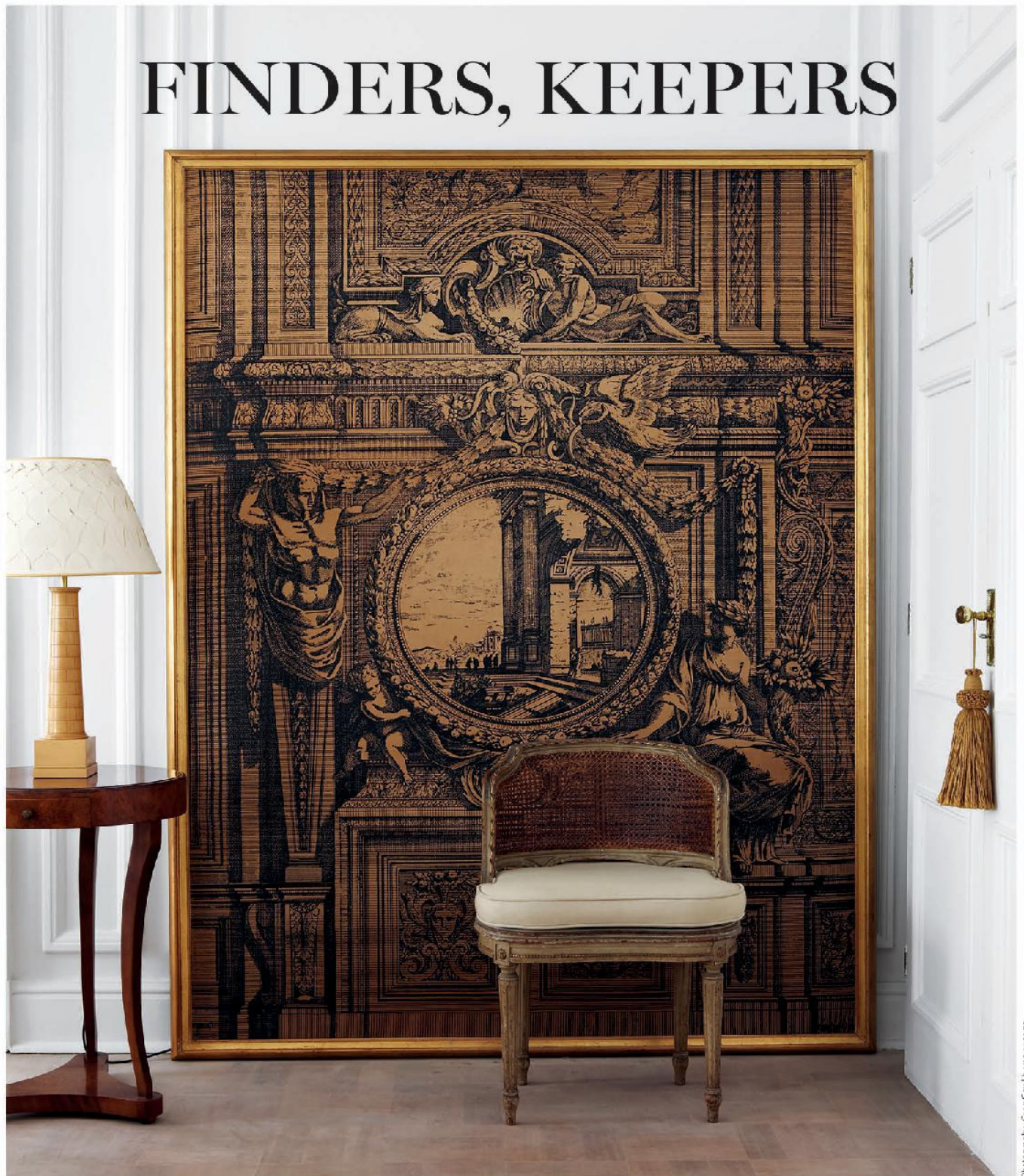


# FINDERS, KEEPERS



Photography: Greg Cox | bureaux.co.za

Far from a mere hobby, building a curated collection entails a lifetime's worth of fervent passion and curiosity | 收藏非但只是為了興趣喜好，而是需要窮上畢生熱愛與好奇才得以達成

