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FIFTH TIMES A CHARM

JUST IN TIME FOR SPRING, A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE IS TAKING ITS FABERGÉ EGGS TO GREATER HEIGHTS

by Wendy Sy

This past fall, New York City's premier collection of Fabergé jeweled eggs quietly paraded one block south of their Sherry-Netherland home. A La Vieille Russie, the art and antique dealer known for its collection of these springtime treasures, has moved from its 59th Street location to the fourth floor of 745 Fifth Avenue.

The space marks the fifth change in address for the multigenerational family business since they've called New York home. A La Vieille Russie was first based in Kiev, where it was founded in 1851. The family fled amidst the chaos of the Russian Revolution, and the business was reestablished in Paris in 1920 by the grandson of the founder, Jacques Zolotnitsky.

Fast-forward to today, and the buzzy question around town is, What prompted its latest move? Simple. The desire for a larger space and better lighting. Inside the salon area are glass cases filled with gems from decades past, most of which aren't associated with a company or fashion house.

"Branding is relatively recent," explains Dr. Mark Schaffer. He currently runs the company with his father and uncle, after it was passed down from his grandfather Alexander Schaffer, who opened the company's New York branch. "Most jewelry was anonymous until the beginning of the 20th century. We're focused on the object

itself—the integrity, beauty and how well it's made."

There are, however, a number of pieces that are identified—take Fabergé, for example. Arguably the most renowned category of work from Fabergé is its imperial eggs, a symbol of rebirth. Although A La Vieille Russie does not currently carry these specific items, at one point it handled more than half of the collection. The company does have rare access to other pieces from Fabergé, including egg-motif pendants and objects as well as

animal sculptures, stationery and silver candelabras.

According to history, Emperor Alexander III first commissioned an imperial egg as an Easter present for his wife, Empress Maria Feodorovna, the mother of Nicholas II, in 1885. The tradition passed down to his son, who then had two created each year: one for his mother, the dowager empress, and one for his wife.

At the Winter Antiques Show in January, A La Vieille Russie's booth included Fabergé's Impe-



Enamel egg-form hanging bell push, ca. 1915 by Fabergé, St. Petersburg

rial Peter the Great Easter Egg, on loan from the Virginia Museum

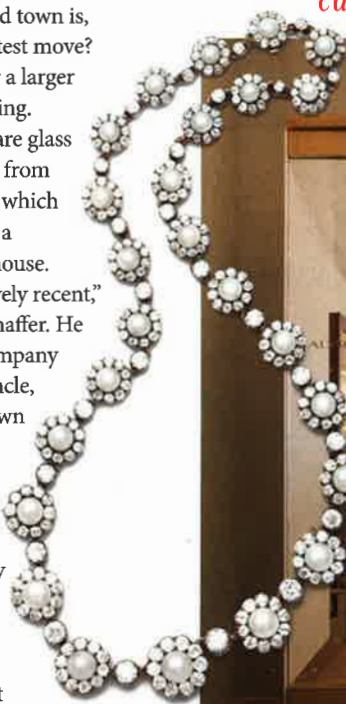
of Fine Arts. It was displayed at the family business' Rockefeller Center showroom in 1936, before being sold to a collector. The item's interior has a small version of Étienne-Maurice Falconet's famous statue of Tsar Peter the Great in St. Petersburg, set against a yellow sunburst.

In the back of the showroom is a spacious area dedicated to private consultations. "It's nice to have our clients come here and relax while looking at objects and jewelry," Dr. Schaffer adds. "We considered

other neighborhoods...but decided in the end that we wanted to stay as close as possible to where our clients are used to us being."

Sometimes, you just have to stick with the tried-and-true. "I remember my grandparents showing me antique pieces when I was a little kid, barely old enough to walk," Schaffer adds. "It takes confidence on the part of the collector to see the quality, and we hope to share that enthusiasm here." ♦

Across from Bergdorf's and adjacent to the Plaza, the space marks the fifth change in address for the multigenerational family business since they've called New York home.



(from left) Victorian natural pearl and diamond necklace, English, ca. 1890, A La Vieille Russie's new showroom, antique diamond and peridot dragonfly pin, English, ca. 1890

