

# Shopping in Brittany, France

## Sew Rare

by Jan Peterson, Photos Elwyn Peterson



Claude in front of her amazing shop in Dinan, Brittany, France.



Drawers filled with antique beaded flowers.

For those of us who love to sew for our old girls, or for those of us who happily hire someone else to costume our dolls, an amazing source of authentic fabrics, buttons, silk threads, trims and laces can be found in the charming medieval town of Dinan in Brittany, France. Of course, absolutely nothing can replace a visit in person to the magical world of *Fleur de lin et Bouton d'or* (Flax Flower and Buttercup - buttercups in French are "gold buttons", so the play on words is delightful), but for those with no travel plans to France in the near future, the shop has a wonderful website and purchases can be made on-line.

Claude Le Guen, the charming owner of the shop, is a delightful guide to the sewing treasures of the past. Her mother was a professional seamstress and brought her daughter up to love and appreciate fine silk *passementerie*, rare 19th century ribbons, glass buttons and a myriad of other treasures, all made by hand. Claude studied at the PhD level in town and country planning and for three years she was a contractor for her university, but eleven years ago she decided to trade it all in for a new direction in life working with the beautiful materials she had learned to love growing up in a family of *couturière* heritage. She bought a charming little shop nestled among



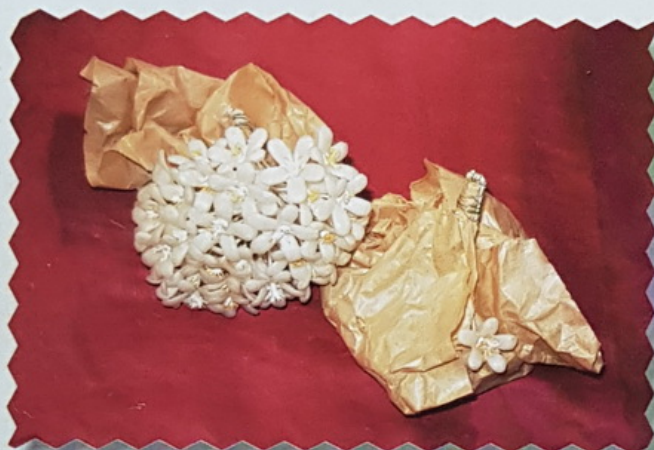
Button, button who's got the button? Claude does in every shape, size and color imaginable!





Customers delight in what unexpected treasures await them in Fleur de Lin et Bouton d'Or.

An Alladin's Cave of sewing delights to thrill every doll couturiere.



Rarest of the rare circa 1900 hand-made wax flowers in their orginial wrappers preserve their pristine condition.



Fabulous flower trims dating from the 19th Century to the 1930s.



A lovely 19th Century chromolithograph of a young French seamstress.

buildings dating to the thirteenth century on a steep cobblestoned street in the Old Town of Dinan. Claude has lovingly furnished the shop with 19th century display armoires and counter tops. Charming display shelves of antique wooden spools hold sewing treasures to tempt even the non-seamstresses among us. Stepping into her shop feels exactly like stepping back in time. As my husband was taking the photos for this article, it was so much fun listening to the reaction of tourists and hard-core sewing enthusiasts as they wandered into her shop for the first time! Without exception, there were sharp intakes of breath and then comments of wonderment at the whole ambiance of the shop.

Claude is a joy to visit with. Her English is fluent, as are her French and Italian, and she manages very well in Spanish, so doll collectors from all over the world can converse with her in those languages. Claude carries materials for sewing and hat making for every size and scale, from the smallest mignonette to real-life people. When I explained to Claude that my personal interest was antique dolls, she simple bubbled over with items to show me and ideas on how to incorporate them into a doll's trousseau. Many of the shelves are marked *POUPEE*, so it is easy to discover treasures on your own. Claude has charming items for dolls: everything from picnic baskets to a rare egg-shaped basket interwoven with silk to use in the presentation of a mignonette, hand-woven rice grass in pristine condition (despite its decades and decades of age) for making doll hats in every scale, precious, brilliantly colored cloth flowers of velvet and silk to trim hats, the list goes on and on.

