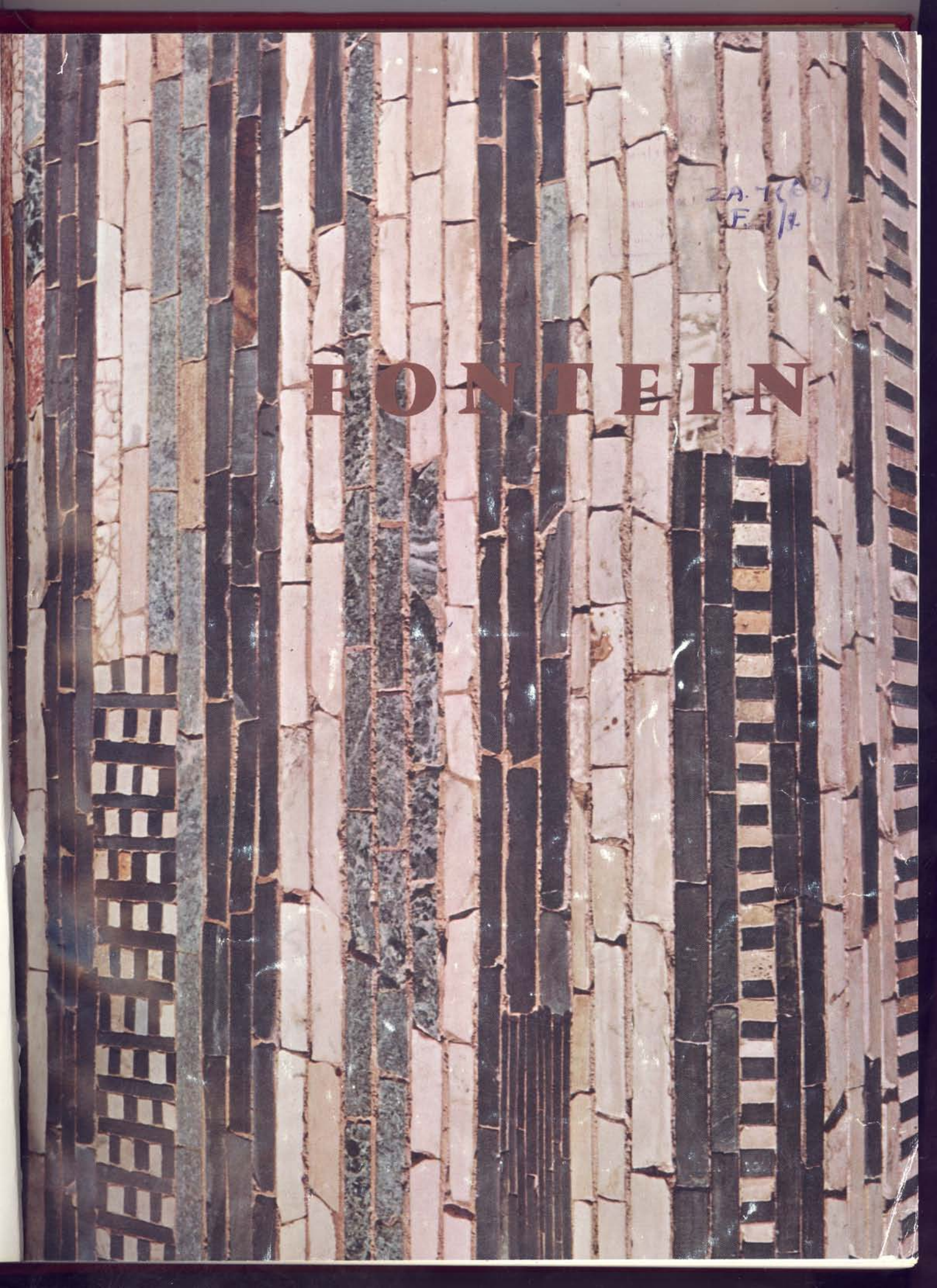


2A. T(60)
E. 1/2

FONTFEN



FONT E I N

A QUARTERLY DEVOTED TO ART IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

VOL. I

NO. I

WINTER 1960

Editorial	Page 3
Wanted: A History of Art in South Africa—Walter Battiss	Page 4
Prints from the Johannesburg Art Gallery	Page 9
Art in Architecture—Norman Eaton	Page 15
Die Dier as Onderwerp by Drie Suid-Afrikaanse Kunstenaars — Zandberg Jansen	Page 18
Make South Africa a Land of Fountains!— Keith Pulvermacher	Page 27
Eighteenth Century Cape Furniture—Prof. G. Pearse	Page 29
Adolph Jentsch—Anton Hendriks	Page 34
Abstrakte Rigtings in die Suid-Afrikaanse Skilderkuns— Anna Vorster	Page 36
Dilemmas of the Artist in South Africa—A Discussion Between Edoardo Villa and Giuseppi Cattaneo	Page 40
Ou Bouwerke in Noordoos-Kaapland—Dr. W. Steyn	Page 44
Sculpture at the Union Exposition	Page 48
An Exhibition of Urban African Art—Cecil Skotnes	Page 51

Advisory Board: Walter Battiss, P. Anton Hendriks.

