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TABLE SET THYSELF – The Confidence Table in Europe

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The Confidence dining room in Ulriksdal Court Theater, Sweden

Photo: © Lasse Brundin

Curiosity awakens

While working as a guide at the Royal Palace Ulriksdal north of Stockholm in the 1990s I also managed to learn a few things about the 18th century court theatre Confidencen. It is situated in a separate building in the park and although it was not part of the palace tour, the theatre was of course closely

associated with the palace and thus worth knowing a little about. The somewhat odd name Confidencen comes from a dining hall that was fitted out in a room adjacent to the auditorium, where the royal family and their close friends could eat and talk “en confidence”. I will explain this more closely later. I also knew there was a similar dining hall in a pavilion next to the Chinese Pavilion in the Drottningholm Palace Park. This autumn I got a chance to take a “behind the scenes” look at the latter. This past summer I also watched a documentary about the palaces and castles that Ludwig II of Bavaria built in the second half of the 19th century. While watching it, I realised that one of them, Herrenchiemsee, had one of those special dining halls too! I was intrigued by this and wanted to find out just how common these tables were, and where the original idea came from.

An 18th century problem

If you were a powerful man or woman, perhaps a king or queen, in the 18th century, you probably lived quite a good, comfortable life. However, maybe there was a certain field that was troublesome – you did not get much privacy. The life-style demanded many servants and attendants of different sorts, which meant that you were rarely alone. The fact that people gladly spread rumours and gossiped was probably both titillating and extremely annoying. You have to take into consideration that the gossip was not only personal, but also sometimes political. And political rumours and gossip could be downright dangerous. If you wanted to talk with someone privately about delicate matters, you probably had to take a walk in the palace park and be very careful not to walk too close to any vegetation. There could be people with big ears hiding there. Alternatively, you could go to some out-of-the-way room and close the doors. However, there could always be an eavesdropping servant behind that closed door. Was this an imagined problem? No. We know for instance from the Swedish court that the problem was very real. Queen Lovisa Ulrika (1720-1782) experienced this when she realised that secret information reached her political opponents. (1)

A magic table



So how
do you
solve
this

The hoisting device in the Confidence Pavilion next to the Chinese Pavilion in Drottningholm

Photo: © Lasse Brundin

problem? Well, there were quite a few inventive people in the 18th century, and someone came up with a solution: a more or less isolated dining hall without servants! The dinner table was set by servants in

the basement, as close to the kitchen as possible. In the ceiling was a sliding hatch that covered a hole through which the set table could be hoisted to the dining hall above. Small bells attached to the hoisting mechanism signalled that the table was on its way up. A simple but at the same time complicated solution, and really quite a typical 18th century invention. (One writer claims that the set tables could also be lowered from the above *down* to the waiting guests, but I have found no evidence for this highly impractical solution.) Who came up with this idea? We cannot be entirely sure. Some sources claim that the idea was French, maybe because it is easy to believe that an invention like that must have originated in a country that had a complex and highly evolved court ceremonial, like France in the time of Louis XIV (1638-1715). However, one must remember that The Sun King loved *public ceremonies*. People were invited to see the king get up and get dressed in the morning, and to see him eat. He very much wanted to be in the centre of things, and dinners in solitude (or with a few people present) probably did not appeal that much to him. This notion that the invention is French could, at least in Sweden, probably also emanate from the fact that we use a French name for the whole arrangement: *table de confidence* – “confidence table”. (I will use that term henceforth when I speak about the table in general terms.) Other sources claim that the whole idea came from the German speaking countries. This might have to do with the fact that there are, or have been, a relatively large number of tables within the borders of present-day Germany. They were simply popular there.

A Danish invention?

Architect Kent Alstrup at Styrelsen for Slotte og Kulturejendomme in Denmark kindly points out to me that some people believe that the hoistable table might be a Danish invention! And that it is somewhat older than most people tend to think. (2) In an interesting article in the book *Rosenborg Studier* (Copenhagen 2000), art historian Mogens Bencard suggests that this might be the case. In an exhibition catalogue from 2010 he gives further details around his theory. (3) As early as in 1694 a hoistable table was constructed for the hunting lodge Hubertushuset in Jaegersborg Dyrehave north of Copenhagen. A number of unspecified payments to the astronomer and inventor Ole Rømer (1644-1710) in connection to this building makes Bencard believe that Rømer might very well be the inventor of the table. Even though the payments are not sure-fire evidence that he is the inventor, there is clear evidence that he constructed a number of *farende stole*, a sort of hoistable chairs, for the royal palaces. In the autumn of his life, King Christian V (1646-1699) had difficulty walking and could use these chairs to “travel” painlessly from one floor to the next. One such chair is preserved at Frederiksborg Palace.

An almost disproportionate number of hoistable tables were fitted out in, or in connection to, Danish royal castles and palaces at the tail end of the 17th century and in the first half of the 18th century. Maybe that is not *proof* that it is a Danish invention, but the concentration – and the early appearance – makes me quite convinced. It is also telling that Peter the Great of Russia (1672-1721) visited Copenhagen in 1716 – and four years later had a pavilion built with a hoistable table (*and* a double hoistable chair reminiscent of Rømer’s *farende stole!*) in Peterhof outside Saint Petersburg.



