

A Cartier Match Safe

By Neil Shapiro

It is often difficult to determine if a match safe was made by a particular maker if the match safe is not marked with that maker's name or mark. To try to positively attribute an unmarked object to one maker requires a series of facts that tie the characteristics of the object to that maker. Even then a definitive attribution may be impossible unless there are so many undeniable overlaps with known examples by the maker in question that attribution cannot be reasonably withheld.

An example of this type of analysis was applied to a round match safe with a bluish-green, guilloché enamel face with opaque white enamel borders, over an 18k ground, with rose cut diamonds mounted in the center. The sides of the match safe have bands of blue-green guilloché enamel with granulations of opaque white enamel. The thumb lift is another rose cut diamond.



Unmarked match safe

On the bale is a French mark for 18k gold or finer and under the lug is a four digit number, 1203. Engraved on the underside of the lid are the words, "E. Wasserman - New York." It is 1 7/8" in diameter and 3/8" in thickness. The striker is saw tooth in shape and made of the same 18k gold.



French 18k gold mark



Inside of lid



Striker

Since a name and geographic area is engraved on the match safe it was a logical place to begin to search for some clues to its origins. An internet search of the name E. Wasserman, New York, circa 1900-1910, revealed that Edward Wasserman was the son-in-law of Jesse Seligman one of the founders of J. & W. Seligman & Co., founded in 1864, a prominent U.S. investment bank from the 1860s to the 1920s, until the divestiture of its investment banking arm in the aftermath of the Glass-Steagall Act. The firm was involved in the financing of several major U.S. railroads in the 1870s and the construction of the Panama Canal in the early 1900s. Seligman was also involved in the formation of Standard Oil and General Motors. J. & W. Seligman & Co. was one of the wealthiest financial companies in the world. Edward Wasserman, a wealthy financier in his own right, clearly, was the owner of this expensive match safe. Edward Wasserman, who lived and worked in a rarified wealthy world, would not have owned an imitation Cartier match safe.

The match safe had a French gold mark on the bale so searching for a French company that might have made this type of match safe made sense.

The author remembered a round match safe with an enamel body made by Cartier, so he began to look at work by the eminent jeweler, Cartier. In the library at the Clark Art Institute there were a number of auction catalogs that had images of Cartier items that were sold. Some of the watches had very similar enamel work as well as shape and size to the match safe, all the watches were made by Cartier. This seemed promising so further searching of Cartier's work was necessary.



Marked Cartier match safe



Cartier watch

In the book, *Cartier*, by Hans Nadelhoffer, (p.97-98, 2007), there was a section on Cartier's Russian period. Nadelhoffer states there was a time when Louis Cartier competed with Fabergé. It is referred to as Cartier's "Russian Style." It was magnificent period with pieces made in the grand Imperial Czarist's style. From 1900, the year when Fabergé created a sensation at the Paris Universal Exposition, until 1906 Cartier offered his clients objects made not only in the Fabergé style, but also created by some of the same Russian suppliers as Fabergé used. Starting in 1906, Cartier himself began producing pieces in that style. The materials used and the types of objects made by Cartier and Fabergé were often identical.

Cartier's Russian-inspired pieces usually had a guilloché face or frame with either straight rays emanating from a central point or silk moiré type wavy lines creating an impression of shot silk with an iridescent appearance. Cartier often enclosed the enamel surface in an opaque white enamel border, either wavy or circular.

In 1904, Louis Cartier asked the Russian enamellist, Gustav Yahr, to create and produce pieces for Cartier to sell in his Paris store. Although Cartier and his artisans were unable to recreate Faberge's colors Cartier was able to produce a blue-green and a violet-green that Cartier himself liked. (Nadelhoffer, *Cartier*, 2007, London, p.93).

The match safe in question had the same blue-green coloration, the correct type of guilloché enamel, and it was reminiscent of some of the illustrated examples in Nadelhoffer's book.



