



PICTURE: THE TABLE GALLERY

ABOVE: This complete horse skeleton dating to 1910 was one of the most prized possessions belonging to popular television presenter and antiques expert Paul Martin (opposite), who's been collecting since he was six years old. It's been sold following his recent move

Looking back at a lifetime of collecting

*Paul Martin is probably best known for his appearances on the BBC's 'Flog It!' this year. Before his visit to King's Lynn he found the time to talk to **Pippa Jane Wielgos** about his love of antiques*

For two decades Paul Martin has been entertaining millions with his encyclopaedic knowledge of the antiques market, his infectious enthusiasm and his friendly style of presenting - his daytime show *Flog It!* becoming a cult classic and transforming the way we think about and appreciate antiques.

"Antiques bring a piece of history into

your life," he says. "They've been made with love and handed down through the generations, they'll certainly outlast me, and there's nothing 'greener' - they're the ultimate in recycling."

The hugely-popular presenter started collecting Brooke Bond tea cards as a youngster, and spent several years dividing his time between an antiques stand on London's Portobello Road and a promising career as a professional

drummer before being discovered by the BBC during an interview about oak furniture. He was signed up to present *Flog It!* and over the course of the last two decades has become one of the channel's most popular presenters. In March he'll be returning to King's Lynn (the seventh episode of the 18th series of *Flog It!* was filmed in the town) to talk about his lifelong love of everything antique.



PICTURES: RED FORGE STUDIOS

ABOVE: Paul Martin's antique shop The Table Gallery in Wiltshire, which houses a vast range of furniture and artwork in addition to everything from Victorian coppers and animal skulls to ancient bog oak from the Forest of Dean and 19th century garden urns

"Antiques are my oxygen, and I live and breathe them," he says. "I buy them because of their wonderful history of craftsmanship, or as a document of social history, which has a real identity and tells a story of that area. We're giving it a new lease of life by loving it and making it survive for another century."

Ahead of his talk at St George's Guildhall, we caught up with Paul Martin and asked him about how he first became interested in antiques.

"I think it must have started with my uncle David, who was an antique dealer in Teddington," he says. "He was surrounded by fascinating things, so until I was 15 I used to help him out in the shop and stay with him on the occasional weekend. I learned an awful lot about antiques though him. He was a great collector, a classic car enthusiast, and he had a big grand piano. The shop was full of weird and wonderful things, and they were fascinating to me."

His favourite pieces come from the Queen Anne (1702-14) and Georgian (1714-1830) periods, when England ruled much of the world and trade routes brought back goods from the Far East that had a significant influence on domestic designers.

"It's the Golden Age of furniture making, and marks the height of craftsmanship at its very best before power tools were invented," says Paul. "The workmanship was extraordinary, and everyone was a master of their genre in every skill."

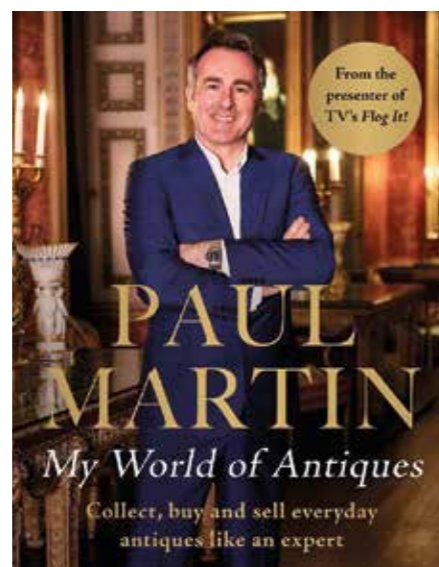
Having filmed over 1,300 episodes of

Flog It! all over the country since the summer of 2002 and seeing thousands of antiques brought in by members of the general public, Paul's still as enthusiastic as ever - but the items themselves aren't his favourite part of the work.

"I really enjoy meeting people and hearing their stories," he says, "and it's great to be able to go behind the scenes in castles, stately homes and museums, and talk to experts and curators - soaking up their knowledge and experience."

It sounds like the perfect job for an antiques dealer, but the life of a television presenter isn't glamorous all the time - especially when you're filming on around 200 days during the year.

"It can get quite tiring sometimes,



working 12 hours a day and living on takeaways and hotel food," he says.

"You do spend a lot of time on the road, and I miss my home and my family."

He's looking forward to coming back to Norfolk, though.

"I have very fond memories of Norfolk," he says, "because my first holidays as a child were in the county. I remember the Norfolk Broads with its wherry boats, the camp sites and I collected all the memorabilia and stickers from them. My father was a member of the Caravan Club, so we visited much of the county. I love the place and the wide open spaces, and I love the people."

In addition to owning and running The Table Gallery in Corhsam, Wiltshire, Paul's just finished filming for the new Channel 5 series *Susan Calman's Antiques Adventures* with Susan Calman and antiques experts Natasha Raskin Sharp and Danny Sebastian. He's working on a new series of *Antiques Road Trips* and other filming projects for the BBC and Channel 5 are already in the pipeline.

"If I can find the time I'd also like to continue restoring my house, and I'm really looking forward to things getting back to normal after the last two years," he says. "And as usual I'll always be on the lookout for more interesting art and antiques. That's the magic of collecting - you never know what you might find."

Paul Martin will be appearing on Thursday 24th March at 7.30 pm at St George's Guildhall in King's Lynn. For tickets please call the Alive Corn