Rosenborg Castle in Copenhagen
Photo: © Lars Rune Larsson

Mogens Bencard points out a few older examples of “magic

tables” in the 17th century, but they were temporary constructions that were meant to amuse and astound guests and not the kind of tables I am discussing here. However, there is supposed to have been something resembling the subject for this article in Maison de Chantemesle in Essonne south of Paris. This construction was described by the Swedish diplomat Daniel Cronström in a letter to architect Nicodemus Tessin the Younger. Cronström lived in Paris and it seems that he had only heard of this table, not actually seen it. However, he describes it as if both the table and the dinner guests were hoisted from one floor to another. It is not known when this table was constructed, but it must be before 1701, as the letter from Cronström is dated that year. I would say that this table, too, belongs to the entertainment category. Depending on how well known the construction was in that period, it could however be a contributory cause to the fact that the hoistable table has been seen as a French invention. (4)

How did the confidence table reach Sweden?



The Confidence Pavilion at Drottningholm
Photo: © Lasse Brundin

There are two confidence tables in Sweden. One is a reconstruction from the end of the 20th century because the original 18th century construction was demolished at some point. The other one is more or less untouched since the 1760s. The first-mentioned was built at Ulriksdal Court Theater and was used for the first time in the autumn of 1754. (5) The other one is in a pavilion of its own just next to the Chinese Pavilion in the Drottningholm Palace Park. It was supposedly built in 1763. (6) Both constructions are intimately associated with Queen Lovisa Ulrika (1720-1782), who was the sister of Frederick the Great of Prussia. That is an important detail in this whole story. The design for the two Swedish tables (it is very likely that they were identical) were presented to Lovisa Ulrika by her younger brother August Wilhelm. (7) He lived in Oranienburg Palace, some 35 kilometres from Berlin, and one could have expected him to have a confidence table himself. However, there is no evidence of that. On the other hand, he must have been very familiar with the city palaces in Berlin and Potsdam. Both had confidence tables. His sister must of course have been familiar with those tables too, as they were both in place before she left Prussia for Sweden in 1744.

The table in Berlin was a gift from Augustus II the Strong (1670-1733). (8) It was fitted out in 1728 and seems to have been quite a big and advanced table. The one in Potsdam was simpler and it could perhaps be that design that was given to Queen Lovisa Ulrika. The two Swedish tables are really quite modest compared to, for instance, the ones in Russia. It could also be that the design for the Swedish tables was more like an outline design that could be adapted to local requirements. The Swedish tables are relatively small



and quite simple wooden structures. There is room for six people seated around them. (9) There was no need for anything fancy since the tables were always covered with tablecloths and fully set with plates, glasses and perhaps candelabra when they were elevated and visible to the royals. Around the table are four "servants" – a kind of cylindrical shelves that were also hoistable. Glasses, bottles and other things could be placed on them – or perhaps more food.

The hoisting device in Ulriksdal Court Theater
Photo: © Lasse Brundin

A more advanced table



One of the "servants" in Ulriksdal Court Theater
Photo: © Lasse Brundin

The Russian tables (as well as some of the Danish and German ones) were much more advanced and constructed in another way. They are generally bigger and could be said to consist of two parts: A stationary outer "frame" and a hoistable part in the middle. This meant that you could safely sit by the frame and wait for the middle part to appear from the room underneath without risk of falling down into the hole. The Swedish diners probably had to stand by the walls and wait for the floor to open and the table to appear before they could sit down. Or perhaps they waited in the adjoining rooms (or outside the building) until they heard the bells announce that the table was on its way up. Then they could of course miss the sight of the table magically appearing through the floor.

However, it is not quite true that the *whole* frame was stationary. At each cover, there was a hole as big as a plate – and each hole was fitted with its very own hoist, a *postilion*. Each postilion was covered by a slate on which the guest could write down exactly what he or she wished to eat. You then rang a small bell, and the postilion with the slate disappeared down to the serving room. After a while, the postilion appeared again, now with the desired dish on it! The table must certainly have surprised and amused those who had never seen one before.



Residenzschloss in Dresden, Germany

Photo: © Charlotta Jarnvall

A similar table stood in Germany, in Dresden's Residenzschloss, the palace of Augustus the Strong. Judging from one description its construction was yet a little different. It seems that the table was divided in two halves, which means that one half could be set (or refilled) in the serving room below, while the other half was in the dining hall above. This table also had postillions and slates on which to write orders. At one occasion the conversation was very stiff, which caused Augustus the Strong to send down an order for "big *devisen*". These were a bit like fortune cookies – some kind of candy with amusing poems or verses in it. The court jester Schmeidel happened to be in the serving room when the order arrived – and immediately let himself be hoisted up to appear on the table as a surprise. He said, "Your majesty wanted *devisen* of the biggest kind. Here is a sample. You won't find bigger *devisen* than this." This amused Augustus the Strong so much that he invited the court jester to the table. (10)

