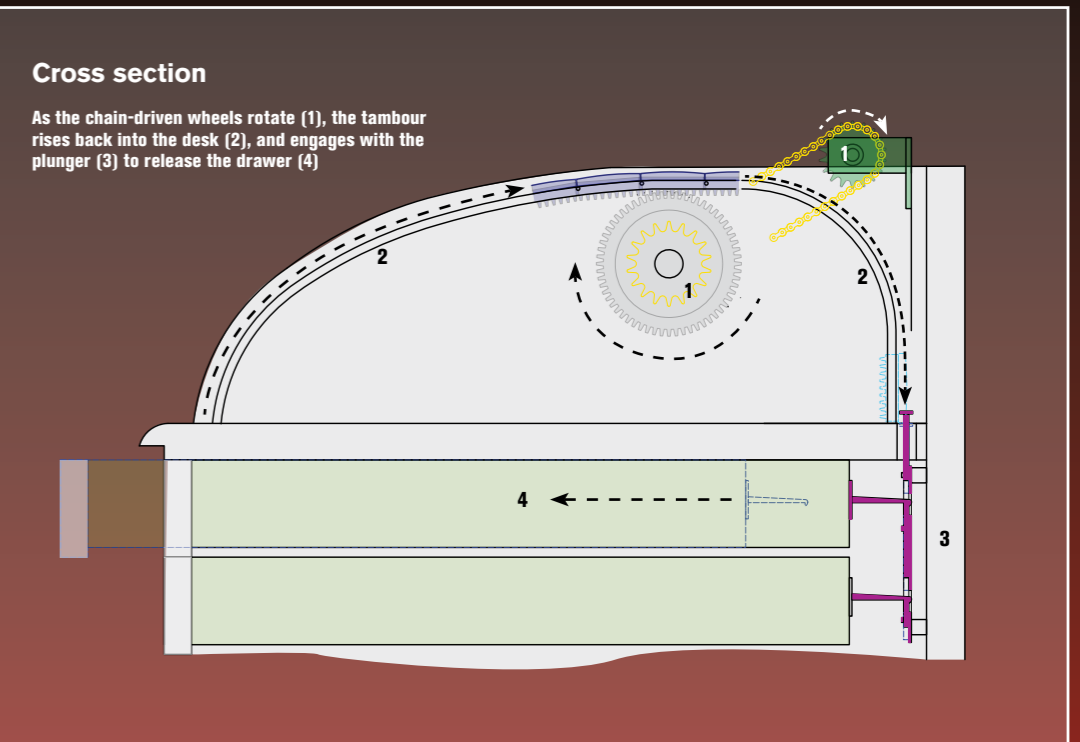
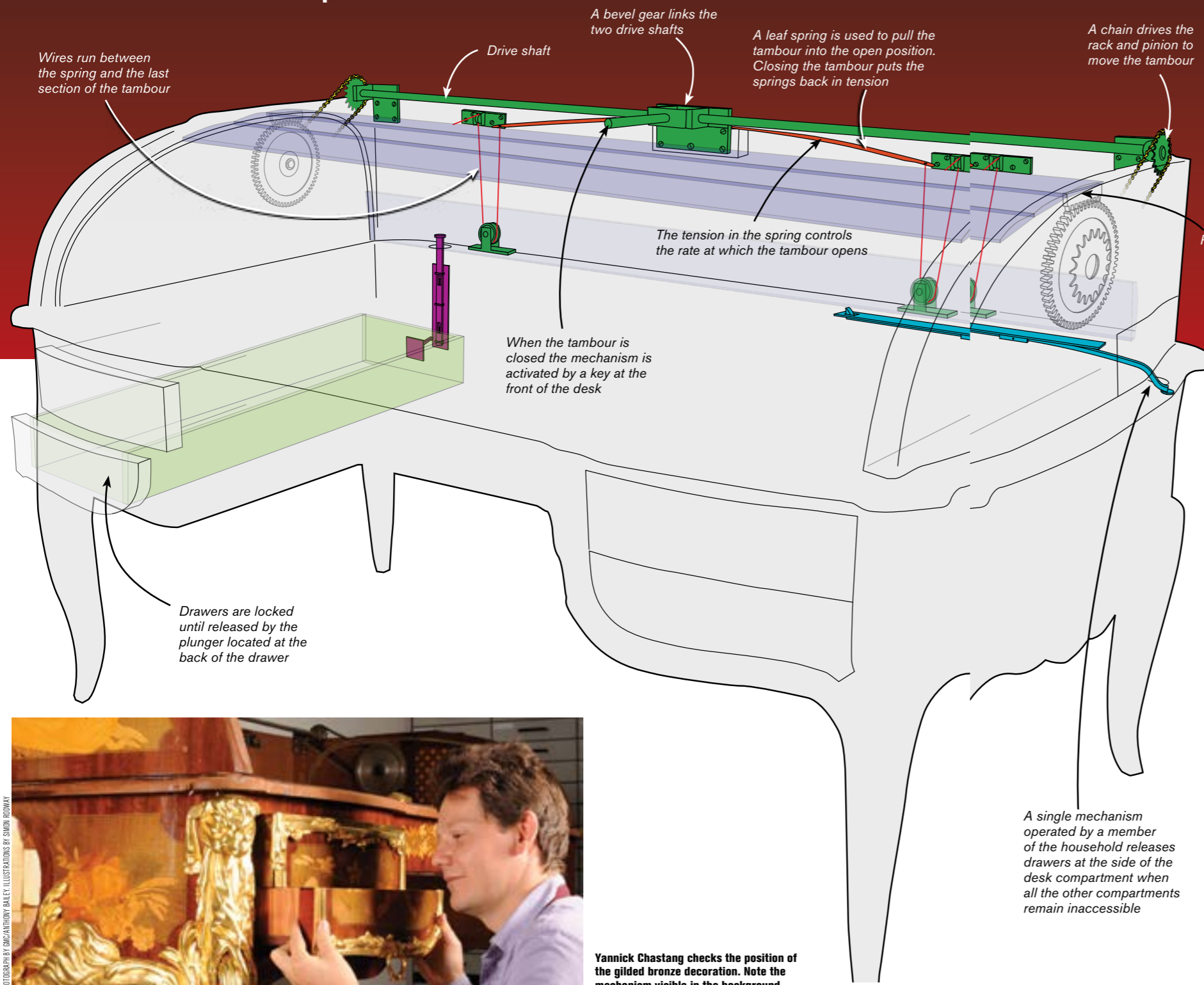


