

# RD

L U X U R I E

THE HOME DESIGN ISSUE

ROOM

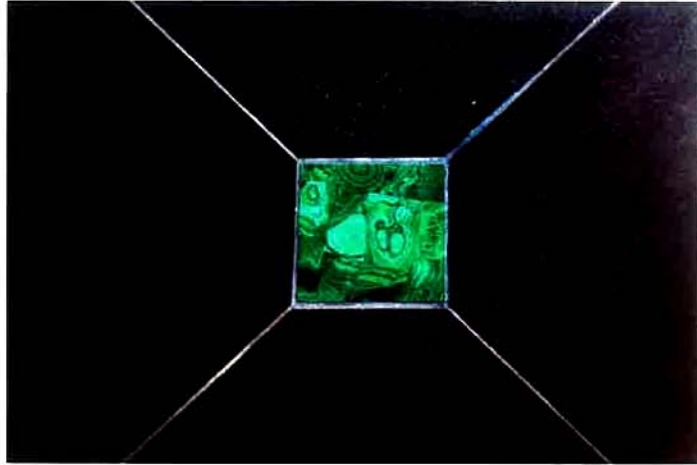


IN DALLAS, A GRAND NEW MANSION BRIMS  
WITH MALACHITE — A MOST ROYAL STONE — GIVING A CERTAIN  
PALACE IN ST. PETERSBURG A RUN FOR ITS RUBLES

# THE ENVY OF EMPRESSES EVERYWHERE

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**N**o one who visits the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, wants to see *only* the masterpieces of Leonardo, Raphael, Rembrandt, Murillo, Canova, Gauguin, Matisse and Picasso. They want to see the Winter Palace, too, through which one enters to visit the Hermitage. Royalty never disappoints, and even the most diehard of Marxists kept the palace open for the people. The vast rooms of the Winter Palace — the throne room, the chapel, the state dining room — are so numbingly grand that almost everyone makes a beeline to the smaller Malachite Room, which is, to the Winter Palace, what the Amber Room is to the Summer Palace outside of the city.

The Amber Room came first, a gift to Czar Peter the Great from the King of Prussia but, soon after a fire destroyed much of the Winter Palace in 1837, the Russian neoclassical architect Alexander Briullov was asked to redesign the interiors.

His rooms are masterpieces of state stagecraft, but the most intimate, the most private, is the Malachite Room.

I will never forget walking through it with a Russian guide and a small group of Dallasites a few years after I left the Dallas Museum of Art. We marveled at the combination of intense green malachite veneers, the snowy white plaster, the gilt bronze and wood, the warm browns of the inlaid woods and the crimson in the silk and damask upholstery and draperies.

The effect was hypnotic, and we all yearned to step over the silk ropes and pretend that we were the Empress Alexandra Fyodorovna, the wife of Emperor Nicholas I, for whom the room was designed as an official drawing room in which to greet friends and dignitaries.

After all, in our minds, we *were* dignitaries. But we merely marveled at the green of the columns, pilasters, urns, table tops, boxes and vases — a color so intense that it seemed difficult to believe that it was all cut and inlaid by Russian and Italian craftsmen almost two centuries ago. The upholstery has been replaced many times in the intervening decades to retain its ruby brilliance. Not so the malachite.

We learned that the largest malachite mines then known in the world were in the Ural Mountains, and that the Russians imported Italian stone craftsmen who had, for centuries, used it in their *pietra dura* furniture.

I piped up that I remembered Italian painters grinding malachite to produce green pigment in the late Middle Ages. (Everyone was impressed.) But it wasn't that information that mattered: It was that the technologies to veneer malachite were still alive, and that there was a market for luxury malachite objects worldwide, even today.

Although we in Dallas are not as rich as the czars or even as the princes and sultans of Abu Dhabi or Saudi Arabia, we are no slouches in the acquisition department. Since that visit, literally hundreds of malachite objects have migrated to the Dallas-Fort Worth area. These pages are graced with photographs of just a few of these objects, gathered by one particularly enthusiastic collector for the grand Dallas home she shares with her husband. Many of them inhabit a malachite room that might impress even Empress Alexandra. What other city has a house with malachite cabochons in the floor, an entire malachite shower and hundreds of square feet of malachite veneer on furniture, sculpture, clocks and boxes?

The husband of said enthusiastic collector has a very ADD way of attempting to dissuade his wife from collecting even more.

"T. N. M. M!" he says to her. "There's no more malachite!"

I secretly hope that there is.

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PREVIOUS SPREAD: Stairs of Carrara marble leap from black granite floors inlaid with semiprecious malachite stone.  
THIS PAGE: A monumental custom chandelier of gilt bronze and semiprecious malachite





OPPOSITE PAGE: A stunning late-19th-century mounted malachite pedestal clock on a new custom base of black granite and malachite. ABOVE, clockwise from top: Semiprecious malachite inlaid into wood wall sections. A large Empire-style center table, almost three feet high, of malachite and bronze. A semiprecious malachite weight dangles from one of a pair of custom crystal-and-malachite chandeliers. One of a pair of ormolu mounted malachite coffee tables.



ABOVE, clockwise from upper left: One of a pair of important Empire-style *girandoles* (candelabras), approximately 8 feet tall, of gilt bronze and malachite, the latter believed to be Russian. One of a breathtaking pair of late-19th-century gilt-bronze mounted malachite pedestals and urns, the latter signed *F. Barbedienne Paris* — the same foundry reproduced sculptures by Rodin — and a giallo sienna marble mantel, circa 1810. An empire-style malachite console adorned with sphinxes of bronze; atop it, a pair of candelabras from a malachite mantel set, Napoleon III, Paris, circa 1880. A late-19th-century gilt-bronze mounted Louis XV-style malachite vitrine. OPPOSITE PAGE: One of a pair of semiprecious malachite Louis XVI-style columns with ormolu capitals and bases, mounted on custom bases of Carrara marble inlaid with more semiprecious malachite.