Ludwig II of Bavaria

The royalty and nobility of the 18th century used the magic table at least in part to be able to talk in confidence with each other. The subject of the conversation probably varied between politics, gossip and perhaps amorous things. Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845-1886) was a little different. He used the table primarily to be able to eat in solitude. He wasn't very keen on having to socialize with people. On those occasions when he was obliged to have dinner guests, he often saw to it that a large flower arrangement was placed between him and the guests. That made it impossible for them to see each other. He also ate very fast to make the repast end quickly. The guests usually didn't get more than a bite of each course. He preferred to eat alone, and if he could avoid servants near the table – all the better! Still the table was usually set for more than one person. Ludwig liked to carry on imaginary conversations with two of his idols, Louis XIV and Louis XV of France. Sometimes their, likewise imaginary, mistresses were invited too. (11) It is hard not to see the almost theatrical appearance of a set table as a part of Ludwig II's dinner "performance". He had a confidence table installed in the grandiose palace Herrenchiemsee (which was never finished) but also in the small and compact but very



fascinating Schloss
Linderhof

[_ \(http://www.schloesser.bayern.de\)](http://www.schloesser.bayern.de)

The hoisting device at Schloss Linderhof
in Bavaria

© Bayerische Schlösserverwaltung

www.schloesser.bayern.de (<http://www.schloesser.bayern.de>)

(<http://www.schlosslinderhof.de/englisch/palace/history.htm>), which is well worth a visit. The hoisting machinery at Linderhof is not part of the guided tour, but the dining hall where the table appeared is. The picture above shows the machinery. It is hardly surprising that Ludwig II decided to have confidence tables installed in his palaces. They are very appropriate for his famous fairy tale world. It is, however, perhaps a little surprising that he did not have a table in his most fantastic creation, Neuschwanstein. There is, however, at least a dumb waiter there, going up three stories from the kitchen to the dining hall.



Schloss Linderhof in Bavaria

Photo: © Lasse Brundin

Same idea – different names

According to local tradition, Ludwig II's inspiration for the tables came from the tale "Table Set Thyself" in the brothers Grimm collection of folk tales. That is the reason why King Ludwig's tables are referred to as *Tischlein-deck-dich*. (12) But the idea as such was, as we have seen, not new in his days. In the German speaking part of Europe, the tables seem to have been called *Maschinentafel* (machine table) or *Confidenztafel* (confidence table). That is quite an interesting fact since it seems that the latter term forms the basis for the French name *table de confidence* that has been used for the Swedish tables. In France, however, this kind of table has usually been referred to as *table machiné* (machine table) or *table volante* (flying table). The latter is a somewhat problematic name, though, as it can also mean a regular small and movable table. It is also the name of a magic trick. On the other hand, in a letter to her brother Frederick the Great of Prussia, Queen Lovisa Ulrika uses the French form *table de confidence*, as if there is no German word for it. (13) To add to the confusion, the tables in Denmark have usually been *eremitageborde*, since they were often installed in the type of pavilion called hermitage. And naturally, the two tables I have managed to find in Italy have yet two other names. The first one is called *tavola matematica* (mathematical table), presumably because it is technically advanced. The other one is called *tavola muta* (silent table – compare with dumb waiter). And what is the name of the only Czech table? *Kouzelného stolku* (magic table). The perhaps most intriguing term has been used for the only known table in Austria: *table de conspiracy*. Conspiracy table! The lack of uniformity in names and terms makes it quite difficult to search for places that have or have had confidence tables.

Location



The Confidence Pavilion at Drottningholm

Photo: © Lasse Brundin

Most of the confidence tables seem to have been installed in garden pavilions of different kinds. Many of them bear the very logical name hermitage (cf. hermit). This was of course the ideal location for a table of this kind and purpose, as there were no adjacent rooms where eavesdropping servants could dwell. The Confidence Pavilion in the Drottningholm Palace Park in Sweden is a good example. The dining hall is situated quite high above the ground – except on the entrance side. The entrance is reached by a ramp, which must have been easy to keep watch over. In the park of Fredensborg Palace in Denmark, there was a table in a hermitage positioned at the end of a short jetty in a lake. The hermitage at Peterhof in Russia was surrounded by a moat and could only be reached via a drawbridge. As if that was not enough, the only way up to the dining hall was by the previously mentioned hoistable chair. This means that you were completely isolated in the dining hall. Everything was done to avoid uninvited guests. In July 1797, when Czar Paul I decided to visit the hermitage, he famously was stuck in the hoistable chair between the two floors. The Czar had the elevator demolished

and had a flight of stairs installed instead. (14)

Other confidence tables have not been located in park pavilions, but in more private areas in the actual palaces. The aforementioned palaces in Potsdam and Berlin in Germany can serve as examples. It can be questioned whether these tables had any practical use, as it would be quite easy for servants and other eavesdroppers to lurk about in adjacent rooms. Maybe these tables were rather something that you showed to surprised guests, as a kind of modern wonders. There is also a third variety, even though I have only found one example of this. Then I am back to where I started – the court theater Confidencen in Ulriksdal, Sweden. This table is situated in a room right next to the auditorium. In a way, that is the most congenial location, simply because the magically appearing table has a clear theatrical aspect. The dining hall here was like an extension of the stage with its pieces of scenery, trapdoors and other constructions.



