

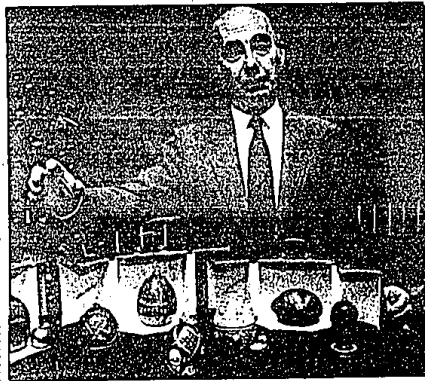
Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300



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STEPHEN GANTRELL/staff photographer

Theo Faberge talked about the Faberge egg collection recently at Jacobson stores in Birmingham and Livonia.

Faberge's story of 'The Egg and I'

By C.L. Rugenstein
special writer

THEO FABERGE had no intention of going into the egg business.

"It never even entered my head," said the grandson of Carl Faberge, who created those opulent jeweled masterpieces for Czar Nicholas of Russia.

Theo had always held his grandfather in awe: "I felt if I couldn't approach the level of his craftsmanship, I didn't want to make any eggs," explained the 66-year-old Faberge at Jacobson stores in Birmingham and Livonia recently to preview his St. Petersburg Collection. "I didn't want to emulate my grandfather."

Fortunately Faberge discovered — in a roundabout way — his own particular talent for making those ornamental eggs.

"I was trapped into it, actually," he admitted, by the nephew of a woman for whom he'd done antique jewelry repairs in his London shop. "He asked me to make a little wooden egg" — preferably of yew wood. Theo did — using a piece of wood he had authenticated to be 900 years old, or about the period of William the Conqueror. The aunt was impressed and asked Theo to make an egg for her — but not of wood, which looked too much "like a doorknob!"

SO FABERGE ADDED more gold decorations, made it larger, and put in a birthstone to create the predecessor of the Scribe's Egg, one of the eight limited edition decorative eggs in the St. Petersburg Collection.

The St. Petersburg Collection represents the first time any Faberge has gone public with his creations. Since before the Czar's patronage brought them worldwide renown, the Faberges were custom jewelers who worked only on private commissions. Theo himself only did commissions until he created the Scribe's Egg. "And if I hadn't done that one, I wouldn't have done any of them," he added.

All turned by hand on his own lathe (a thread-driven Holtzapffel, circa 1881, to which he clamps a power source) with a handcrafted gold "surprise" set into it, the Scribe's Egg gave Faberge the confidence to create other designs.

"I exhibited a very similar piece in the Goldsmith's Hall in London, and it was accepted quite favorably," he modestly noted. "So I thought then, perhaps I could do something worthy of the name of my grandfather."

IT ALSO SET him to thinking he'd

like to reach a wider public with "affordable eggs of quality."

The result is the St. Petersburg Collection, ranging in price from \$650 for the Scribe's Egg, to \$2,400 for the lavish ruby crystal and scrolled silver commemorative St. Vladimir's Egg.

Though Faberge designs all the eggs and handcrafts the wooden ones himself, he worked closely with a modelmaker on the commemorative egg. The inside "surprise," a Faberge egg tradition, is a sterling silver scale model of St. Vladimir's Cathedral in Kiev, signed and dated in Church Slavonic.

The St. Vladimir Egg is special on several other counts as well. It celebrates next year's one thousandth anniversary of Russian Orthodox Christianity. It was specially commissioned by the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia and blessed by head of the church, His Eminence Metropolitan Vitaly. And finally, it's the first piece a member of the Faberge family has made for the church since the Russian Revolution.

The St. Vladimir Egg is the crowning piece of the collection but others, like the Spring Egg, the Devil's Egg, and the Dragon's Egg are equally fabulous.

EASTER WAS THE time for gift-giving in Russia, and since the egg symbolized resurrection, the return of life to the land, eggs were the gift of choice. (Hence the reason for Czar Nicholas' choice of the egg as a vehicle for his extravagant fancies.)

