain, in which other materials served in place of the kaolin and feldspar of hard paste. Sèvres combined marl with saltpetre, salt, alum, gypsum, sand and soda of Alicante (a plant reduced to ash). There is a tension between the hardness of this fired, vitrified, body and the soft, organic forms into which it can be crafted. Vases seem to swell and twist, parts recalling leaves and ears. Some even take on the form of animals.

While the vases in this room are among the most fanciful and stylized in the collection, if you look very closely you will see patterns derived from close scrutiny of the surfaces of stones. For example, gilding on the Dark Blue Pot-pourri Vase in the shape of a Masted Ship (c. 1761) and on the Dark Blue Vases (???) resemble the pebbley patterns seen on the surfaces of stones when scrutinized with a microscope, while those in the garniture that includes two candelabra vases with elephants' heads (1761) look more like the wormy patterns of lichens and algae.

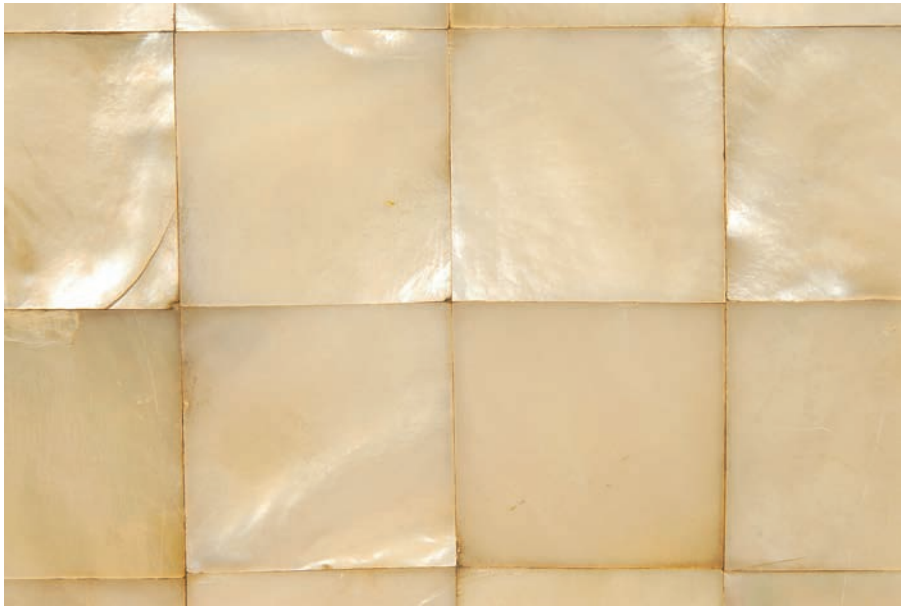
The dark, mottled blue ground colour of all these vases was known at the factory as 'bleu lapis', named after the stone lapis lazuli that it resembles.

Coffer

Italian or South German, mid-17th century

Oak with mother-of-pearl and gilt bronze

The coffer on a stand just after the last window in this room shimmers with the riches of the sea rather than of the earth. It is covered with mother-of-pearl, the iridescent nacre that makes up the inner surface of some molluscs, including nautilus and oyster shells. In nature, mother-of-pearl is not flat, so it had to be cut into dozens of little squares in order to cover the surfaces of this box.



Carpet

Savonnerie manufactory, probably woven 1753-1757

Wool

This carpet was almost certainly made for use in a royal chapel and its design celebrates the riches of the earth. The abundance of plant motifs recalls traditions in which the ground is sanctified and walkers are honoured by the scattering of palms and flowers. The four large, greenish jewels are more unusual. Each is set in an oval moulding, which is, in its turn, held between four little balls. Like the overall *trompe l'oeil* effect of gilt metal on this carpet, the table-cut jewels are slightly disturbing as their sharpness is hardly appealing to the feet.

Chandelier
French, late 17th century or early 18th century
Rock crystal, steel and cut glass

The chandelier's frame is made of steel. The candleholders are of glass and most of the pendant drops are rock crystal. Steel is an alloy of iron and carbon, created by carburizing wrought iron with charcoal in a furnace. Glass is made by heating silica (the primary constituent of sand) to a viscous state and then cooling it rapidly. Unlike these materials, in which substances found in the earth are transformed using fire, rock crystal is a naturally occurring, transparent, colourless form of quartz. The tear- and pear-shaped drops and balls hanging from the chandelier were laboriously created using small saws, grinding wheels and mineral abrasives such as emery to cut the basic forms and then further worked with steel wool and mineral abrasives such as emery. Their glass-like appearance was finally achieved by polishing and the lack of surface blemish bears witness to the skill of the makers. However, despite their remarkable clarity, if you look into some of the drops, internal striations and flaws reveal their origin in the earth.