Editorial: Zandberg Jansen, Charles Eglington, Donald Turgel.

Editorial Address: P.O. Box 7, Fondrie, Dist. Germiston.

Advertisement Manager: P.O. Box 4960, Johannesburg.

Printed by: Voortrekker Pers Bpk., Johannesburg.

Colour Blocks by: Pictorial Process Engraving Co. Ltd., Johannesburg.

Published by: Sable Publishers, P.O. Box 7, Fondrie, Dist. Germiston.

Subscriptions should be posted to Central News Agency Ltd., P.O. Box 10799, Johannesburg, or handed in at any branch of the C.N.A. Ltd. in the Union of South Africa, Kingstons Ltd. in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, C.N.A. (S.W.A.) Ltd. in South West Africa, or Circulation Manager, P.O. Box 163, Saxonwold, Johannesburg.

Yearly Postal Subscription: 42/-.

Our Cover Design is a portion of the mosaic marble strip wall of the "Wachthuis" in Pretorius Street, Pretoria. The building was designed by Norman Eaton and the actual mosaic was executed by Chris Venter.

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FURNITURE IN SOUTH AFRICA



Late 18th century glass cabinet.

Prof. G. E. Pearse

The eighteenth century has often been described as the age of gracious living and this is reflected in the beautiful homes erected in Holland and England, in the North American colonies and in the Dutch colony of the Cape of Good Hope.

The standard of taste displayed in the furnishing of these homes was exceptionally high and we, in South Africa, are very fortunate in having so many beautiful examples of this furniture and silverware preserved for our enjoyment.

In these days of machinery and mechanical production it is difficult to appreciate the care and loving thought given to his work by the eighteenth century craftsman. The artisan lived with his work for a far longer period than can be conceived at the present day and his scope was infinitely wider in every way.

The furniture of the eighteenth century had almost to be hewn from the log. Every surface had to be laboriously smoothed with the plane, the scraper and stone, every moulding "scratched" and every cutter made with the file out of the oilstone. The rip, half rip, shaping and fret saws had all to be operated by hand. The wood screw was unknown and the beautiful locks and hinges were fixed with metal rivets and pins which necessitated the greatest care in their workmanship.

"When in the hurry and rush of the present day", says Herbert Cescinsky in his *English Furniture of the Eighteenth Century*, "we can spare a few moments to reflect upon the craftsmen of the eighteenth



Chair of stinkwood, mid-18th century.

century, slowly fashioning, with skilled eye and hand and with pride in his ability, the furniture that has been preserved for us, one is forced to recognise that the qualities which they gave to their work are inimitable by our present day methods, in spite of improved means and apparatus and the nearloom of all that has gone before". Of the craftsmen who made the furniture at the Cape we know very little. In those days when wooden ships were used, the finest craftsmanship was required in their construction and decoration. There is little doubt that many of these men were servants of the Dutch East India Company who took their discharge and practised their trade at the Cape. Several writers have referred to the employment of Malays as craftsmen but a close examination of the details in the furniture makes it clear that the designs are based on European prototypes and show no oriental influence whatever.

We do know that Anton Anreith, the famous sculptor, was responsible for the design and execution of the pulpit, lectern and organ case as well as the doors to the vestry in the Lutheran Church in Strand Street, Cape Town, and a study of the mouldings and carved details in these works of art indicates that he may have been responsible for much of the carving in the fine cupboards, chests of drawers, and display cabinets that have been preserved. Anreith had a workshop in Bloem Street and gave instruction in sketching, modelling, wood-carving and free hand drawing. He probably employed a large staff of skilled workmen and Malays to carry out the rough work required and they in turn may have been responsible for many of the smaller and less decorative pieces of furniture. Some eighteenth century writers refer to the furniture at the Cape as being clumsy and heavy. Many of these visitors came from England where they had been accustomed to the work of Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton and to the grace of the gilded and richly upholstered French furniture. Captain Robert Percival, writing of the Cape at the end of the century says. "The Dutch are remarkably neat in their houses . . . Their sitting rooms are very neat and clean: The furniture indeed, is usually clumsy in the extreme and looks very awkward, though kept in excellent order. Several houses, however, are not inelegantly furnished."