Faberge's Spring Egg features hand-painted spring flowers raised in crystal. Inside is a golden yolk topped by a ruby mounted imperial crown. While the yolk symbolizes Christ's resurrection, the crown represents the Czar, who was head of the Russian church.

The Devil's Egg is another reference to a Biblical theme. Of "Paradise green" crystal with a 23 carat gold, ruby-eyed serpent circling its top, it "tells the story of temptation and original sin" according to Faberge spokesmen. The inside surprise is a gold-on-crystal apple, with a secret compartment beneath its silver tray to store one's own special temptations.

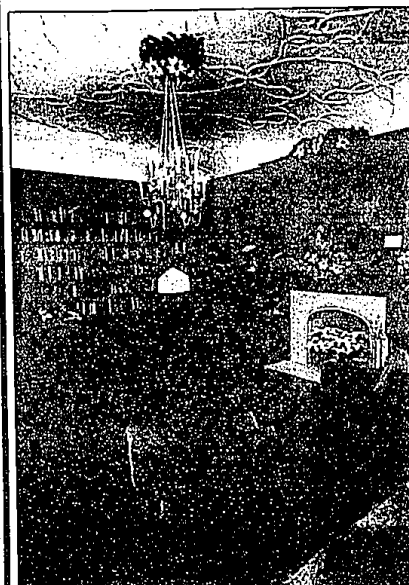
FABERGE CREATED the Dragon's Egg as a tribute to his grandfather Carl, who was one of the first Europeans to incorporate Japanese ideas into jewelry design. A 23 carat gold, ruby-eyed oriental dragon surrounds the top of the jet black crystal and gold-flowered egg. This egg however is meant for use as a paperweight and has no inside surprise.



Patli Baker (left) and Bea Wright of Village Green Florists in Livonia decorated the Ford mansion gathering room.



Another Livonia florist who helped with decorations was Kathy Harrigan of Merri-Craft Florists. Not shown, but equally involved, were Vicki de Santo, Shirley Fradette and Estelle Howitt. They did Mrs. Ford's study.



Simplicity adds to the quiet elegance of the estate's library.

Floral fantasy at Fair Lane

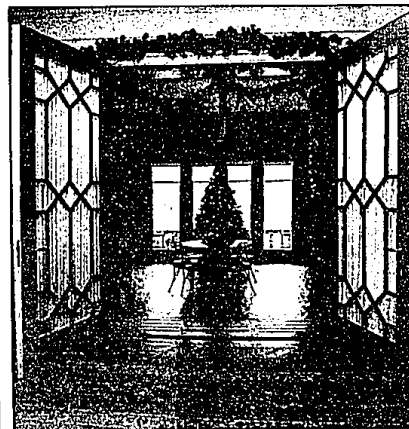
GUIDED floral tours are among the special holiday season events being offered by the Henry Ford Estate-Fair Lane, on the campus of the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

In full force during the pre-Christmas holidays, they will continue through Jan. 2 (except for New Year's Day) 1-4 p.m.

More than a dozen local florists volunteered their time and resources to decorate the estate with all manner of holiday foliage.

Regular tour prices (\$5 regular admission, \$4 for seniors, students and children) apply.

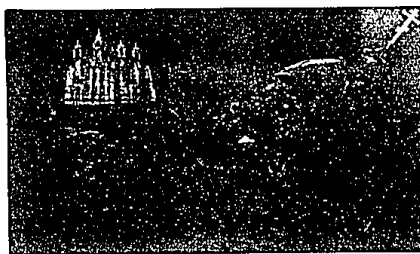
The Henry Ford Estate-Fair Lane is on the campus of the University of Michigan-Dearborn, on Evergreen, across from the Fairlane Town Center. For further information regarding any of these programs, call 593-5550.



Above, the entrance to the sun porch festooned in greenery while at the left is gaily bedecked chub in the mansion's music room.



Staff photos by Steve Fecht



Interior of Faberge egg has surprise element.