Match safe under discussion

"Even earlier, Cartier's had been producing smokers' requisites - silver lighters (from 1867) matchboxes, and cigarette-holders (1874)." (Nadelhoffer, p.201)

On page 295, in the Nadelhoffer book, is an example of a pocket watch and chain with a matchbox, circa 1910. The face of the watch is marked Cartier, and the annotation states the watch works were made by Jaegar and the chain by Lenfant. The annotation also reads, "Matchbox with gold and white enamel decoration, white enamel monogram in a gold ring, with catch in gold and rose cut diamond, striking surface on edge. Watch case with decoration identical to matchbox."

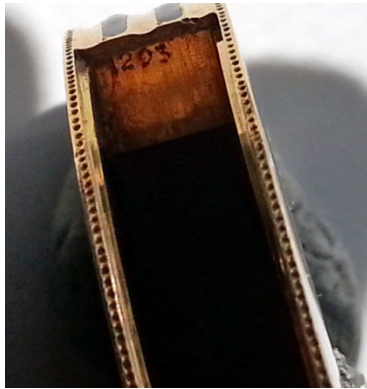


Cartier pocket watch with chain and match safe

Since Nadelhoffer was working directly from the Cartier archives in Paris, if the matchbox or the watch had any other markings he would have noted them as he noted all the marks on all of Cartier's objects throughout his book. It seems clear that Cartier marked the watch face with the firm's name and since the match box was intended to

remain attached to the watch there was no need to mark that as well. In the case of the match safe we are researching the watch and chain were probably separated when the style of wearing a pocket watch with a chain worn with a vest went out of fashion, resulting in an orphaned match safe without Cartier's name on it.

There is the matter of the number 1203 under the lug nut on the match safe. Cartier is noted among collectors for their watches. Many of these collectors refuse to accept a watch as an original Cartier unless those four-digit numbers are present on the underside of the lug. It seems reasonable to state that Cartier also used those four-digit numbers on some of his other objects, especially those literally connected to his watches.

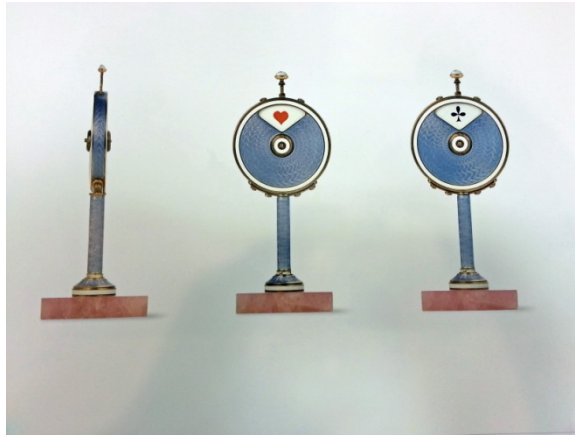


Three match safes: Upper left & right marked Cartier

Below are Cartier objects made in a Russian enamel style:



Pocket watch



Card counters



Buttons



Tape measure

Notes from, *The Cartier Collection: Precious Objects* by Francois Chaille, 2012

1906-1921: Lavabre was the exclusive supplier of objects made in the Russian style enamel for Cartier.

1907-1922: Jaeger supplied watches for Cartier.

In the early 1920s, Cartier formed a joint company with Edward Jaeger (of the famed Jaeger-Le Coultre company) to produce movements solely for Cartier. Thus was the famed European watch & clock company born, although Cartier continued to use movements from other great makers. Cartier watches can be found with movements from Vacheron Constantin, Audemars-Piguet, Movado and Le Coultre.

*It was also during this period that Cartier began adding its own reference numbers to the watches it sold, usually by stamping a **four-digit code on the underside of a lug**. In fact, many collectors refuse to accept a Cartier watch as original unless these numbers are present.*

Other notes are from: *Cartier*, by Hans Nadelhoffer, 2007



Signed Cartier watch



Signed Cartier match safe

Conclusion:

As with some very high end unmarked Gorham match safes* that were sold by the luxury New York City retailer Theodore Starr; Cartier made unmarked match safes that were attached to watches and only the watches were marked Cartier, since they were meant to be worn together. Cartier also made standalone match safes that were marked by the company for use without a connected watch – perhaps as an accompaniment for a cigarette case.

*Gorham was very diligent in marking all their work, as they advertised their mark as one of quality. It was only recent research that revealed Gorham made products for other companies and omitted their mark.