la majesté du bureau du roi

F&C reveals the technical ingenuity driving the mechanisms of this classic piece



Yannick Chastang checks the position of the gilded bronze decoration. Note the mechanism visible in the background

There is one item of furniture whose name when mentioned evokes passion and respect in almost immeasurable proportions. Conservationists will raise an eyebrow, a clear indication of some insider knowledge if ever there was one, whilst students of furniture design history will gush uncontrollably with anecdotes about the Palace where it resides. I am of course talking about the *bureau de roi* commissioned from Jean-Francois Oeben in 1760 and completed by Jean Henri Riesener in 1769 for Louis XV. From a historical perspective this piece of furniture is quite literally smothered with sentimental iconography and status befitting a pre-revolution head of state of the late 18th century. But the Louis' were no ordinary kings. They were chosen by the gods, no less, and when it came to furnishing the royal salon no expense was spared.

It's not unheard of for important artefacts like this to come complete with unquestionable provenance and even though the

palace exercised little restraint when it came to spending money, every penny was accounted for. Amongst other things, the records outline the nature of the work and the distribution of labour to complete the piece but sadly not all the details relating to the precise nature of all the hidden mechanisms. Some of this information still remains a mystery today.

We've been tracking the restoration of a replica bureau de roi by Francois Linke started in 1943. The current owner, Adrian Alan, has placed it in the hands of Yannick Chastang and F&C wanted to share with you some of the hidden secrets that make this desk as much a feat of mechanical ingenuity as artistic excess. Linke followed in the footsteps of numerous makers to produce three copies between 1910 and one other incomplete example in 1943.

Moving parts
There are as many as eight separate mechanisms within the bureau de roi that make it

impregnable to anyone other than the key holder apart from a member of the household whose responsibility it was to maintain the supplies of ink in the ink wells. These range from secret compartments to lockable drawers but by far the most exciting feature is a tambour lid that not only opens automatically at the turn of a key, it also does the same in reverse.

Such is the way of complex mechanisms that the system failed on more than one occasion causing it to be removed and along with it the secret of its design. To this day there remains no definitive answer as to how this might have worked suggesting that sometimes simple is best. Of course at F&C we wouldn't want you to feel left out so have reconstructed a few of the mechanisms that might just find their way into your next commission. F&C

Next month we are looking forward to revealing the project in its entirety and telling the incredible story behind this 21st century masterpiece

Over the page we have asked John Bullar to demonstrate a selection of devices more suited to exoteric man