

## Modern Bowmaking - (after 1750) in France

Why have so few old bows survived? It was not possible to convert the old bows to the new type of bow, as could be done with the instruments; also, bows were considered only an accessory.

Although individual early bows may seem quite modern, modern bowmaking is considered to have begun around 1750. In Paris, second generation bowmaker François Xavier Tourte developed a bow made of pernambucco and cambered using heat to a modern curve, which had a head shape and frog mechanism that would go unremarked today. Although further innovations and variations occurred, the pattern for the modern bow was essentially set.

Modern bowmaking can be divided into three main epochs, which can be recognized by differences in bow heads, frogs, and camber. The periods are named after the most prominent influence of the time.

- Tourte period (1750-1800)
  - head: square, high, and narrow
  - frog: tended to be long
  - stick: usually round
  - camber: flat behind the head, before starting the curve. Overall, little camber.
  
- Peccatte period (1800-1875)
  - head: squarish
  - frog: high
  - stick: usually octagonal until 1820/30, usually round in 1830-1900. Some octagonal sticks appear from 1870.
  - camber: the portion behind the head is slightly curved
  
- Voirin period (1875-1946)
  - head: smaller and rounder
  - stick: from 1900 to 1950/60, about 1/3 of the sticks are octagonal, about 2/3 round.

Today, no one style predominates, and bows are being made with stylistic influences from all three periods.

### First or “Tourte” Period (1750 ~ 1800)

This period is characterized by the development of the modern form of the bow, an achievement credited to the Tourte family in Paris. The most significant bows of this period are those made by the Tourtes, though other makers include Persois, Eury, and Lupot.

**Nicholas Pierre Tourte** (approx. 1700 – 1764) was known as “Tourte Père” and started his career as a cabinetmaker. He is often credited with the invention of the bow screw, although the idea originated in Italy. The bow screw is first mentioned in the inventory of the Ateliers of Ursule Gaffino in Paris, 1747.

The heads of his bows had not yet achieved a perfected elegance of form, being square, high, and narrow. His sticks are relatively thin. His frogs are usually straight, without a heel-plate. Some have mother-of-pearl inlays. At the beginning of his career, he made bows with clip-in frogs, and also crémaillière sticks.