Petit Trianon in Versailles – site for two planned tables.

Photo: © Lars Rune Larsson

Confidence tables in the 20th century?

I was absolutely convinced that Ludwig II of Bavaria was the last person to have confidence tables installed. But to my great surprise, I suddenly found information about a table from the 1960s! I was even more surprised when I learned that it was installed in a house here in Sweden. On the island of Torö outside Nynäshamn south of Stockholm, a rather strange villa was built in 1969. The official name is Villa Spies, but people in general have come to call it Villa Fjolle (*fjolle* being Danish for crazy or foolish). The architect was Staffan Berglund and the commissioner was the Danish businessman and traveling agency tycoon Simon Spies. The house as such is very special, to say the least, but what attracted my interest was the dining table which is possible to hoist from the first to the second floor. The elevator system is of course electrical and modern, but apart from that, the difference to the old confidence tables is primarily that the seats and the table are both fixed to the same platform, which means that they are all hoistable. Does this sound familiar? Yes, the concept is actually the same as for the installation that supposedly existed in Maison de Chantemesle, the one that Daniel Cronström wrote to Nicodemus Tessin about in 1701. The table seems to have been Simon Spies' idea, not the architect's idea. But where did he get the idea? It is very tempting to contemplate nationality here. Spies was Danish! Was he aware of the great number of confidence tables that existed in Denmark in the 18th century? Maybe. But there is another very convincing explanation, which is presented in a very interesting article by Mikael Askergrén: Simon Spies probably got the idea from the James Bond parody *Casino Royale* from 1967! (15) This means that you cannot really count this table as a "real" confidence table – but the general idea is of course the same as for the old ones, which is why I have included the Villa Spies table in my list over the ones I have found.

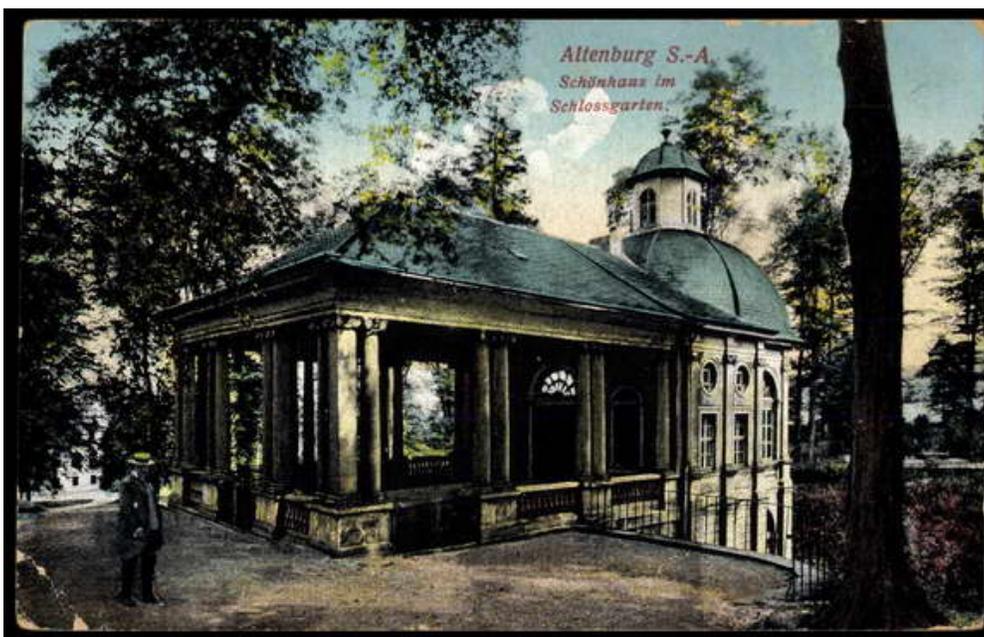
Where are the tables to be found in Europe?



Schloss Belvedere in Weimar, Germany

Photo: © Magnus Hernander

In my search for confidence tables, my ambition has been to find as many as possible. In order to do so, I have contacted quite a few organisations, museums and other institutions in the European countries where there *ought* to be confidence tables. In Great Britain and Ireland, the phenomenon turned out to be unknown. Spain and Portugal seem to be void of tables, too. (16) I expected to find at least one in Spain. It took some time before I found any tables in Italy and Austria, and when I did, it surprised me that there are so few. There seems to be no tables within the present-day borders of Belgium and the Netherlands either. The fad could easily have spread to Hungary, but that is another country where I have not been able to find any tables. There are two big palaces in Latvia (Rundale and Jelgava) that were built at just the right time to be fitted out with confidence tables. But I have found no evidence for any. The architect was Bartolomei Rastrelli who mostly worked in the Petersburg area, where there were several tables.



Schönhaus at Schloss Altenburg in Thuringia, Germany.

Probably the site for a confidence table.