BY BEVERLY CHENG



A high-profile auction never fails to pique public curiosity. It sheds light on the private life of a collector and often raises the question: why are certain items so precious? The controversial sale of priceless Chinese bronzes, among other exquisite art and artefacts, from the late Yves Saint Laurent's estate in 2009 fetched a record-breaking grand total of more than €377 million at the hands of Christie's International. While celebrity sales may attract attention, the interest in antiques runs the gamut – from the sales of Elizabeth Taylor's regal jewellery and Karl Lagerfeld's Memphis Group collectibles to smaller regional antique markets across Europe and North America. One thing's for certain – there's still an interest in precious relics from the past.

"You never decide to be a collector," explains Côme Remy. The 20th-century decorative arts expert worked with Hermès and notable auction houses including Christie's before starting his own consulting business; he now splits time between his home in Paris and his teaching job at Hong Kong's Insight School of Interior Design. "Usually if you receive something from a grandparent and you fall in love with an object, you decide to increase your knowledge. Then, you try to find other objects of the same quality, designer, period, colour... and that becomes the beginning of a collection."

Côme's collectors are as diverse as their collections, with some honing in on furniture from a very particular period – he has one client specifically collecting furnishings from 1774, the beginning of neoclassicism, and another collecting all manner of decorations depicting elephants. Côme and advisers like him scour auctions and estate sales to find items that will enrich their existing collections.



01

PASSION IS WHAT  
DRIVES A COLLECTION,  
YET KNOWLEDGE  
IS WHAT SUSTAINS IT

GAP Interiors/Ingrid Rasmussen







Courtesy of Sotheby's Asia

GAP Interiors/Tina Giovan - Interior Designer Katie Scott



Courtesy of Authentiques HK

#### COLLECTIVE MEMORY

01 The right antique armchair can give personality to a living area

02 *Table 18 fleurs Margueritz* by Hubert Le Gall

03 This gilded period mirror and console matches the intricate mouldings of this entranceway

04 A selection of lamps sold at Sotheby's *Boundless* art sale

05 An English Arts & Crafts ladder-back chair from Authentiques HK

06 This silver masque lamp by Garouste and Bonetti was sold by Sotheby's this past January

He cautions that starting a collection, especially when buying your first piece, is often the most difficult step. "I think the hardest thing is to find something you're really keen on having and which is not something that everybody has. At the beginning, you're going to buy what everybody's buying. After some time, you'll start buying items that represent small, secret subjects that you'll specialise in after 40 years," says Côme.

At the heart of the matter, passion is what drives a collection, yet knowledge is what sustains it. In-depth research in an area of focus goes a long way, particularly with budding collections. In 2013, a single-owner collection of 20 Yixing earthenware teapots amounted to HK\$60 million in returns, with one piece selling for over HK\$10 million. This historic sale would mark the peak of Yixing teapots at auction. "Ten years ago, no one

high-end auction could have predicted that, but it reveals the collector's private life, more so than any other: why certain objects are so precious? It was Yves Saint Laurent's 2009 sale of his estate that set a record for Chinese bronze vessels and other decorative arts, with the Christie's International auction house setting a record of 3 billion 770 million euros. Famous collectors' collections, such as the royal collection of Queen Elizabeth II, Karl Lagerfeld's Memphis Group collection, and the collections of European and North American small-scale antique markets, can all be traced back to the same passion for the past.

Côme Remy points out: "You won't decide to become a collector." This 20th-century decorative arts expert has worked with Hermès and other famous brands, and he has since opened his own consulting business; now he splits his time between Paris and Hong Kong, teaching at the Insight School of Interior Design in both cities. "From my parents, I inherited certain objects, and then I fell deeply in love with them, and then I began to learn more about them. You try to find quality, design, period and color-related objects, that's the beginning."

