



## THE ANTIQUES THAT SHAPED ME

# Paul Martin

*takes a break from filming The Great Auction Showdown to reflect on his life in antiques*

**What first sparked your interest in antiques?** My uncle was an antiques dealer – a maverick, ahead of his time – and through him I gained a great insight into the historical and cultural value of antiques. It wasn't just about money; the pieces he sold were documents of social history and you can't put a price on that. The shop was filled with a vast range of things, from the steering wheel of a Hindenburg airship to a 1930s bottle of Port, and everything had a story. It was a theatre of dreams and the things he sold were portals into the past.

**What was the first antique you bought?** When I was 20, I was a scenic painter at Pinewood Studios. It was well-paid and I was living with my aunt and uncle in Teddington, so I'd save my money and spend it on antiques. The first piece I bought was a Queen Anne side table from Chiswick Auction Rooms. It was beautiful, with slender legs and big pad feet and the drawers ran as perfectly as they had in the 1700s. With a historic surface – lovely patina and colour – it became the benchmark for me, setting the standard for everything, and was the start of my love affair with English furniture.

**Can you share your biggest mistake?** Hard to say, I'm still making mistakes! When I buy online I ask for condition reports, and I ask lots of questions, but when Martin Bros. Removals turn up with the delivery, I've been known to put it straight back in the van and send it off to the nearest auction room. But my real mistake was not having listened to the great dealers who were around when I was in my 20s and 30s – the people who were at the forefront of the

business, amazing people, such as Victor Chinnery, who bought and curated for the National Trust. He had the best eye for English furniture. I knew him in my 40s and he became a good friend, but I regret not having listened more when I was younger. Anyone starting out now should be looking at Will Fisher (of Jamb), Max Rollitt, Robert Young and Ron Green.

**What is your favourite antique amongst the pieces you own?** Because I am driven by my heart and my eye, the latest thing is always my favourite. And I often have to sell a favourite in order to make room for a new one. I'm not a collector, I'm always having to let something go in order to move on. As a dealer you can't be a collector; I think you are either one thing or the other, although there are some lucky dealers who have had previous careers that allowed them to collect and hone their eye and knowledge in a specific area, such as snuff boxes. Over the years they have collected the best of the best and they find they want to start selling it.

**If money were no object, what would you buy?**

Works by Henry Lamb or the Bloomsbury Group; nice English 20th-century modern. They would be an excellent investment. I'd get daily joy from looking at them and my money would be secure, as these pieces will appreciate in value. They aren't difficult to transport, not heavy to lift and they don't take up too much room. They'll put a smile on my face, and they will be treasures for my children to inherit.

**Finally, what advice do you have for collectors?**

Keep your eyes and your ears open. Listen to everyone in the trade, ask questions and get hands on. Visit stately homes and support the National Trust. Buy what you love and be true to yourself and you will find that you've created your own look. 📺

*The Great Auction Showdown with Paul Martin airs on Channel 5 this spring*



**ABOVE** If money were no object, Paul would like to own a painting by the Bloomsbury Group such as this.