

GLORIES OF FRANCE

An Auckland couple have turned a shared passion for Louis XIV into a thriving business selling the finest European antiques and décor.

Nicholas Ferneyhough and Chrystelle Baran met through mutual friends in London some 20 years ago. He was on his big OE, fresh out of Auckland University's School of Music; she was visiting from France to study languages.

Ferneyhough had come from an Auckland home filled with New Zealand colonial antiques. Baran grew up in Bordeaux in a home furnished with Louis XV and Louis XVI period pieces. Hence, they shared an interest in European history as expressed through art, design and furnishings – and with that they left London to begin their own business buying and selling antiques.

Since then they have divided their time between France and New Zealand. *World* stopped by their Auckland shop, Baran de Bordeaux, at the top of Parnell Road, to learn more.

"From day one," Baran told us, "we invested in the highest-quality antiques we could afford. The first time I took Nick to France we immediately started going around the *antiquaires* and *brocantes* I had frequented growing up. There is just something magical about owning a chest of drawers or a mirror that was made in the 17th or 18th century. I always think of the hands that made it and who may have owned it and it takes me back to a time when people lived in such style – an elegance and *savoir-faire* I feel is lost today."

Baran and Ferneyhough founded Baran de Bordeaux in 2000 and have been in their Parnell premises for the past five years. They have always dealt in the finest European antiques and décor and this has ensured their ongoing success.

Nicholas Ferneyhough and Chrystelle Baran travel widely in search of fine European antiques for their Parnell, Auckland, shop.





Far left, from top: Louis Vuitton cabin trunk, (c.1920); French Aubusson tapestry (c.1680); large French Baccarat crystal chandelier (c.1850). Left: French Napoleon III period Baccarat crystal chandelier (c.1870), Flemish oil painting of birds from the studio of d'Hondecoeter (c.1680); a pair of French Louis XV-style bronze & crystal girandole candlesticks (c.1870); French Louis XV style cast-iron jardinière (c.1880); French Régence period walnut commode (chest of drawers) (c.1720); a pair of Portuguese chairs in tooled leather and walnut (c.1680). Below: French terrestrial globe (c.1900).

They travel to France three times a year visiting sites and markets throughout France and drawing on contacts they have made over the years. That explains why Baran de Bordeaux may be the only shop in New Zealand where you'll find an authentic Louis XIV (commode chest of drawers), or a genuine Baccarat crystal chandelier.

"We specialise in 17th to mid-20th-century French antiques and décor," Baran says. "I buy only unique pieces that have a decorative quality and an originality that sets them apart from the rest. As a rule, if I would not put it in my own home I won't stock it in the shop. Very few of our clients decorate their homes entirely with antiques, so they tend to look for standout signature pieces that will complement their interiors, whether they are traditional or contemporary."

Ferneyhough adds: "What we have found is that early French and Italian antiques seem to possess a design strength and presence that mixes well with modern and contemporary art and interiors. Later 19th-century antiques, like the New Zealand colonial style, don't seem to have that quality. They tend to be fussy and over-embellished pieces that lack the simplicity and purity of earlier handmade antiques"

They are especially passionate about the art, design and architecture of Louis XIV (1640-1715). It was a period known as Le Grand Siècle, or the Great Century, for its tremendous innovation and French cultural pre-eminence throughout Europe. Says Baran: "It was our love of Louis XIV that led us to buy our wing at Château de





Left: French painted Louis XV period armoire (c.1750); a collection of 19th-century French confit pots; French Louis XVI-style bergère armchair (c.1890); Parisian dressmaker's dummy (c.1930s). Below: A carved wooden statue of the Madonna (c.1650).

Saussignac about seven years ago.”

Château de Saussignac, the couple's French home, is near the village of Saussignac, in the Dordogne, about midway between Bordeaux and Bergerac. They are one of five title holders, but the building is so grand each owner has a private entrance and accompanying parcel of land. “The core building dates from a century or two earlier, so it was actually too austere for our taste,” says Baran. “But our wing was added around 1680, which places it right within our favourite era.”

Typically, they spend less time enjoying their château than being on the road, buying unique period pieces that catch their eye. Ferneyhough combines the French lifestyle with music projects. He has scored music for French films (under the pseudonym Crofton Orr) and more recently produced an album for jazz musician Kyle Eastwood, son of legendary actor and director Clint Eastwood. Using a neighbouring 15th-century château for a recording studio, he produced *Songs From The Château*, which became the number-one jazz album in France.

But today we're talking antiques. As Ferneyhough takes us on a tour of the shop, we stop at what he identifies as an original Louis Vuitton travel trunk from the 1920s. “People often get the antique thing wrong,” he says. “They imagine it to be a delicate, fussy look, something they remember from their grandmother's house. But that couldn't be further from the truth when decorating with early European.” He points to a set of terracotta jugs used to carry water from a village reservoir and a heavy oak table that no doubt saw more than one rowdy family feast.

Baran de Bordeaux specialises in antique chandeliers and light fittings. “Most pre-date electricity,” says Ferneyhough, “so they need to be converted from candles. That can be hugely time-consuming and for shipping they require careful packing. At this end they need cleaning and wiring, but the final effect is something that cannot be replicated with a modern fitting. Antique chandeliers are opulent without being too flashy or tacky – so common with modern chandeliers. It's the faded patina on the metalwork and the soft light reflected by the old glass or crystal.”

Baran de Bordeaux is also the New Zealand agent for de Gournay, makers of the world's finest hand-painted wallpapers. www.frenchantiques.co.nz



Top: A collection of French antique glass wine flacons. Above: Flemish oil painting of birds (c.1680); a pair of French Louis XV-style bronze and crystal girandole candlesticks (c.1870); French Louis XV style cast-iron jardinière (c.1880); French Régence period walnut commode (chest of drawers) (c.1720).