I am still happy with the around 40 tables I have found. That is many more than I expected to find when I started this project. Below is a list of which confidence tables I have found in Europe. Most of them do not exist any longer, a few remain, and a few have been reconstructed. Some of them are possible or likely tables whose existence I have not been able to confirm. Nevertheless, the list gives quite a good picture of where most tables have been concentrated – and it raises a number of questions. It would for instance be interesting to find out how the idea spread through Europe. What kind of “kinship” is there between the disparate tables? Is there a plausible explanation as to why there have been no tables on the British Isles or the Iberian Peninsula? Are there any confidence tables outside of Europe? And how is it possible that a table was installed in Château de Lunéville in eastern France as early as in 1705? But I am leaving these questions for somebody else. My purpose has primarily been to compile a list over known tables. It is probably not complete – it can even be, to a certain degree – erroneous. I am therefore very grateful for any further information that you, the reader, can provide me with concerning this interesting subject.

Denmark: (17)

Dyrehaven, Hubertushuset

(1694. A hunting lodge, hence the name Hubertushuset, which is mentioned in Salmonsens Konversationsleksikon 1915-1930.)

Rosenborg Castle (<http://kongeligeslotte.dk/en/palaces-and-gardens/rosenborg-castle-and-the-kings-gardens.html>), The Red Pavilion

(The end of the 17th century. Later called The Blue Pavilion or the Hermitage. There was a *farende stole* – a hoistable chair – here too.)

Rosenborg Castle, The Pavilion with the 4 Orbs

(The table in this pavilion is not mentioned by Bencard, but it is listed in Salmonsens Konversationsleksikon under the entry “Eremitageborde”. Kent Alstrup at Styrelsen for Slotte og Kulturejendomme confirms that there used to be a confidence table there.)

Frederiksberg Palace (<http://kongeligeslotte.dk/en/palaces-and-gardens/frederiksberg-palace.html>)

(1703. The table existed at least until 1721.)

“The King’s house behind Børsen”

(This table is listed in Salmonsens Konversationslexikon and dated to 1704.

Mogens Bencard mentions a house that was bought by King Frederick IV for his mistress. This is most likely the same house, even though Bencard writes that the rebuilding of the house took place 1709-1710, which means that the table cannot have been installed earlier than that.)

Frederiksborg Castle (<http://kongeligeslotte.dk/en/palaces-and-gardens/frederiksborg-castle.html>), Sparepenge

(Since there was a *farende stole* – hoistable chair – in the park pavilion Sparepenge, Bencard dates the table to the 1690s. The hoistable chairs were installed for Christian V who died in 1699.)

Copenhagen Castle, a vaulted room next to the Queen’s bedchamber

(Around 1710 according to Bencard. The castle was demolished in 1731.)

Copenhagen Castle, the Hermitage Room

(1720s.)

Fredensborg Palace (<http://kongeligeslotte.dk/en/palaces-and-gardens/fredensborg-palace-and-palace-gardens.html>), the Queen's antechamber (1724.)

Fredensborg Palace, the Hermitage

(1722. The pavilion was built at the end of a short jetty and was also known as the Angler's House. There is a watercolour painting by A.E. Willarst from 1727, where anglers can be seen standing on the jetty but also in the water. The painting is reproduced in *Rosenborg Studier*, p. 249.)

Copenhagen, Charlottenborg Palace (<http://www.charlottenborg.dk/page/view/161?lang=eng>) (1730s.)

Dyrehaven, The Hermitage (<http://kongeligeslotte.dk/en/palaces-and-gardens/the-hermitage.html>)

(This small castle was built 1734-1736 and was fitted out with a confidence table in 1736. There must have been some sort of problem with it, as it was replaced with a new one two years later. This table had room for twelve people.)

Christiansborg Palace (<http://kongeligeslotte.dk/en/palaces-and-gardens/christiansborg-palace.html>)

(1739. This seems to have been Denmark's largest and most technically advanced table with room for 20 people. The table was demolished before 1770. The Palace was destroyed in a fire in 1794.)

France:

Essonne, Maison de Chantemesle (18)
(Before 1701.)

Lunéville, Château de Lunéville (<http://www.chateauluneville.meurthe-et-moselle.fr/fr/le-chateau-des-lumieres-de-luneville.html>) (19)

(1705. The table was recreated "virtually" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLODc-XtWB8>) for an exhibition in 2015.)

Meudon, Château de Bellevue (20)
(1750s?)

Choisy-le-Roi, Château de Choisy (21)

(1756. Guérin de Montpellier constructed the table. The palace was demolished in 1839.)

Versailles, Petit Trianon (<http://en.chateauversailles.fr/explore-the-estate/marie-antoinettes-estate/le-petit-trianon/petit-trianon>) (22)

(Antoine-Joseph Lorient started building two tables but was ordered to stop in 1772 before they were completed.)

Paris, The Louvre (23)

(A table is mentioned in a diary in 1769, but this was almost certainly a model only.)

Versailles, Les Petits Appartements (<http://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover-the-estate/the-palace/the-palace/the-kings-interior-apartments/the-kings-interior-apart/the-kings-interior-apartments-1>) (24)

(Unconfirmed. There was, however, a hoistable chair in Versailles. It was commissioned by King Louis XV for Madame de Châteauroux. She could use the chair to get to her rooms on the third floor. Madame de Pompadour later used the elevator.)

