



WILL FISHER
DESCENDING THE
IMPOSING STAIRCASE
THAT LEADS FROM HIS
EDWARDIAN FLAT IN LONDON

GOOD WILL HUNTING

A COLLECTOR
SINCE HIS EARLY
CHILDHOOD, ANTIQUE
DEALER WILL FISHER'S
YEARS OF FORAGING FOR
UNUSUAL PIECES OF PERIOD
FURNITURE STOOD HIM IN
GOOD STEAD WHEN IT CAME TO
DECORATING HIS EDWARDIAN FLAT
WITH THE APPROPRIATE ELEGANCE.
ADAM BRAY JOINS HIM FOR A FIRESIDE
CHAT. PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON UPTON



A MAHOGANY BOOKCASE FROM THE BRITISH MUSEUM (RIGHT) AND A LEATHER KNOLL SOFA DOMINATE THE SITTING ROOM. ON THE MARBLE-TOPPED MAHOGANY TABLE IS A HIPPOPOTAMUS SKULL (TOP). TWO 19TH-CENTURY GERMAN PORTRAITS REST ON HIS FAVOURITE PADFOOT TABLE (ABOVE)





THE KITCHEN WORK SURFACES ARE MADE FROM OLD TEAK (ABOVE). THE METAL CABINETS (TOP) WERE SALVAGED FROM BUTCHER'S SHOPS. 19TH-CENTURY MAHOGANY DOUBLE DOORS (OPPOSITE) OPEN TO REVEAL A STAINLESS-STEEL SMEG OVEN AND MODERN BRICK-SHAPED WALL TILES

It is often the case that those who have the least to say, say it the loudest. This applies to decorating as much as anything else. For Will Fisher, the idea of 'correctness' is all. It is impossible for him to define – as much to do with eye as experience, fantasy and imagination. He implies, in brief, that precision applies to the cut of a jacket or the height of the skirting board; finding the smoothest grappa and the most suitable moulding for a doorframe. As he is an experienced and discreet antique dealer, getting any information out of Fisher is hard enough; to have a conversation about what inspires him to live as he does is nearly impossible. The incessant mobile phone, the disorganised personal organiser and London traffic allow slight insight into the life of someone who is happiest sitting in front of an elegant early 18th-century chimney nursing a blazing fire, and talking with friends long into the night.

After three years of property hunting, having been gazumped, lied to, and generally frustrated, Will finally succumbed to a flat at the top of a purpose-built Edwardian building in north London. He bid at auction on the flat that he had viewed in the half-light of an April afternoon, and roughly measured for scale by putting one foot in front of the other. Only when he successfully bought the flat did he realise it was rather less substantial than he had previously thought.

Having collected furniture and objects throughout his life, Fisher was well-placed to decorate. The previous occupant had created mirror-glass murals that encrusted the damp, peeling wallpaper and gave an air of a Sixties acid den. While this was not unappealing, it was not quite the effect Fisher was after.

When a very young boy, Fisher often stayed with his grandmother, and remembers sitting and drawing 18th-century buildings, measuring porticos and lintels meticulously. He recollects being 'bitterly disappointed' when driven past Buckingham Palace. Looking up at a row of windows at the very top of the building, he noticed for the first time that they were 'far too small, and completely out of proportion'.

Fisher's obsessive instincts and magpie collecting were recognised early on when the legendary antique dealer Warner Dailey (*WoI* Sept 1998), whose son Sam Arrowsmith was at school with Will, started taking the boys on buying and selling trips around London. Dailey showed the boys that the contents of a skip could be as rewarding as the grandest auction or West End dealer's showroom, and it was not long until the two boys (still at primary school) got the dealing bug.

With the help of Dailey, the boys set up a stall in Greenwich market selling curios bought at other street markets, and muskets and carvings brought back from India by Dailey. It didn't take long for the





THE CHROME ART DECO MIRROR IN THE BATHROOM (TOP) WAS SALVAGED FROM A DEMOLISHED CITY BANK; THE GREEN PANELLING (ABOVE) CONCEALS A LAUNDRY AREA. OPPOSITE: A BATTERED RED MOROCCO-LEATHER LIBRARY CHAIR, C1890, SITS IN FRONT OF A PAINTING BY ALAN WALL

authorities to find out about two 9-year-old boys who wore second-hand tweeds and charged in guineas and shillings (ten years after decimalisation), and to have a 'sense-of-humour failure' and close them down. Unperturbed, Fisher wrote immediately to Christie's. The then chairman William Brooks invited the juvenile to a boardroom lunch (a treat that wasn't offered again for another 20 years). 'I remember they offered me a cigar after lunch. I didn't know whether to accept it or burst into tears from not quite knowing what to do with it.'

After he left school, Will began a kind of antique-dealer's apprenticeship. He worked at Christie's and later at Bermondsey market, slowly learning the trade, and sharpening his eye for unusual examples of period furniture. Now he has a website devoted solely to fine period chimneypieces, and will soon start dealing from a shared 10,000sq ft space off the King's Road.

Fisher is most passionate about what he refers to as, with a degree of reverence, 'the English Fireplace'. For him, it is the perfect distillation of the architecture of the period house, and a literal 'warm heart of the home'. He has two very simple 18th-century marble chimneypieces, both in working order. The sitting room, where Fisher works and relaxes, is furnished with some smart pieces of period furniture, in particular a massive bookcase removed from the British Museum. Designed by Sir Robert Smirke (1780-1867), it is stuffed with reference books and old auction catalogues. A Blofeld-type leather Knoll sofa squares up to a hippopotamus skull, which virtually covers the entire marble top of a very unusual mahogany table.

The rest of the flat is furnished as elegantly as the main room, a repeated demonstration of Fisher's appetite for what is appropriate. In the bedroom, a large wardrobe made from Victorian panelled doors is painted a quirky colour, which, depending on the light, can be aubergine or the richest, darkest chocolate brown. His favourite piece of furniture is a simple padfoot table. 'It's very masculine and over-scale,' he says. 'Ridiculous fat legs on such a tiny little table - the hardware on the front - the handle gunged up with years of...' His eyes glaze over as he begins a eulogy to the table. This tribute could go on for a while, but we are interrupted by his phone again. Will's dream home is not a grand Palladian house or an apartment in a Nash terrace - well, not quite yet, anyway. A disused swimming pool with a mezzanine containing an extensive library is where he'd like to live. The pool filled with exotic fish and surrounded by extraordinary foliage, and between the changing rooms a massive William Kent fireplace with a constant fire surrounded by handsome, overstuffed leather chairs ■

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