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Germany's Royal Treasury

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Badge of Polish Order of the White Eagle from the Ruby garniture. Of all Augustus the Strong's jewelry garnitures, the ruby garniture has the greatest political symbolic significance. The red of the rubies and the white of the diamonds represent national colors. Workshop of Johann Heinrich Köhler, Dresden, 1722-1733.

DRESDEN, GERMANY:When Germany's great collector, Augustus the Strong, Saxon Elector and King of Poland, died in 1733, he left behind the world's first museum of applied arts and Dresden's royal treasury. Unlike other European royal collections that succumbed to money shortages, plunder or vagaries of fashion, this treasure chamber, called the Green Vault — a name derived from its malachite-colored walls — remained virtually intact for centuries. That is, until the bombing of World War II. After 60 years, with this year's celebration of Dresden's 800th anniversary, the historic Green Vault, Augustus's original collection in its original palace setting, is again on view.

"We started this endeavor to close a wound here in Dresden," said Professor Dr Georg Milbrandt, prime minister of Saxony, at the opening of the Green Vault on September 16. "Through history we have received a unique treasure. This is the heart."

No ordinary collector, Augustus II (1670-1733) was born into the Wettin dynasty, a family of devoted art and antiques connoisseurs. From them, Augustus inherited paintings, sculpture and furniture, as well as one of Europe's great collections of its day, the royal "kunstammer," assorted technological wonders and innovations that included clocks, automata and scientific instruments.

Augustus, zealous art patron and porcelain aficionado, amassed great treasures and, wanting his treasure chamber to outshine those of his peers, he resolved

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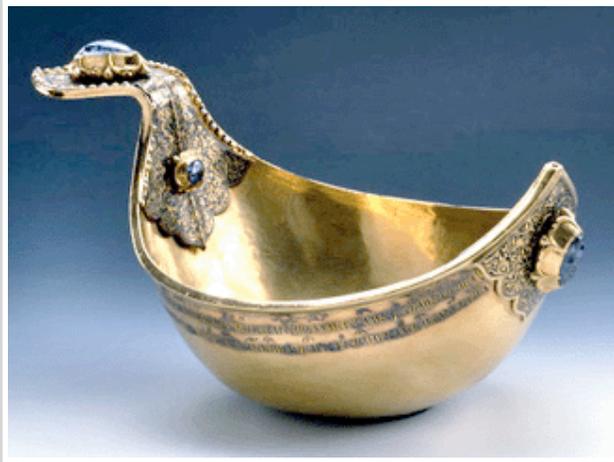
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early on to turn Dresden into a center of artistic activity worthy of this princely residence. From Europe's great royal art collections, he took away lessons in the potency of order and installation, contemporary metaphors for power, wealth and importance.

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Drinking bowl of the tsar Ivan the Terrible, gold, niello, sapphires, rubies and pearls, made in the workshops of the Kremlin, Moscow, after 1563. Four large sapphires in cabochon, the largest of which is framed in small rubies on the handle, contribute to its importance.

Tribuna of the Uffizi in Florence, Italy, the heart of the grand ducal art collections of the Medici, Augustus viewed an intoxicating assortment of diverse objects in precious stones, rock crystal and gold integrated with bronze statues and paintings.

He noted how the gallery of the Hapsburg imperial family in Vienna arranged its art systematically in groups. Exotic materials, ivory-turned objects and carvings, clocks and automata, precious jeweled vessels and state jewelry glorified imperial power in a theatrically impressive display.

Above all, Augustus admired Versailles where King Louis XIV's fine arts reflected a trendsetting lifestyle and embodiment of greatness. Displayed on gilded wooden consoles on three levels against mirrored walls, the splendor of the French court's colors and wealth of forms could be admired from every direction.

At home in Dresden, prominent artisans, such as goldsmith Johann Melchior Dinglinger, thrived and produced unique works with precious stones and exotic materials from far and wide — amber, ivory, coral, coconuts and shells from the South Seas. Clever objects with little practical value, this elite form of princely collecting, called "Schatzkunst," meant to titillate, to give Augustus pleasure and to cultivate conversation among his prominent guests. Along with Dinglinger and his two younger brothers, who worked with enamel and gold, sculptor Balthasar Permoser and others active in the service of Saxony helped to make Dresden the "Schatzkunst" center of the Baroque world.