Italy:

Palermo, Casina/Palazzino Cinese (25)

(Around 1800. The machinery and the table still exist. The table is called *tavola matematica* – mathematical table – and very much resembles the table in Český Krumlov.)

Portici, Palazzo Reale di Portici (<http://www.centromusa.it/it/visite-visite.html>), Casino della Tavola Muta (26)

(1775. The table was installed in an oval room in a tower in the park and was referred to as *tavola muta* – silent table. If my information is correct, the tower does not exist anymore.)

Poland: (27)

Warsaw, Royal Castle (<https://www.zamek-krolewski.pl/en>)

(Around 1715. Augustus II the Strong had the table installed. The castle was demolished in the Second World War, but has been rebuilt.)

Warsaw, the Saxon Palace

(1710s. This table was also commissioned by Augustus the Strong. The palace was blown up in the Second World War.)

Russia: (28)

Peterhof, Grand Palace (<http://eng.peterhofmuseum.ru/page.php?id=4&page=191>)

(18th century.)

Peterhof, the Hermitage (<http://eng.peterhofmuseum.ru/page.php?id=4&page=98>)

(1721-1725. The machinery was destroyed in the Second World War but was reconstructed in 2009. There was room for 14 people around the table.)

Saint Petersburg, the Shuvalov palace

(1730s.)

Saint Petersburg, A. P. Bestuzjev-Rjumin's estate

(1740s or 1750s. The estate was situated on Kamenny Island.)

Tsarskoye Selo, the Hermitage (http://eng.tzar.ru/museums/palaces/catherine_park/regular/hermitage/)

(1750s. The machinery is partially preserved, partially reconstructed. 18 people could sit around this table.)

Saint Petersburg, the Winter Palace (<https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/>)

(18th century. I am not entirely sure if this was a separate table or if it is the same as the one in the following post.)

Saint Petersburg, the Small Hermitage (<https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/explore/buildings/locations/building/B20/?lng=>)

(End of the 1760s.)

Oranienbaum (<http://eng.peterhofmuseum.ru/page.php?id=7>), Palace of Peter III, the Hermitage

(1760s. The Hermitage does not exist anymore.)

Kuskovo (<http://www.moscow.info/parks/kuskovo-park.aspx>), the Sheremetev country estate, the Hermitage

(1767. In the pavilion, there was also a hoistable chair, probably resembling the one in the Peterhof Hermitage. The Russian tables are concentrated around Saint Petersburg, but this estate is actually situated outside of Moscow.)

Saint Petersburg, the Sheremetev palace

(1770s.)

Sweden:

Ulriksdal, the Palace Theatre **Confidencen (<http://www.confidencen.se/english/>) (29)**

(1754. The machinery and table were reconstructed 1994-1997.)

Drottningholm, the Confidence Pavilion next to the Chinese Pavilion (<http://www.kungahuset.se/royalcourt/visittheroyalpalaces/thechinesepavilion.4.396160511584257f2180001373.html>) (30)

(1763. Original, still working machinery.)

Torö, "Villa Fjolle"/"Villa Spies" (31)

(1969. The table still exists.)

Czech Republic:

Český Krumlov, Villa Bellaria (http://www.castle.ckrumlov.cz/docs/en/zamek_zahrada_bellar.xml) (32)

(1746. The table is in a house in the castle park in this gem of a town. The machinery is still in working order.)

Germany:

Dresden, Dresden Castle (<http://www.skd.museum/en/museums-institutions/residenzschloss/>) (33)

(1721. The table was constructed by Andreas Gärtner. It had only room for four people, but if the description of two halves is correct, it probably meant that eight people could be seated around it if necessary.)

Dresden, Pillnitz Palace (<http://www.schlosspillnitz.de/en/homepage/>) (34)

(1720s. A confidence table was planned but never installed, possibly due to the high water table near river Elbe.)

Berlin, City Palace (35)

(1728. The palace was bombed in the Second World War and demolished.)

Altenburg, Schönhaus (36)

(1730s. The pavilion was demolished in 1955 as it was in a bad state. I have not been able to verify this table.)

Weimar, Belvedere (<http://www.klassik-stiftung.de/en/institutions/castles-and-gardens/belvedere-castle-park-and-orangery/>) (37)

(1730s. The table is supposed to have existed as late as 1933. I have not been able to verify this.)

Festung Königstein (<http://www.festung-koenigstein.de/en/>), Friedrichsburg (38)

(1731. The pavilion was struck by lightning in 1744.)

The table and the hoisting device were reconstructed in 1999.)

Potsdam, City Palace (39)

(1745. The palace was bombed in the Second World War and was demolished. Here is a picture of the table (<http://www.bildindex.de/obj00001660.html#|1>).

An interesting coincidence is that the room where the confidence table stood housed a portrait of Lovisa Ulrika (<http://www.bildindex.de/obj00020074.html#|home>).

Berlin, Kadettenhaus Neubau (40)

(1770s.)

Schloss Linderhof (<http://www.schlosslinderhof.de/englisch/palace/history.htm>) (41)

(1870-80s. The machinery still exists, but it has been blocked for security reasons.)