The clumsiness mentioned by this writer and others may have characterised some of the cruder and simpler pieces of the earlier period, found in the taverns and farmhouses, but the later eighteenth century work is equal to the finest craftsmanship in Europe.

The larger pieces were massive and dignified rather than clumsy, but the smaller pieces by contrast show lightness and delicacy in treatment. The hideous claw and ball foot, so popular in South Africa today, was rarely to be seen, the dainty club foot being more general. Many of the drawer fronts in chests of drawers, cupboards, escritaires and armoires were shaped in plan or section and were far more delicate in design than the revolting so-called linen-fold pattern so common today in imitation Cape-Dutch furniture and in radio and cocktail cabinets. The principal woods used in the manufacture of furniture at the Cape were indigenous to the country. Of these the most important were stinkwood and yellowwood. Stinkwood in colour is like walnut with rich streaks varying in design from light brown to black. It was used for the framing and styles of doors, for the fronts of drawers, as borders to the tops of tables and for chairs and settees. It is hard, strong and durable, difficult to season and work but gives a very fine surface. Several writers refer to it as South African walnut.

There are several varieties of yellowwood. That at Knysna is more golden in colour than the Outeniqua species. It was used chiefly for panels in doors and table tops and provided a beautiful contrast to

the stinkwood framing. It was also used for veneering and when polished was often taken for satinwood.

In addition to the indigenous timbers a large quantity of timber was imported from South America and the East and West Indies. Of these might be mentioned imbuia, known as Brazilian walnut, a frequently termed South American stinkwood. It was used for furniture at the Cape and can hardly be distinguished from the South African variety.

In an advertisement in the Cape Town Gazette dated December 17th 1808, advertising a sale, a list of items is mentioned including "some Brasil stinkwood and other logs and planks". Amboyna, a native of the West Indies, was used in veneers. It has a rich yellowish brown colour with a close "birds' eye" figure. Ebony came from Madagascar, Mauritius and Ceylon. That from Ceylon is light in colour with rich dark brown stripes and is generally known as Coromandel wood. Ebony is close grained and exceedingly heavy and was used at the Cape for carving, mouldings and inlay. Beefwood, as the name implies, is of a rich reddish brown colour. It came from Indo-Malaya and Australia and was frequently used for panels. Camphorwood, indigenous to Japan and Central China, was occasionally used. The camphor trees, planted by Willem Adriaan van der Stel at Vergelegen, still stand. Teak, from India and Burma, was used not only for furniture but also for doors, windows, ceiling beams and flooring at the Cape. The furniture at the Cape during the eighteenth century reflects the types used in Holland during the same period but it is generally much simpler in design.

It can be subdivided into three periods:

1. The first half of the eighteenth century when the furniture was still heavy, the chairs straight backed and the tables of the gate-legged type.
2. The middle of the eighteenth century when the curved or cabriole leg, so characteristic of the French baroque furniture, was employed.
3. The end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, when curves were eliminated and chairs and tables, in particular, were much lighter in design and had tapered legs.

The most varied and familiar piece of furniture is the chair and many examples have been preserved no doubt because more chairs were manufactured than any other article of furniture. The majority of these chairs had cane seats and in some cases cane backs, upholstery being very rare at the Cape. Riempje seats, which many writers consider to be characteristic of the Cape, are never to be found in the finer pieces of furniture, but were used in the rough furniture produced in the outlying districts and farmhouses. Cane was imported from the East. Early caning is exceptionally fine, the very small supple cane only being used for splitting. The outer surface retains its natural glaze but the reverse or split side was not neglected, this being carefully scraped with the edge of a piece of glass and pumice-stoned perfectly smooth before the actual caning was begun. The woolly edges of modern caning are never therefore found in original work and merely passing the hand over the back is often sufficient to distinguish modern from original caning.

In the first period the legs and supports to the backs of chairs and the legs of tables were turned. Turning dates back to the seventeenth century. It was probably introduced into Europe by the Portuguese, Portugal having borrowed the idea from the ebony chairs and tables of Northern India, imported from the trading stations on the north-west coast. The common ball turning is easy to produce but to spiral-turn on a lathe is a complicated matter and indicates a high step of evolution in the wood-turner's craft.