MORNING ROOM

Writing Table
Guillaume Benneman (master 1785, d. after 1804)
1786
Oak carcass, veneered with purpleheart, sycamore, ebony, boxwood and casuarina wood marquetry, gilt-bronze mounts and leather top

This table was made for Louis XVI and stood in the king's study at Versailles. The gilt bronze decoration includes myrtle sprays and lions' pelts. Each end is decorated with gilt bronze cornucopiae (horns of plenty) from which spill marquetry depictions of the riches of the sea and the riches of the earth.

The marine fruit include madrepore corals, algae, shells and pearls and their terrestrial counterparts pears, peach and quince. A fig is cut open to reveal its seeds, whose depiction reflects that of the grapes and pearls. These pictorial panels, made out of pieces of inlaid wood and flanking Louis XVI's cypher of crossed Ls, associate the king with the powers and abundance of Nature.

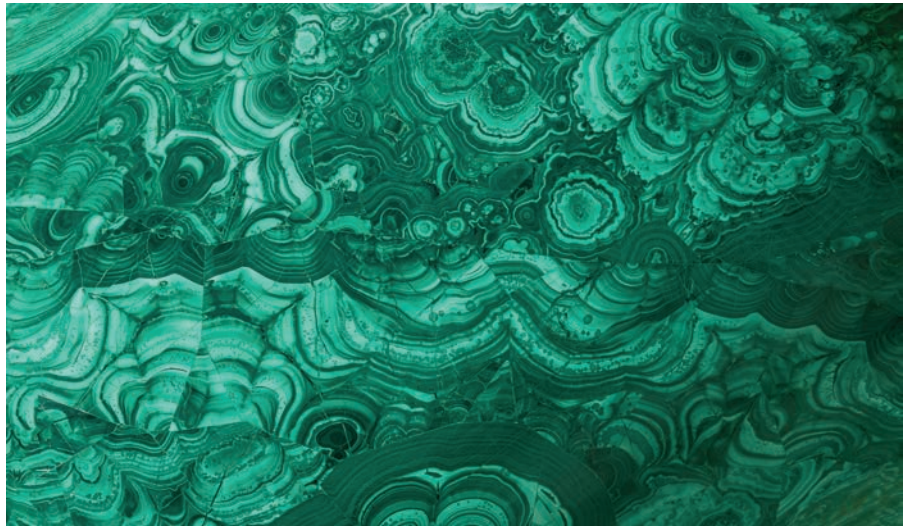
Return to the West Gallery and take the stairs to the First Floor.
Follow the visitor route across the Goodwood Room to the Goodwood Landing.

GOODWOOD LANDING

Malachite Urn
Russian, Pre-1873

Russian Tsars favoured enormous vases made of native materials as gifts for foreign rulers and dignitaries. Alexander II (reigned 1855-1881) gave this one to Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879) in 1873, probably in recognition of his help in financing the expansion of the Russian railways. Giant vases of this form - derived from ancient Greek and Roman models - have long been associated with imperial power and used to display mineral wealth and technological knowledge.

In the 19th century, Russia's Ural Mountains were the richest source of malachite in the world. The surface of this vase shows off the startling colour and pattern of the copper-bearing mineral. From a distance, the vase looks as though it was carved from a single - and impossibly large - block of malachite. In fact, the form was carved from a soft, greyish stone and the malachite was cut into extremely thin panels and applied over the body of the vase as a veneer. The pieces were arranged so as to make playful and amplified versions of the natural patterns of the stone.



GOODWOOD ROOM

Embroidered Hangings
Probably Dutch or Northern Italian, 1700-1770
Silk, metal, linen and cotton

These embroidered hangings depict interiors from the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, destroyed by the Babylonians and Romans, respectively. They hangings were made for use in a building of the European Jewish diaspora. The representation draws upon modern prints and European building styles and materials, and upon Biblical descriptions of the First - Solomon's - Temple.

The importance of embroidery and of the careful choice and fashioning of metals and other natural materials for the spaces that housed the Ark of the Covenant are made clear in the biblical description of the portable Tabernacle that God ordered Moses to make and the account of Solomon's building of its more permanent home in Jersulem. Both texts emphasize the presence of textiles embroidered with blue, red and crimson yarns and of the gold that covered the structure, and of which the ritual furnishings were made.

These embroidered cloths make visible riches of the earth that are designed to house and honour the heavenly. Metal threads make them shimmer and add literal weight to the representation of the gold, silver and bronze furnishings of the Temple, which include the golden candelabrum, altar and table for shewbread. In other areas, coloured silks evoke the precious materials of the building, including blue, red and silvery-grey marbles.The variously-shaped shard shapes, lozenges shapes and veins of the blue marble pillars contrast with the smooth surface of the bronze pillars that stood at the entrance to Solomon's Temple. The spiraling columns are wound around with garlands, which blossom at the top into vases of golden flowers.

Continue through the doorway to the special display Riches of the Earth in the Exhibition Room.

Waddesdon Manor
Near Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire
HP18 0JH

www.waddesdon.org.uk