

The House of Marchak

Known as the “Cartier of Kyiv”¹, the House of Marchak is named after its founder Joseph Abramovich Marchak (1854-1918). He was born to a Jewish Ukrainian family, the eldest son of Abram Isakovich Marchak and Feni Lazarevna, in Ignatovka, on the outskirts of Kyiv². Marchak began his career at the age of 14 as an apprentice at a jeweller’s atelier in his hometown. Just 10 years later, at the age of 24, established his own business making chains and simple pieces in the impoverished Podol neighbourhood in Kyiv in 1878, using money from his wife Elizabeth Fedorevna’s dowry and from pawning his own clothes³.



Figure 1. Portrait of Joseph Marchak.

From these humble beginnings, Marchak’s craftsmanship was beginning to be recognised for both quality, beauty, skills, and his attention to detail, and soon his production began to diversify beyond chain-making. Within a year of establishing his business, Marchak was able to move and establish himself on Kyiv’s main street, Khreshchatyk Avenue, and by 1899, employed over 150 workers in his boutique and workshops⁴.

¹ Sotheby’s (2022)

² Nemets *et al.* (2022)

³ Wilson’s Estate Jewelry (2022)

⁴ Wilson’s Estate Jewelry (2022)

The company was known to use the finest materials: gold from Paris, Berlin and Hamburg; silver from Moscow; and platinum from St. Petersburg⁵. Marchak was also known to hire the best craftsmen – from goldsmiths to engravers – and believing in them, investing in his staff and giving them the tools to excel. He even began a series of apprenticeships, starting with goldsmithing and eventually expanding to different disciplines⁶. Marchak was also known for having an extensive reference library that continuously updated in tandem with changing trends for his designers to use and the best working environment for his staff.

From the 1890s onward, Joseph Marchak began to travel, promoting his business and exposing himself to new ideas. This began with the 1891 *Franco-Russian* exhibition in Moscow, which began his interest in Paris in particular⁷. Marchak began to participate in exhibitions around the world as well, gaining recognition and winning awards, such as a medal for his jewellery during the 1893 *World Fair* in Chicago; a medal in the 1894 *Exposition Internationale d'Anvers* in Belgium; a gold medal in the 1902 *International Artistic Exhibition* in Saint Petersburg; and a Grand Prix at the 1905 *Exposition Universelle et Internationale* in Belgium.



Figure 2. House of Marchak on the corner of Khreshchatyk and Triokhsviatytska in 1913.

In 1913, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the ruling House of Romanov, Tsar Nicholas II commissioned Marchak to create all the official gifts and commemorative pieces for the tercentenary celebrations, which was presented to him on his visit to Kyiv⁸. However, with the outbreak of World War I (1914-1918) and the Russian Revolution (1917-1923), Marchak had to close and its founder Joseph Marchak passed away in 1918 at the age of 64 due to cancer⁹.

⁵ Wilson's Estate Jewelry (2022)

⁶ Hancocks (2022a)

⁷ Hancocks (2022a)

⁸ Marchak (2022)

⁹ Wilson's Estate Jewelry (2022)

The Marchak name continued as Joseph Marchak's youngest son, Alexandre Marchak (1892-1975), took after his father in creativity and fled to Paris in 1919, having lived and studied in Paris for several years, first establishing a shop on 48 Rue Cambon and then on 4 Rue de la Paix by 1920¹⁰.

In the collection

During the 1920s, in addition to their reputation, Marchak's originality and quality led to swift success and a revival in popularity, particularly among wealthy foreigners. Known for their romanticized and oriental style, Marchak's work often incorporated motifs such as knots, baskets and loops, keeping up with the latest trends and the Art Deco style¹¹.

This compact (fig. 3) features interesting geometric designs on the surface but also on the bejewelled clasp. The Art Deco period was heavily inspired by cubism and the machine aesthetic in the form of geometric designs, particularly on diamond brooches, but also influenced all aspects of the decorative arts. In comparison to the Belle Époque and the Art Nouveau style, the Art Deco style emerged largely in part to the changes in fashion, led by Coco Chanel (1883-1971), and art by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)¹².