As



For the Eighteenth Century visitor, the Ivory Room was the second display room. Today, it houses renaissance ivory-turned objects and carved sculptures, reliefs and vessels. The present Ivory Room is in the spirit of the late Baroque period and contains the most comprehensive historic collection of ivories in the world. These tankards include gold and silver mounted figures on the lid of the vessels.

political instruments, these finely embellished objects demonstrated prestige and strength. Jewels and jewel garnitures manifested political relevance as well. Within the hierarchy of European powers, a ruler's rank was measured by the quantity and quality of stately dress. Robes lavishly embellished with rare gems satisfied an ego-driven need to exhibit power, which Augustus further demonstrated by appointing administrative officials as tour guides for high-ranking visitors whom he allowed to view his splendid collection. For centuries after Augustus's death, the public continued to visit the treasury in an interior setting that remained relatively unchanged until the devastation of World War II.

Allied bombing of German cities precipitated the collection's evacuation to Königstein Fortress, where it remained in storage until 1945 when the Red Army shipped the entire collection to the Soviet Union. Returned to Dresden in 1958, a small number of items were exhibited in the Albertinum Museum. But not until German reunification and the financial commitment for reconstruction of the Royal Palace as a "home of science and art" could Dresden's riches unfold.

First to open in a rebuilt portion of the Royal Palace in 2004 was the new Green Vault. Individual pieces, such as Dinglinger's tour de force in silver and gems, "Court of Delhi on the Birthday of the Great Mogul," are displayed in a modern museum atmosphere. The historic Green Vault, however, is a complete collection "in situ," a Baroque synthesis of the arts as an expression of wealth and absolute power at one with architecture.



Baroque Dresden

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restorers, craftspeople and sculptors worked with architects and scholars using original inventory lists from 1733 and antique techniques to reconstruct the suite of ten rooms that Augustus designed from 1723 to 1730. "One feels transported to a fairy palace," the young philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer wrote in 1804, "and is dazzled by the infinite splendor on entering the glittering rooms..."

Today, the historic Green Vault continues to overwhelm the senses. Upon entering, Dr Dirk Syndram, director, said, "It's a very moving moment for me to be in such a room. This is a world wonder that still exists." Like a Baroque opera in which the acts and arias follow one another with increasing intensity, one enters a sequence of increasingly rich displays beginning with a golden-shimmering collection of amber objects; then, into the Ivory Room where lathe-turned and carved ivory objects — bowls, columns, inkwells, goblets and tankards — appear in their original context, an open display on tables, consoles

and shelves on faux marble walls.

The



The Silver Gilt Room belongs to the original suite of rooms of the Green Vault. After it was built in the mid-Sixteenth Century, this room was used for small functions until 1586. The stucco ornamentation of the original ceiling has been partially preserved. The spiral staircase enabled Augustus the Strong to gain access from his private apartments. Today, vessels in gold ruby glass and gilded silver line the walls.

intense red walls and lacquer of the Silver Room highlight figures of wood and ivory, coconut shells and rhinoceros horn, as well as gold ruby glass, gilded silver and a collection of figurative silver works and silver cups from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries that line the walls. In the Coats of Arms Room, an earlier banquet hall, numerous shields salvaged from the rubble of 1945 are preserved and affixed to the doors on which they originally hung — perhaps causing today's visitors to reflect on the transience of princely power, something Augustus could appreciate.

The crescendo peaks in the Jewel Room, itself an architectural gem in which painstakingly executed interiors reflect the material value of the jewelry garnitures on display. Verre églomisé painting and gold-etched mirrors decorate the ceilings and walls. Diamonds, emeralds, sapphires and rubies of all shapes, cuts, weights and hues gleam alongside ceremonial swords, daggers and walking sticks. Two "Moors," sculptured by Permoser with jeweled mounts from the Dinglinger workshop, hold emerald and stone clusters. Well-known symbols of Saxony's riches from silver and precious mineral deposits, they have been part of the Jewel Room's collection since 1729.

The historical Green Vault is at Taschenberg 2. Admission is limited to 100 visitors an hour. Tickets for specific times can be purchased in advance from www.dresden-tourist.de. The price is 10 euros (about \$12.50), including audio-guide.

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