

Empire-style computers? Frenchman takes PCs to lap of luxury

September 6 2012, by Emmanuelle Trecolle

Does your laptop clash with your Empire-style interior? No problem. A French entrepreneur has signed up a team of traditional craftsmen to turn out PCs fit for a royal home.

Out with dull office-grey plastic—even the slick lines of an [iPad](#): Georges Chirita's workshop outside Paris turns out one-of-a-kind computers in polished brass and gold leaf, mounted on marble with leather-clad keyboards and mice.

"When people first fitted Louis XV chandeliers with electric bulbs, everyone was taken aback. Now it doesn't raise an eyebrow," said the Romanian-born entrepreneur, an electronic engineer who settled in France 22 years ago.

"Computers used to be seen as mere work tools. But now the product has reached a kind of maturity, and it's easier to start seeing it as a luxury object," said the 58-year-old, whose own bookshelves heave with a mix of IT manuals and interior design books.

Luxury? Framed by marble columns adorned with twisted gold or soaring eagles, Chirita's hand-made desktop computers—in one of three styles, Louis XV, Louis XVI or Empire—positively drip with the stuff.

They also feature in-built hidden processors and a wireless mouse.

Solid gold, jewels, initials or a coat of arms embossed on the rear of the

screen: the sky is the limit for the made-to-measure creations whose equally luxurious price tag starts at 17,000 euros (\$21,000).

Special attention is paid to the back of the screen, Chirita explains, since these are computers for "important people who receive other important people—so the back must be as attractive as the front."

— 'He sent a USB key to [Queen Elizabeth II](#)' —

While undeniably kitsch, Chirita's desktop PCs have won a fan base from the Gulf to China and the United States.

For the traveller, he offers gold-plated USB keys adorned with fleur-de-lis patterns—with a 100-year guarantee—or portable hard drives stamped with 17th-century motifs, also in gold-plate.

Chirita sent one of his USB keys to [Queen Elizabeth II](#) for her Diamond Jubilee this year, and proudly displays the thank you note he received in return from a lady-in-waiting.

When he first launched his project in the late 1990s, Chirita built a series of models and prototypes, assembling the computer parts himself, but he soon realised he lacked key skills on the visual design side.

So he went knocking at the door of the highly-specialised craftsmen known in France as "artisans d'art", whose rare skills are often handed down from generation to generation.

More used to restoring period homes or antique furniture, the artisans Chirita approached were often wary of the grubby high-tech sector.

"But once they understood the idea and realised it wouldn't demean their work," they came around, he said.

Chirita assembles 80 percent of the computer himself, including all the electronics, handing over to craftsmen for the decorative elements in marble, lapis lazuli, wrought metal or gold leaf.

Once completed the different pieces are assembled like an intricate puzzle in his workshop in Melun southeast of the capital, with tiny gold-plated screws.

Chirita's client base is 90 percent international, and he adapts his wares to the tastes of Chinese clients who tend to go for shinier finishes, or Gulf buyers who prefer mat gold.

He works mostly with interior designers: "The very wealthy don't have time to take care of this kind of thing," he said. "Sometimes we don't even know who the final customer is."

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