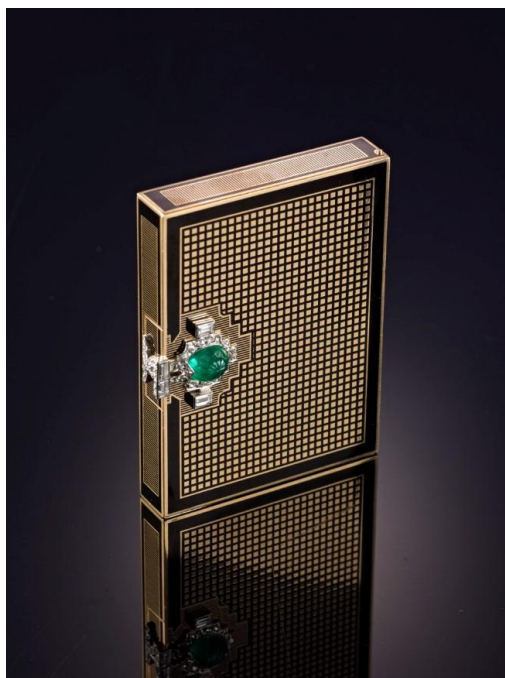


Figure 3. Compact, Maker: Marchak Paris, c. 1920, Materials: gold, emerald and diamond, Height 0.9 x Width 4.5 x Length 6 cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

¹⁰ Marchak (2022)

¹¹ Wilson's Estate Jewelry (2022)

¹² Etherington-Smith (2014), p. 74-76

At the same time, designs inspired by China and Japan were on the rise once again. Orientalism took form in the decorative arts through the use of lacquer work, lacquer imitations, and oriental materials such as jade, combined with traditional motifs and symbolism. This compact (fig. 4) is an example of oriental designs during the 1920s, the enamel is used to imitate traditional lacquer crafts and a lozenge frame at the centre is decorated with flower patterns such as peonies and water lilies. The black and red colour palette is also inline with the traditional colours of lacquer, tastefully paired with gold. At the time of production, Alexandre Marchak entered into a partnership with Robert Linzeler (1872-1941), a supplier for retailers such as Cartier, from 1922-1926¹³. Styled 'Linzeler et Marchak', they were one of the thirty jewellers selected to exhibit at the 1925 Paris *International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts* out of the many jewellery firms at the time and was awarded a Grand Prix¹⁴ (fig. 5). The styles and designs displayed at the exhibition became the standard for what would later be known as 'Art Deco'.



Figure 4. Compact, Maker: J. Marchak, c. 1925, Materials: gold and enamel, Height 0.6 x Width 3.9 x Length 5.9cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

¹³ Marchak (2022)

¹⁴ Sotheby's (2022)

