

Stephanie Mackentyre meets antiques dealer and television presenter...

PAUL MARTIN

The face of the BBC's 'Flog It!' for 19 years means there's not many people who wouldn't instantly recognise Paul Martin. Apart from a new hair cut he's not changed in all these years. He's still the charming, charismatic and personable antiques dealer originally spotted by BBC Bristol over 20 years ago.

As well as "Flog It!", Paul has also presented "Britain's Hidden Heritage", "Countryfile Diaries", and "Make Me A Dealer". He's still regularly featured as an antique expert on "Antiques Celebrity Road Trip" and away from our screens he's also the owner of his own antiques shop, The Table Gallery, in Corsham, Wiltshire.

When I caught up with Paul, he'd been busy in his 30-acre garden, during a rare day off.

"I've had a bit of a day of it today: I was trimming the hedges and I had just a few bits which the petrol saw wouldn't get

through the final woody bits. So, I got a rusty old hand saw and then before I knew it the saw had gone through my thumb!" Paul told me it was still throbbing like mad when we chatted. "I should have gone straight to A&E, but I had to do the school run so I picked up my children and then I went to hospital at teatime. They told me off for not coming sooner."

His television career began after a one-off interview with BBC Bristol when Paul had a stall on the Portobello Road in London, selling antiques. "Antiques are my oxygen. I was in the right place at the right time. I was young, accessible with no ties or commitments and I was single with no kids. I lived and breathed antiques and I was ok in front of the camera. I was also confident dealing with the general public and found it easy to speak to people.

"The Day Time Controller for the BBC at the time was Fenia Vardanis. She was the person responsible for creating Strictly Come Dancing so a very clever lady. She saw my interview and asked to see my CV. I went on to make a total of 1500 shows. The show is a national treasure; it's timeless and we made a point of never featuring anything seasonal. So, for example, we try not to feature any holiday or snow! It's a show which has held the nation's interest and nowadays Flog It! is



“Antiques are my oxygen. I was in the right place at the right time.”



A



B



C



D



E

- A) Large Oak Farm House Table
- B) George III Hall Chairs
- C) Full Skeleton Mount of Horse
- D) George III English Oak High Back Box Settle
- E) Large Victorian Oak Studio Easel

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shown all over the world.”

Flog It! is viewed in places as far reaching as Iraq and Iran, Denmark, Holland, America, and even South Africa. Handy that Paul has a genuine love of travel too. “I’ve been in every castle, museum, stately home. I’ve interviewed every curator, collector, and so many artists including Peter Blake [Sir Peter Thomas Blake CBE RDI RA, English pop artist, best known for co-creating the sleeve design for the Beatles’ album Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band] several times. Filming of the show has the most wonderful memories for me.

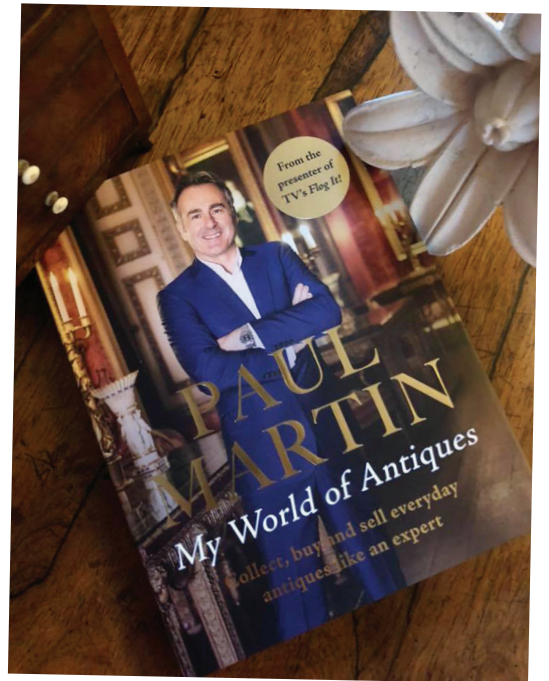
I’ve flown in aircraft and helicopters; I’ve even done air sea rescues. I’ve been inside submarines, visited zoos, and gone wild water swimming! I’ve just done everything with those little films we make in the middle of each episode, and I miss it terribly, especially the people.

The repeats of Flog It! still hold up. It’s educational and it’s entertainment and it’s made by the same people who make the antiques roadshow, so it has to be good. I did do “Make Me a Dealer” for the BBC for two years but it was never Flog It! I also wrote the Curiosity Shop which I wrote with my wife Charlotte. Unfortunately, though, it got lost in the daytime scheduling, running at 2.15pm rather than my usual one at 4.30pm which we lost to The Repair Shop.”

Paul was a regular face on Countryfile Diaries too, which he filmed from his own West Country garden. “That was wonderful to do as I was able to feature the kids and my wife. We covered everything from keeping bees through to our ponies. It was decommissioned last year, which was sad, especially as I had done it from the very start.”

Paul is still very much a feature on our screens due to the episodes being repeated. He’s also a guest on other antique-related shows, including a brand new one.

“I’m still guesting on the antiques roadshow. However, I’ve got a new show now out on Channel 5 with Susan Calman. It’s called Susan Calman’s Antiques Adventure. I have a Flog It! role as I introduce her to antiques. It’s me with her and Natasha and Danny from Bargain Hunt and we explore the world of antiques. We hope to teach Susan about antiques and



Paul Martin My World of Antiques book jacket



The Table Gallery Exterior © Red Forge Studios

what to look out for along the way.”

