

# Robb Report

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## Minding the Manor

*A contemporary furniture collection takes its cue from a baronial estate's classic contents.*



THE FURNISHINGS in the new Waddesdon collection from Chappell & McCullar are not imitations of the classic French period pieces at Waddesdon Manor; they are interpretations, which, in some ways, might be better than the originals. “We took good design from the 18th century and interpreted it to a 21st-century ideal by simplifying the lines,” says Keith McCullar, who co-owns the San Francisco furniture company with Michael James Chappell. McCullar notes that classic French designs often are too heavily ornamented for today’s interiors. “We cleaned them up and got them down to their pure form with just a bit of embellishment,” he says, “so they would be a bit easier to live with and more flexible in their ability to be deployed in a period room or a very stark modern interior.”

Waddesdon Manor, a château-style estate in Buckinghamshire, England, was built in the 1870s for Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild, who had commissioned French architect Gabriel Hippolyte Destailleur to design the home to hold his extensive collection of antique furnishings and objects d’art. Today, Waddesdon Manor, which the Rothschild family bequeathed to the National Trust 50 years ago, is a museum managed by a charitable trust under the stewardship of Jacob, the fourth Lord Rothschild. Jacob is, as was his forefather Ferdinand, an avid collector and furniture aficionado, and he and Waddesdon’s curators did not take lightly the decision to license the Waddesdon name. They appreciated that Chappell and McCullar, native Californians who began dealing in antiques privately in 1995 and opened their shop in 2002, did not want to duplicate the estate’s furnishings. “One of our main

positions from the outset,” explains Pippa Shirley, Waddesdon Manor’s head of collections, “was that we were not in the business of making reproductions and that, instead, this should be a modern take on a very important historic collection.”

Chappell & McCullar oversees production of the pieces, each of which is built both by hand and by machine. “The joinery is identical to that used in the 18th century, but we use power tools to cut dovetails because it is more efficient and cost-effective,” says Chappell. The items’ underlying structures are cut from farm-grown poplar, and their exteriors are covered in exotic wood veneers.

The Waddesdon collection—nine pieces priced from \$9,000 to \$22,000—includes chests, tables, a stool, a bench, and a sofa. The Christophe low table derives from an antique bench; the Guilloche Demilune chest is influenced by a circa-1770 Dubois chest; and the Dubois commode bears a cast bronze palmette cast from an early-19th-century ceiling frieze. “When you see one of these pieces,” says McCullar, “you can recognize the form as historically inspired, but definitely with a modern twist.” —WILLIAM KISSEL

**CHAPPELL & McCULLAR**

441 Jackson Street, San Francisco, CA 94111  
415-693-0882, [www.chappellmccullar.com](http://www.chappellmccullar.com)

*The Guilloche Demilune chest, one of nine pieces in the Waddesdon collection, is a contemporary incarnation of a circa-1770 design.*