The best part of visiting with Claude is listening to her charming stories of how she finds her treasures. Auctions, old estates, and often just great luck have led Claude to her finds. Several treasures have actually found her, too! Her favorite stories are of little old ladies who happen



*Delicate gold filament Spanish lace, beaded purses and firescreen fans grace the shop.*

*The selection of doll-sized ribbons and trims is extensive enough to raise one's blood pressure!*

*These elegant silk hat trims came from the granddaughter of a 19th Century French milliner.*

*Delicate silk flowers and ribbons perfect for trimming that French fashion's chapeau!*

*Tiny antique flowers and beaded purses to please the most demanding doll.*

*Light as air valenciennes, chantilly, and other French laces are available in a myriad of patterns.*

*Elegant passementerie braided trims in diminutive doll sizes.*

into her shop and tell her stories of their own grandmothers who were seamstresses or milliners. Many times they mention they have hat ribbons, flowers of silks and feathers, trims and laces from the past tucked away in their attics! Claude has been able to buy entire collections of fabulous trims and ribbons, over 100 years old and in pristine condition, from these wonderful stashes. Once, she acquired the oh-so-rare wax flower nosegays for weddings dating from 1900 still wrapped in their original papers and still snowy white! I have personally been on a quest for these for wedding bouquets for my French fashion dolls and about fainted when Claude offered me a bouquet as a memory of my first visit to her shop! It is a sure thing it will not be my last! Another incredible find were 19th century iron molds for pressing silk and velvet into the petals to make every sort of flower imaginable for hats and sewing trims. I gave Claude a current copy of *Antique Doll Collector* magazine and returned a few days later for a few more photos. She had devoured the magazine and recognized myriads of antique adornments on the doll costumes in the magazine. When I came into the shop a





Antique embroidered initials can be sewn into your doll's clothes.

second time, Claude had organized piles of tiny treasures that had been tucked away in her back room.

She has tiny beaded bags, sparkling faux jewels to trim elegant gowns, parasols suited for large *bébés*, a tiny china tea service, and lovely fans for large dolls. I felt I had landed in dolly paradise!

Among the treasures on display, were beautifully made flowers of every sort totally hand strung of glass beads. Claude said that ladies purchase them today for trimming their own hats and making brooches. Their original purpose, at the turn of the 20th century and earlier, was actually to make funeral bouquets for the rich! The beaded flowers lasted a long time on the graves and were a status symbol because of their cost. Claude said her own grandmother was from a simple family and her only dolls as a child were made of rags and corn cobs. Claude related that when a child died from an affluent family, the funeral director would place a tiny china doll or cherub among the beaded flowers. Her grandmother, as a little girl, and her small friends would wait a respectable time after the burial and then would slip into the cemetery to rescue the baby dolls! For her grandmother and many other little French girls at the time, these little dolls were the only commercially made toys they ever owned. Somehow I think long-ago French mothers who had lost a child would not have minded so much that these funeral *poupées* ended up beloved "*bébés*", tenderly costumed and treasured by children who would never have had a commercially made doll without them.

I often think how different my own life would be had I never discovered my first French doll. Owning her has led me into tiny places of pure magic like *Fleur de lin et Bouton d'or* that I would have never noticed before. Best of all is making new friends who share our love of the past and the beautiful dolls that capture its romance.

In France, Claude's shop can be found at: 9, rue du Petit Fort (Jerzual), Dinan, France 22100 Telephone/Fax: 02 96 85 05 87  
Open seven days a week from June 15th to September 15th  
From 10 am to noon and from 2 pm until 7 pm  
(The rest of the year the shop can be opened on request.)  
Her online shop can be found at: [www.fleurdelinetboutondor.com](http://www.fleurdelinetboutondor.com)



A collection of doll baskets, including a rare mignonnette's presentation egg-shaped basket woven with silk ribbon!



Displayed on an old velvet fob, these tiny brass pieces are perfect to adorn a doll's hat along with two tiny tussy mussies.

These little enameled buttons are tiny jewels!



What French doll wouldn't die to have a costume adorned with these rare tiny gold fleur-de-lis buttons!