The high straight-backed chairs with their turned legs, stretchers and

Chest, Grootte Schuur.



uprights supporting the back and the caning in the back in a chaped or oval frame provided a very becoming background to the elaborate costumes of the ladies at that time. Many examples of the gate-legged table with turned legs are to be found in museums and private collections. The gate-legged supports to the hinged tops were double so that when opened there was no obstacle to one's legs when seated. Other pieces of furniture were the sturdy chests used for the storage of clothing and linen and enriched with shaped open-work brass angle pieces which vary enormously in design. Richly moulded brass handles occur at the ends usually with an open-work brass plate and the fine open-work brass key esculcheon plates to the locks show a great variety of treatment. The lids were hinged with strong wrought iron hinges rivetted to the underside of the lid and to the back of the chest and the richly designed brass heads of the rivets can be seen on the tops of the lids. The majority of these chests stand on bold turned feet.

In addition to these pieces of furniture are cupboards which followed the types common in the sixteenth century, architectural in treatment, the majority of which were imported from Holland. A great change is noticeable in the design of furniture at the Cape from the middle of the eighteenth century. It was at this time that many of the finest houses in Cape Town and in the country districts were erected, with the result that there was a steady demand for well-designed furniture.

De Jong writing in 1792 says: "No place to my knowledge has in comparison with its population so many beautiful, so many attractive houses as this. In this matter the people are showy to the point of wastefulness. Some of these houses run to sixty, seventy, and, a few years ago, to a hundred thousand gulden: those from twenty-five to thirty-five thousand are few in number. Building here is not merely a hobby, it is an urge, a madness, a contagious craze (*razernij*) which has infected all the people.

The cabriole or curved leg, terminating in a club foot is to be seen in the chairs and the settees, the backs of which were usually shaped and open with seats often in the Greek vase form. The gate legged table was still popular but here again cabriole legs replaced the turned legs of the earlier period. Large dining room tables which could be built up in sections buttoned together appear. When not in use these sections served as occasional tables which could be placed against the walls.

Many new types of furniture now appear. Enthusiasm for porcelain and china, imported from China and Japan, brought about the wall cupboard with its upper portion glazed and the glass cabinet in which the finest pieces of porcelain could be displayed. Writing became very popular in the eighteenth century and the *escritoire* or writing desk was an indispensable piece of furniture in every home.

Chests of drawers, a natural development of the chest, replaced the latter and some fine examples of these have been preserved.

Cupboards varying from a simple type with panelled doors to the rich so-called *armoires* with drawers below and cupboards above with their shaped and bellied fronts, richly shaped cornices and fine carving appeared in increasing numbers. Corner cupboards were also introduced varying from the low to the tall type which has cupboards above and below.

Beautifully designed silver fittings were used in these cupboards as key escutcheons and drawer handles. The names of several of the silversmiths who executed this work have come down to us.

Beds used at the Cape varied from the simple bed with solid head and foot boards, to the more elaborate four-poster bed with its turned uprights and richly moulded cornice.



Wall cupboard, late 18th century, at "Nederburg", Paarl.

Settee, Groote Schuur. Mid-18th century.

Other pieces of furniture which might be mentioned are the attractive foot warmers which were very popular in houses where fireplaces were rare. They were even taken to church by the slaves in cold weather. They were small and box-like and were sometimes carved. The tops had openings through which the warm air from metal containers below, filled with hot coals or charcoal, could escape. Linen presses, in which the linen was placed between thin sheets of wood and compressed by a heavier sheet, above which was a threaded column passing through a rail at the top of the press, are often to be found. The threaded column could be turned by inserting a hardwood rod through a slot.

At the Cape, as elsewhere in the eighteenth century, candle light was the principal form of artificial lighting for rooms. The candles were placed either in silver candlesticks or candelabra, in sconces fixed to walls, or in magnificent brass chandeliers suspended from the ceiling. The silver candlesticks were placed on tables or low cupboards and on delicately shaped gueridons with tall turned shafts on bracket-like feet supporting a flat circular moulded tray. Many beautiful examples of wall sconces with glass shades and great brass chandeliers with their branching candle holders suspended from the ceilings by brass rods or chains have been preserved.

The end of the century shows another change in furniture design when the curve was eliminated and the straight line introduced, particularly in chair and table legs. Chair backs were much lower and openwork designs replaced the shaped slat of the previous period. In these designs can be seen the influence of French and English furniture designers notably the work of Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton. In general, the furniture of this period was much lighter and more delicate in design. Many writers refer to the coolness and cleanliness of the Cape houses and say that all the furniture was kept in perfect condition.

In all this furniture a high polish was obtained by a mixture of linseed oil and wax which brought out the beautiful grain of the woods employed.