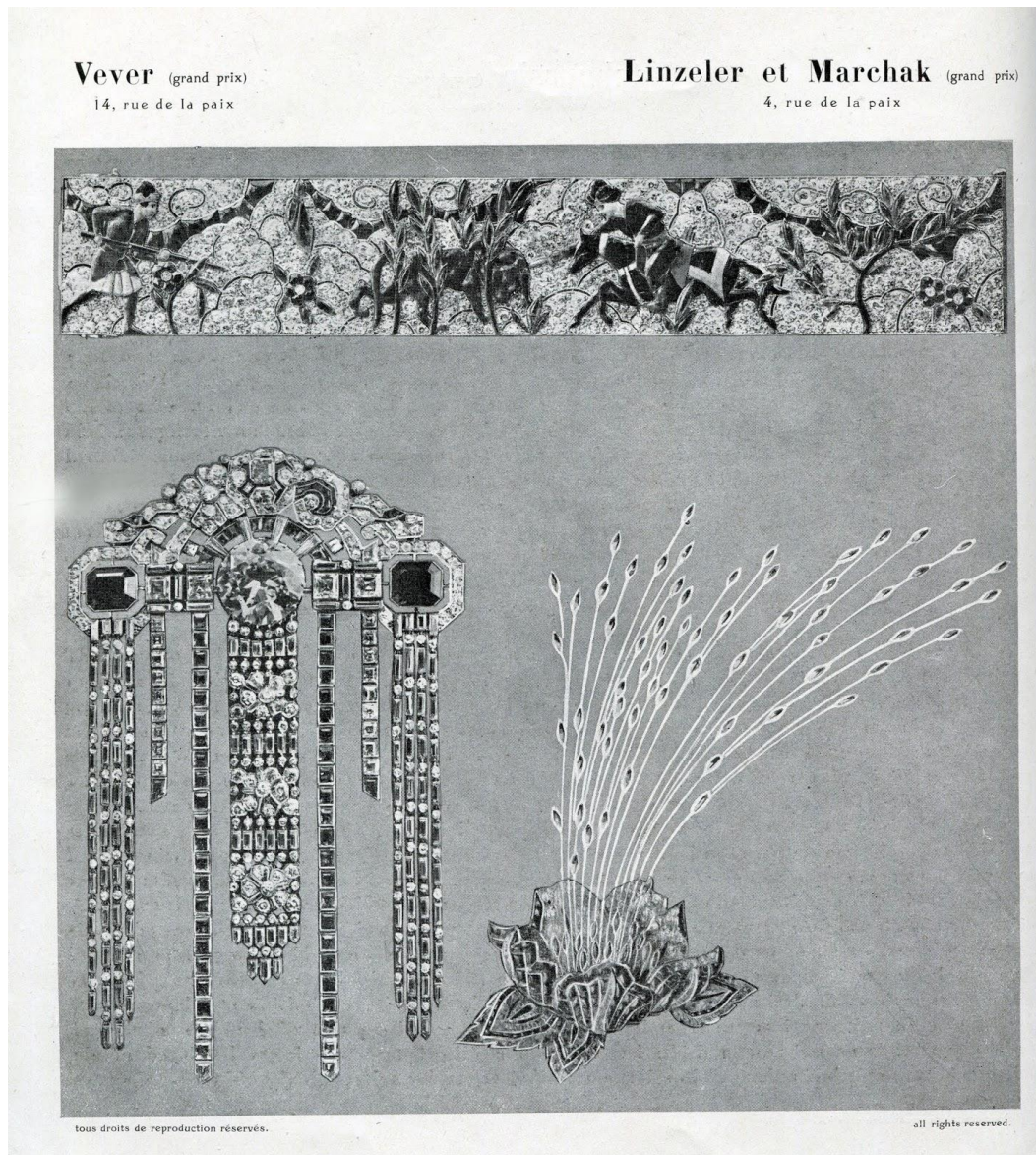


Figure 5. Award winning pieces by Linzeler and Marchak at the 1925 *International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts* in Paris.¹⁵

At the beginning of the 1930s, much of the world fell into an economic depression although France suffered much mildly in comparison to other countries, such as the United Kingdom and United States¹⁶. In fact, in 1931, Marchak joined the *Paris Colonial Exhibition* and won another Grand Prix¹⁷. Art Deco designs persisted throughout the era, albeit in a much more subdued manner. Although this nécessaire (fig. 6), in comparison to previous examples (fig. 3), continues the black and gold colour palette, gone are the jewels and the thick bold lines, replaced with thinner lines and an overall sleeker look. Gold remained an important precious material as it held value in a time of economic decline, which led to most items produced during this period being made in this material.

¹⁵ Richard, J. (2018)

¹⁶ Beaudry and Portier (2002)

¹⁷ Wilson's Estate Jewelry (2022)