It’s good to do different things for different channels. I still regularly do the Antiques Roadshow. I like that because I’m working with all my mates but it’s not like being a presenter. I think Channel 5 are really keen to recommission our new show and I’d like to do my own show for them maybe. Watch this space, as they say.”

As if all of this crazy world of working 12-hour days and learning endless scripts for TV isn’t enough, Paul also found time to write his latest book - My World of Antiques. “It took me a year and a half to write whilst also being on the road, staying in hotels. I would write it three nights a week sitting in my hotel room and then retype it when I got home. I think I rewrote it about six times!

I’m so grateful to Prince Charles for letting me use the photographs from Dumfries House in my book. I also worked with him on the Prince’s Trust Foundation. I worked with Andrew Lloyd Webber too getting more apprentices into places and also working for six years with the Heritage Crafts Foundation. During that time, I got to know all of the artisans who are out there and struggling. Without the heritage crafts there will be no antiques in the future. If something is beautifully made by a master craftsman at the top of their game, it will outlive the maker and be looked after. It will have an identity and a regional diversity and wellbeing, not just for the maker, but for the owner too. It gives you so much joy to hold a well-turned fruit bowl, made out of a lump of ash from your



Interior of The Table Gallery © Pippa Jane Wielgos

garden. Made by an artisan from just up the road, it's humble, practical with no pretence."

Paul has kept himself in shape by being careful with what he eats. In 2018, a vegetarian since the age of 18, he took the plunge and went vegan, eating only plant-based foods. "It was very hard, and I gave up after six months. I found being vegan made me hungry constantly. I just didn't feel full. Since then though I have cut down on dairy. I also don't eat loads of bread, just sourdough. I eat a gluten-free diet and make sure I have plenty of nuts, fruit and vegetables. These days I'm very choosy about what I eat: I don't eat fish and being vegan for a time has made me aware of my food. Now you'll see I go for Manchego (Spanish cheese made from sheep's milk) and goats' cheese, and I love Roquefort too."

This month you can see Paul in Kings Lynn at one of his talks and book signings. "It's a kind of life and times of Paul Martin. It's an hour of me working in the world of art and antiques. I've got some top tips and hidden secrets for people interested in antiques. I point out that there are a lot of dying arts and crafts which are at risk. I really do believe that we need to get out and see art and antiques in their natural environment. I want to show that we are all connected to our past. I also want to help people to change their interiors and pick a bargain which is an investment for the future. At the end of the talk there will be time for lots of questions and answers. It's an informative and entertaining talk - I hope!

■ Paul Martin will be appearing this month at the National Trust St George's Guildhall King's Lynn, Norfolk, PE30 1HA on the 24 March 2022, 7.30pm. For tickets www.kingslynnfestival.org.uk or call the Box Office on 01553 764864. You can also see him later this year at the Holt Festival on the 28 July 2022 at 6pm; visit www.holtfestival.org or call 07900 784 237.



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Quick Fire Questions

FAVOURITE DESTINATION:

10 years ago, I flew to China when I filmed there with the BBC. I was flown out business class so I could sleep on the plane, but I was upgraded at the airport to first class which was a dream come true. I'd never flown first class before. I landed in Shanghai, and I went to all the royal kilns and did the trade route all the way down to south of China. I learnt how porcelain got out of China. I'd love to return with my family one day. When we go on a family holiday, we take the kids to Portugal, as we love to surf and kayak.

SOMETHING NO ONE KNOWS:

I'm a very keen snooker player. I have a full-size table at home, and I've practised with some of the snooker world champions. I regularly go behind the scenes at Ally Pally and I've played with a few of the pro-snooker players. I play for an hour a day every day and I have my own snooker room at home. When I was filming Flog It! I would book into a hotel with a snooker room, or my driver would take me to a snooker hall once I'd finished filming for the day. I play with Judd Trump's Snooker cue. He had two made for him and he gave one to my coach and my coach gave it to me. It has 'Judd Trump Ace in the Pack' written on it. I can make breaks of around 60, so I'm not too bad.

WHERE ARE YOU RIGHT NOW:

I'm sitting at home in a massive drawing room which we are converting. It has a big sofa with a refectory table next to me. We are having a new kitchen diner put into this room and the old kitchen will be an office/art room.

THINGS I CAN'T DO WITHOUT:

My snooker cue, laptop as I have a gallery to run and I'm constantly buying antiques online. Also, my iPhone and a couple of colourful corduroy suits, especially my red trousers. I always overpack as you never know who you are going to interview, and you don't want to clash or match your guest. That's why I got into wearing the bright suits, although I do like colourful clothes.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR PAUL MARTIN:

I would like to be on Strictly and also in the Jungle [I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here] as my kids watch both of them. I would be a superhero then. Whereas at the moment I'm just a boring antiques chap. I would love to take them to the ballroom at Blackpool and to Australia. I would love to get another series off the ground on TV too.

FAVOURITE ANTIQUE OF ALL TIME:

It's always the last thing you've found that's the most exciting. I still have the joy of the hunt and the seek and the thrill. Personally, I like things which are humble from a farming background: a big old sycamore table or something from an old dairy or perhaps a beautiful old cupboard which has been wallpapered on the inside over three generations. Something which has been well loved, well used and well looked after and well made, and that's the market right now.