Herrenchiemsee, Neues Schloss (http://www.herrenchiemsee.de/englisch/n_palace/index.htm) (42)

(1880s. The machinery still exists, but it has been blocked.)

Austria:

Vienna, Schönbrunn (<http://www.schoenbrunn.at/en.html>), the round Chinese cabinet (43)

(1743. Demolished no later than 1753.)

And in the end...

The table and machinery in the Confidence Pavilion, next to the Chinese Pavilion in Sweden, have been preserved since they were installed in the 1760s to this day. However, they have probably, from time to time, fallen into oblivion, or at least not been known to the public at large. I am sure that the courtier Fritz von Dardel was a little surprised when he visited Drottningholm Palace and the Chinese Pavilion on the 5th of August 1857. In his diary (published under the title *Minnen* in 1901) he writes:

Our carriages stopped at Kina, this exquisitely beautiful summer palace, where we were led into one of the four pavilions that surround the main building. Everybody sat in a ring on the floor, as if to play sitting-down games. When Prince Oscar clapped his hands three times, the floor opened and a richly laid table slowly ascended through the hole. We immediately attacked the table and served ourselves. Everybody was in high spirits. (44)

You can sense a certain degree of delight over the magic table – and I dare say that this somewhat odd invention still manages to fascinate and intrigue in this age of high technology. I certainly would not mind having a table like that in my own humble home.

Footnotes:

(1) See for instance *Confidencen: An old theatre resurrected*, 1999, p. 49.

(2) E-mail from Kent Alstrup at Styrelsen for Slotte og Kulturejendomme.

(3) "Eremitage-borde i Köbenhavn og Dresden" in *Tro, styrke, kaerlighed: Danmark og Sachsen – aegteskaber, politiske og kulturelle forbindelser*, pp. 287-288.

(4) The information about the Danish tables are primarily taken from Mogens Bencard's excellent article "Notes on the table in late 17th and early 18th century Denmark" in *Rosenborg Studier* (Copenhagen,

- 2000).
- (5) *Confidencen – an old theatre resurrected*, p. 49.
- (6) This is according to Mogens Bencard in *Rosenborg Studier*. However, the book about The Chinese Pavilion in the book series *De Kungliga slotten* (Stockholm 2002) states that the Confidence Pavilion stood finished in 1762 at the latest.
- (7) *Confidencen – an old theatre resurrected*, p. 49.
- (8) See for instance. *Rosenborg Studier*.
- (9) According to *Confidencen – an old theatre resurrected*, p. 49, there is room for eight to ten people around the tables. However, *Confidencen Ulriksdals slottsteater 1981-1991* (Stockholm 1991) states six, which is a more likely number.
- (10) This information is taken from *Bohemia: Oder Unterhaltungsblätter Für Gebildete Stände*, 2 (A. Haase, 1839.)
- (11) Information from the [Schloss Linderhof \(http://www.schlosslinderhof.de/englisch/palace/pict08.htm\)](http://www.schlosslinderhof.de/englisch/palace/pict08.htm) web site and the guided tour, which I attended in 2013.
- (12) This is according to the web site of [Schloss Herrenchiemsee \(http://www.herrenchiemsee.de/englisch/n_palace/spisezimmer.htm\)](http://www.herrenchiemsee.de/englisch/n_palace/spisezimmer.htm). There is a tendency to use this name for the confidence tables in Germany today, but I have found no evidence that the name was used before Ludwig II's days.
- (13) *Confidencen – an old theatre resurrected*, p. 49
- (14) See for instance this web site: [Peterhof Hermitage Pavilion \(http://stpetersburgrossia.ru/Peterhof/Hermitage_Pavilion\)](http://stpetersburgrossia.ru/Peterhof/Hermitage_Pavilion)
- (15) "Villa Spies", [www.askergren.com/spies \(http://www.askergren.com/spies.html\)](http://www.askergren.com/spies) (1996 + 2008)
- (16) To tell the truth, none of the people or institutions I have contacted have replied. I have also searched the internet in all possible ways but have not found any evidence of confidence tables.
- (17) The list of Danish tables has been compiled from Mogens Bencard's detailed article in *Rosenborg Studier*, however with complementary information from *Salmonsens Konversationsleksikon 1915-1930* and from Kent Alstrup at Styrelsen for Slotte og Kulturejendomme.
- (18) This according to Bencard in *Rosenborg Studier*.
- (19) According to press material for the exhibition *Tous à Table!* in Château de Lunéville in 2015, and an article in *L'est Républicain* (<http://www.estrepublicain.fr/edition-de-luneville/2015/07/23/luneville-tous-a-table-au-chateau>).
- (20) The statement that there was a confidence table in Château Bellevue is supposedly to be found in the footnotes to Rodolphe el-Khoury's translation of Jean-François de Bastide's novella *La Petite Maison* from 1753 (*The Little House: An Architectural Seduction* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1996)). I have not been able to verify the existence of this table.
- (21) See for instance *Rosenborg Studier*.
- (22) See Da Vinha & Masson *Versailles: Histoire, Dictionnaire et Anthologie* (2015) under the entry "Tables Volantes".
- (23) This information can be found in *Mémoires secrets de Bachaumont de 1762 à 1787, volume 2* for May 31, 1769. The table was destined for Petit Trianon at Versailles, so this was not a permanent table for the Louvre.
- (24) The information appears in Mogens Bencard's article on Danish tables in *Rosenborg Studier*. He has received the information from Béatrix Saule at Versailles, which should guarantee that it is correct. I have not seen, however, any other reference to this table. Regarding the chair, see for instance the material for the 2011 exhibition [Sciences et Curiosités à la Cour de Versailles \(http://sciences.chateauversailles.fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=146&Itemid=468&lang=fr\)](http://sciences.chateauversailles.fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=146&Itemid=468&lang=fr).
- (25) See for instance this web site: [Storia della Palazzina Cinese \(http://www.parcodellafavorita.it/storia_palazzina_cinese.html\)](http://www.parcodellafavorita.it/storia_palazzina_cinese.html)
- (26) The information can be found in this [PDF \(http://www.enteassistenza.it/contenuti/AttivitaSociali\)](http://www.enteassistenza.it/contenuti/AttivitaSociali)

