



*CHATEAU MENO*, BY CHARLOTTE SCHOENBACH (ACQ.2006)  
Location: Exploring the World

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The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

Tucson, Arizona

Just last week, countless lovers across the nation were proclaiming their love to one another, proving their deep affection with jewelry, chocolate, flowers and glitter glue. Proposals on bended knee could be heard in the finest restaurants, and the world could gaze at the tender notes written across the sky. Even children got in on the act, taking cookies and sweets to their teachers and schoolmates, hoarding piles of valentines like little scrooges. February is a month famous for romance, and the colossal commercialization of that fact has made roadside teddy bear stands a common occurrence. With so much sparkle and, often, so little substance, a day designed for affection is more often a day of confection. For this reason alone, we at The Mini Time Machine Museum decided to showcase a truly dazzling example of love, one that took more than a five minute stop on the way home from work. In fact, this piece took 30 years to complete.

Charlotte (Turner) Schoenbach married her husband, Meno Schoenbach, on March 19, 1939, at the age of 28. At the time of her marriage, Charlotte was working as a loan clerk for the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, in D.C. While little is known regarding the furthering of her own career after wedlock, Charlotte followed her husband's career with immense pride. Dozens of newspaper and magazine clippings show Meno's ambition and success, from a respected advertising manager of several newspapers, to an administrative assistant in congress, to becoming President of Public Relations for the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills - with Charlotte carefully clipping and saving each stepping stone along the way. Although proud of his career advancements, Charlotte would find herself moving often, first from D.C. to Oklahoma, then to Texas, then to Louisiana. It was not until 1958, when Meno began his career



Chateau Meno, photo by Amy Haskell.

with Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills, that she would find a resting point in Atlanta, Georgia.

Perhaps it was a longing for a permanent home of her own, one with history and personal touches, which first inspired Charlotte to create dollhouses. Or, never having children, possibly it began as a means to relive her own childhood. What we do know from her journals and bundles of preserved memories is that Charlotte made several dollhouses during her marriage to Meno, nearly all of which were given away as gifts. However, there was at least one house which Charlotte kept for herself: a glorious, enchanting palace which she named *Chateau Meno*, in honor of her husband.

Built as one large piece, the two-story structure is immense at over six feet wide and nearly 3 feet tall. There are 14 rooms, including a chapel, dining room, atrium, library, music room, galleries, bed chambers and a marvelous Turkish bath. Each room is decorated in the Rococo style, with



Chateau Meno, detail.  
Photo by Amy Haskell.

luscious flourishes at every turn. The viewer hungrily devours one beauty after the other, the eye darting from the Persian tapestries to the sparkling chandeliers, lingering only for a moment on the walls of artwork-

so irresistible are the richly appointed

fabrics of the walls themselves. It becomes difficult, in fact, to describe the chateau without gushing:

*“There are four sets of elaborately paneled doors, a number of wall-height mirrors with extraordinary gilded frames in various motifs, parquet or marble floors, and more than 60 pieces of superb furniture in the 18th century French style including richly canopied beds, recamiers, vitrines, secretaires, library book ladders, curio cabinets, chairs and many more unique pieces including a velvet-covered dog bed copied from an original French piece.”*<sup>1</sup>

The miniature craftsmanship is outstanding, with nearly every piece being a one-of-a-kind creation by Charlotte herself, or an ingeniously re-purposed found object. She was never formally trained in the art of miniatures, relishing the hands-on learning process as she tackled each piece on her own. She taught herself to carve wood and to weld, seeking the advice of professional miniature artisans such as Jim Traill-Hill<sup>2</sup>, only when a task required tools not at her disposal. We also know that she was terribly clever at using otherwise discarded materials, which she referred to as her “contribution to using recycled things for ecology.”<sup>3</sup>

Schoenbach worked diligently on the chateau in her Atlanta, Georgia basement for nearly 30 years, never losing her patience nor inspiration. The images of European castles and palaces from her *Architectural Digest* magazines thrilled her, and there

are many annotations in her journals referencing particular rooms and furnishings, as well as her ideas for how to recreate them.<sup>4</sup> Gazing at *Chateau Meno* is like walking through the halls of *Versailles* or *Seville*, although neither palace has rooms like *Meno*. Perhaps most telling of all is the fact that Charlotte never actually visited the places which inspired her. By creating the world which she longed to see, she was able to touch and manipulate her own dreams, a quixotic task that proved successful, even if it made her into a fairytale Giant.



Chateau Meno, detail.  
Photo by Amy Haskell.

Charlotte Schoenbach passed away in 1995, too early to see her masterpiece on display among some of the world’s finest miniatures. Among the many files we have regarding the piece, so little is about Charlotte herself. Instead, we have photos of real palaces which she treasured, letters of encouragement from her friends, and the many lovingly preserved notes and articles about her husband. Together, they combine to give a glimpse of the world she longed to know, the man she loved, and the dream she made a reality. Naming the piece *Chateau Meno* was not an act of flattery; the title perfectly describes the decades spent with her true love, and the grand palace built within the walls of their home. It is both an example of the romantic age and a symbol of true romance. What better testament to love and marriage?

Emily Wolverton  
The Mini Time Machine Museum

1 " And Seem to Walk on Wings and Tread in Air." Theriault's Antique Doll Auctions, archived Catalogue. November 11, 2006.

2 Jim Traill-Hill was an English miniature silversmith who specialized in furniture, lamps, and lighting. Charlotte Schoenbach corresponded with Jim Traill-Hill concerning the acquisition of a heated stylus. He also greatly admired her work. In a letter dated October 15, 1978, he wrote: "I cannot tell you how impressed I was with your work— and your modesty about it! I'd be proud to do it myself. It would be excellent for a professional— for an amateur it is fantastic!" Their letters of correspondence date between 1978 and 1981.

3 Coy, Kimberly. "A Dream House, at Last." The Atlanta Constitution, December 20, 1971.

4 Her notebook clearly references *Architectural Digest* issues 1975 – 1983, with other annotative dates missing.

*"Sometimes, I put myself to sleep at night, dreaming what it would be like to live inside it, you know? Sometimes I wish I could make myself small and climb inside."*

*-Charlotte Schoenbach*



Chateau Meno, detail.  
Photo by Amy Haskell.