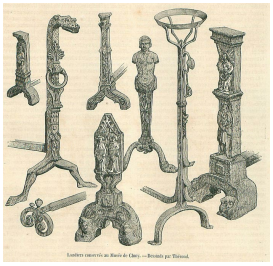
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« Andirons preserved at the Museum of Cluny », sketch of the specimen in the Museum of Middle Age by Thérond, 19th century press.



Brass andiron, 17th century. National museum of Renaissance, Castle of Ecouen.



Pair of andirons, late 17th century. Attributed to Jean-Antoine Ducerceau. Metropolitan Museum, New-York.



Andiron with Pluto, in the King's Cabinet. Gilt bronze, Louis XV style, Versailles Palace.



Placed under the burning logs,**andirons**, or firedogs, allow the air to circulate under the wood and to fan the flames. An andiron consists of an iron bar on which the logs are placed, and a decorative **head**.

In French, they are called "*chenets*", a noun coming from the word "dog", that refers to the role of this tool that **keeps the fire**, and their shape reminiscent of sitting dogs. That is why the English language also calls them "firedogs". It is also common to see andirons decorated with dogs lying or sitting, standing guard over the hearth, and more symbolically of the hearth of home. Perpetuating this idea, these dogs were sometimes replaced by lions, or **sphinxes**, for **Marie Antoinette** and under the Empire.

The utility of the andirons quickly became obvious. The ruins of **Pompeii** show that lifting fire on iron bars was already a known process in the Antiquity. In the **Middle Ages**, the andirons are very tall, as are the fireplaces, and are equipped in the kitchen with receptacles to keep dishes warm.

In the Renaissance they began to be made of **bronze**, which is lighter than iron. The Renaissance andiron is usually topped with a **ball**. Then, in the classical age, the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy of the seventeenth century were systematically equipped with andirons, often in **copper**. The decorative interest of the andirons developed under Louis XIII, where we see the appearance of **silver** andirons ordered by **Cardinal Mazarin**. **Versailles Palace** thus counted under Louis XIV some forty pair of silver firedogs, but they were melted to fuel the war effort of the Sun King.

The 18th century, true **golden age** of andirons, leaves out silver and brass to the benefit of **gilt bronze**. Like the rest of the interior decoration, the andiron is designed and redesigned by the great ornamentalists of the Louis XV and Louis XVI styles, to the extent that Versailles Palace and **Trianon** have a very wide variety of them.

The Louis XV style combines the **flame-like shapes** with the gilt bronze which gleams by the fire. The sinuous forms can sometimes be self-sufficient, but they often accommodate couples of **animals** or **characters** who respond, sometimes enhanced by a darker patina. On the andirons there are scenes of **children's play**, rest, **gallantry** or hunting. **Jacques Caffiéri**'s Italian joyful temperament is fashionable and the fireplace becomes a place of conviviality and intimacy, with, for example, his pair of firedogs "Rooster" and "Hen" representing a gallant scene between two young people.

The Louis XVI style still uses these animals in **complementary couples**, such as the famous deer and wild boar andirons of **Madame du Barry**, designed by Quentin-Claude Pitoin in 1772. These animals, however, rest on symmetrical and ordered pedestals that characterize the andirons of the new trend adopted by **Marie-Antoinette**. Often decorated with vases and garlands, the andirons of the time revisit the forms of antiquity and also adopt sphinxes and **chimeras**. The models of Charles De La Fosse and the achievements of Pitoin and Pierre-Philippe Thomire dominate the period.

Rather than being designed in pairs, the andirons are sometimes mounted on a **bar**, which will often be used from the Empire. The nineteenth century largely reused the vocabularies of the eighteenth century, calling on the great sculptors of the time like **Carrier-Belleuse** or **Feuchère**, and great bronze makers like the **Barbedienne** Foundry.
But the firedogs, with their medieval name, also awaken the amateurs of the **Neo-Gothic** style. Thus, in the 19th century, many wrought iron andirons were built, inspired by the Middle Ages, with more or less fantasy. Eugène Grasset's end-of-the-century andirons kept in the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris contribute to accentuate the **mysterious charm** that the space of the fireplace can have.

Voir la vidéo sur YouTube

Jacques Caffiéri, “The Hen” and “The Rooster”, gilt bronze andirons, 1735. Paris, Museum of Decorative Arts.

See also

Louis XIII style — Louis XVI style — Empire style — Neo-Gothic style — Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse — Ferdinand Barbedienne — The firescreen

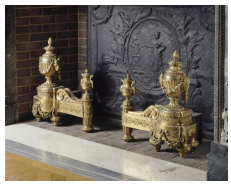
See our antique fireplaces



Louis XV style two-patinas andirons with lions, c. 1750, Versailles Palace.



Louis XV style two-patinas andirons, c. 1750. The De Agostini Collection, Getty Images.



Quentin-Claude Pitoin, Louis XVI style andirons of Marie-Antoinette’s Cabinet, 1771. Louvre Museum.



Quentin-Claude Pitoin, pair of andirons with a stag and a boar, for Madame du Barry’s Salon, 1772. Versailles Palace.



Pair of andirons with winged lions, realized in 1784 by Pierre-Philippe Thomire for Louis XV’s daughters in the Castle of Bellevue. Louvre Museum.



Andiron fender in Directoire style, 1800-1815. Castle of Fontainebleau.



Gilbert Honoré de Chaumont, andiron fender for King Louis-Philippe at Grand Trianon, 1838.



« A kitchen hearth in the Middle Age », illustration in Viollet-le-Duc, Dictionary of furniture from the Carolingian era to Renaissance, 1859.



Neo-Gothic andirons, made by Eugène Grasset in cast iron, c. 1880-1885. Paris, Museum of Decorative Arts.