[/Suggestivi/Portici%20Centro%20Soggiorno.pdf](#)).

(27) The Polish tables are mentioned in *Rosenborg Studier*.

(28) The information regarding the Russian tables is slightly unclear. Mogens Bencard mentions the Sheremetev palace in Saint Petersburg, but it is more likely that the table referred to was the one at Kuskovo, the Sheremetev's country summerhouse and estate. The table is mentioned for instance on this [web site \(http://about-eastern-europe.com/kuskovo-estate/\)](http://about-eastern-europe.com/kuskovo-estate/). The family could very well have had a table in their Saint Petersburg palace too, but I have not been able to verify this. Bencard also mentions the Shuvalov palace in Saint Petersburg. This is another table that I have not been able to verify. In her e-mail to me, Nino B. Vakhania at Peterhof does not mention any table in the Shuvalov palace, but she mentions another Saint Petersburg table, namely the one at A.P. Bestuzjev-Rjumin's manor on Kamenny Island.

(29) See for instance *Confidencen Ulriksdals slottsteater 1981-1991*.

(30) See for instance *Kina slott* in the book series *De Kungliga slotten*.

(31) www.askergren.com/spies (<http://www.askergren.com/spies.html>).

(32) See for instance this web site: [Summer-house Bellarie \(http://www.castle.ckrumlov.cz/docs/en/zamek_zahrada_bellar.xml\)](http://www.castle.ckrumlov.cz/docs/en/zamek_zahrada_bellar.xml)

(33) *Bohemia: Oder Unterhaltungsblätter Für Gebildete Stände*, 2 (A. Haase, 1839).

(34) The information about the high water table can be found in Maureen Cassidy-Geiger's article "Meissen Porcelain for Sophie Dorothea of Prussia and the Exchange of Visits between the Kings of Poland and Prussia in 1728" in *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 37 (2002), footnote 44 on p. 165.

Uli Kretzschmar at Schlösserland Sachsen confirms that there have been strong rumours about a table in Pillnitz, but no traces have been found of it.

(35) See for instance Friedrich Nicolai *Beschreibung der königlichen Residenzstädte Berlin und Potsdam, volym 2*, 1779.

(36) The statement about a confidence table in Schönhaus is in *Herzogthum Sachsen-Altenburg* (Jena, 1895). I have not been able to verify the existence of this table, but judging from the appearance of the building, it certainly is not unthinkable. Compare the Schönhaus picture with the picture of the Confidence Pavilion next to the Chinese Pavilion in Drottningholm Palace Park.

(37) This information can be found in *Rosenborg Studier*.

(38) See for instance this web site: [Friedrichsburg \(http://www.festung-koenigstein.de/en/tour-en.html\)](http://www.festung-koenigstein.de/en/tour-en.html)

(39) Gustav Berthold Volz *Friedrich der Große im Spiegel seiner Zeit: Jugend und Schlesische Kriege bis 1756*, 1901.

(40) This could possibly refer to a more regular dumb-waiter, but the term *Maschinentafel* is used when the dining hall in the house is described in *Handbuch für Reisende in Deutschland*, J.D.F. Neigebaur, 1843.

(41) See the official web site of [Schloss Linderhof \(http://www.schlosslinderhof.de/englisch/palace/pict08.htm\)](http://www.schlosslinderhof.de/englisch/palace/pict08.htm).

(42) See the official web site of [Schloss Herrenchiemsee \(http://www.herrenchiemsee.de/englisch/n_palace/speisezimmer.htm\)](http://www.herrenchiemsee.de/englisch/n_palace/speisezimmer.htm).

(43) Dr Elfriede Iby tells me in an e-mail that she for a long time was inclined to believe that the so called "conspiracy table" at Schönbrunn was a myth. But when the room under the cabinet where the table supposedly had been situated, traces of it were suddenly found.

(44) Fritz von Dardel, *Minnen 1833-1861* (Stockholm 1911) p. 137. Translation by Lasse Brundin.

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