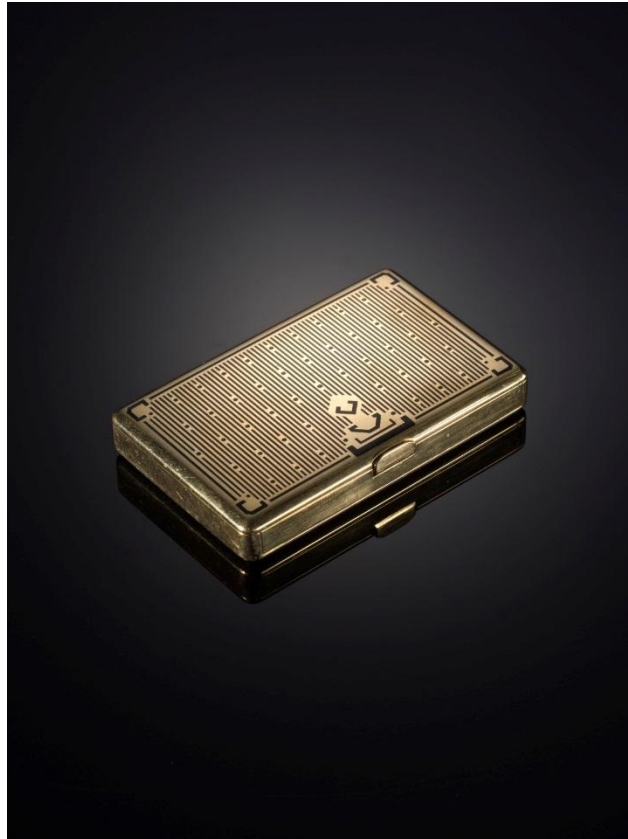


Figure 6. Nécessaire, Maker: Marchak, c. 1930, Materials: gold and enamel, Height 1 x Width 4.2 x Length 6.6cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

The Second World War (1939-1945) broke out across Europe, and Alexandre Marchak fled with his family to Savoie, leaving the company in the care of the director¹⁸. Due to the ongoing war, designs became simpler in comparison to the extravagance of the Art Deco era preceding it. Gold was scarce during the war, but platinum was banned in most non-military applications in certain countries as a strategic material to the war effort¹⁹. As such, despite the simpler designs, this compact (fig. 7) is made entirely from platinum and diamonds which is in and of itself an extravagance at the time. The surface of the compact is engraved with the initials 'J.W.' and it is unclear to whom it once belonged to.

¹⁸ Marchak (2022)

¹⁹ Broughton (2011)



Figure 7. Compact, Maker: Marchak, c. 1940, Materials: platinum and diamond, Height 1 x Width 6.6 x Length 7.6cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

In the post-war period, Marchak hired Alexander Diringer (n.d.), previously working for Cartier and Sterlé, as a chief designer and Jacques Verger (n.d.), also an apprentice to Sterlé, as a sales clerk²⁰. Jacques Verger was the grandson and son of Jacques (n.d.) and Henri Verger (n.d.) who ran their own workshops which collectively supplied brands such as Boucheron, Cartier, Tiffany, Van Cleef & Arpels, Lacloche, Janesich, Ostertag, and Black, Starr & Frost²¹. Jewellery designs in the 1950s turned to nature-inspired themes, such as flowers, birds and bugs, and was heavily inspired by the midcentury modern movement, which focused on simple and functional wood pieces²². This 1950s nécessaire (fig. 8) is an exemplary example of the design styles and movements of the time. The body of the nécessaire is made from burwood with minimal uses of gold and sapphire fittings.

²⁰ Lang Antiques (2022)

²¹ Lang Antiques (2022)

²² Lyon (2022)



Figure 8. Nécessaire, Maker: Marchak, c. 1920, Materials: burwood, gold and sapphire, Height 3 x Width 10.7 x Length 14.5cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

Jacques Verger was a great businessman and was responsible for the rise of Marchak in the American market, acquiring wealthy clientele such as Jacqueline Kennedy (1929-1994)²³. Marchak was also appointed as jewellers to King Hassan of Morocco through Verger's relationship with the monarch²⁴. In 1957, Alexandre Marchak retired and Marchak was purchased by Verger and Bertrand Degommier, and continued to operate the firm until 1988 when the firm was sold to Daum.

In 2003, one of the heirs of Alexandre Marchak, Dr. Daniel Marchak decided to relaunch the Marchak business with the opening of a salon near the Palais Royal. The company returned to Moscow with a boutique in Ukraina hotel along the banks of Moskva River.

²³ Sotheby's (2022)

²⁴ Lang Antiques (2022)

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