Côme's collection and his collecting style are both diverse, but



01



## TREASURED LOT

01

A rare carnelian Double Peony Blossom carving at Bonhams' upcoming December sales

02

An intricately carved lacquer box and cover were sold for over HK\$1million

03

Chinese antiques can easily be paired with other ethnic decor

04

The Eight Trigrams moon-flasks, part of Bonhams' December auction

Courtesy of Bonhams

02



Courtesy of Bonhams

03



Warren Heathy/bureau.co.za

04

Courtesy of Bonhams

was interested in buying Yixing ceramics because they weren't imperial," recalls Xibo Wang, Chinese arts specialist at Bonhams Hong Kong, where the auction occurred. "People started collecting Yixing teapots because they were driven by the market. A fluctuation started five years ago when a few major collectors started buying teapots. Then, other people [without a profound knowledge of Yixing] started buying anything they could find, creating a bubble." He adds, "The top quality of Yixing teapots, though, still produces outstanding results."

Xibo is part of a flourishing Chinese antiques market, which shows little signs of slowing down despite the recent economic slowdown. Since the first auction of Chinese art was held domestically in Beijing in 1993 by state-owned auction houses, many privately run and cooperative dealers have sprung up on the mainland. "There are 10 new auction houses registered every day in Mainland China, all trying to sell Chinese art," says Xibo. The growing amount of dealers raises concerns on the authenticity of items, which is why many turn to established names to insure the provenance of their investments.

分獨愛某特定時期的傢具——專門收藏1774年、新古典主義開始的傢具，另外亦有人喜愛收藏描繪大象的各式珍品。Côme和跟他一樣的顧問也熱衷在拍賣和財產出售上搜尋收藏的新成員。

他表示開展收藏時，特別是購買第一件珍藏，往往是最困難的一步。「我想最具挑戰性的就是尋找一件你渴望擁有，而且不是人人皆有的作品。一開始人買你買。後來就會開始買些40年後仍能專注的秘密小品。」

熱愛是推動收藏的核心，而知識就是維繫的要素。深入研究某特定範圍對新進收藏家來說非常重要。2013年，一套20件宜興紫砂壺收藏



Imperial Chinese arts – particularly those produced and collected by the first three emperors of the Qing dynasty – continue to attract the highest bids. However, trends are diversifying into objects from earlier periods that may not have royal ties, but are nonetheless prized for their breadth of regional artistry. Xibo explains, “In the past 10 years, mainland collectors were only buying imperial art. It was perceived as the highest form of art for its outstanding quality and rarity, because it was only made for royal families. Nowadays, more knowledgeable collectors are not only collecting to show off their material wealth, but also trying to show off their wealth of knowledge about their own cultural heritage.”

Antiques offer a glimpse into the past and, for a fee, they are small, tangible pieces of a collective history. Xibo says, “People were motivated to buy Chinese art because it had to do with their own cultural heritage. But art as an object marks a moment in history and has value. By putting an object in an auction, its commercial value as an object is assessed.” Though the price may be driven by the market, the value is ultimately in the eye of the beholder. “One of my friends, a collector, used to say: ‘You can always find the money, but it’s harder to find good objects,’” shares Côme. “Buy the best with the money you have and you’ll always be happy with the collection you have.”

的單一擁有人回報達6千萬港幣，單件收藏品賣出價達超過1千萬港幣。是次交易創下紫砂壺拍賣的高峰。「十年前，無人有興趣購買紫砂壺，畢竟它們不屬王朝珍品。」香港邦瀚斯中國古董藝術部門主管王晰博回想說。他補充：「人們開始收藏紫砂壺全因市場驅使。如此波動始於5年前，幾位著名收藏家著手購買紫砂壺。然後，其他人[對紫砂壺沒深入認識]也跟著參與。紫砂壺的優越質素依然出色。」

王晰博屬於發展正盛的中式古董市場一分子，即使近來經驗蕭條也沒半點稍停之意。首次中國藝術品拍賣在1993年北京舉行，由國有拍賣行主持，大量私營和企業交易商也紛紛在內地嶄露頭角。「中國每天也有10間新的拍賣行註冊登記，嘗試出售中國藝術品。」他說著。拍賣會數量的增加也引發真偽品的議題，故此大多數人也選擇投向著名品牌，保障投資。

中國王朝藝術品——特別是清朝首三屆王朝收藏和生產的作品——一直也獲高價競投。然而，對早期跟王朝沒甚關聯的作品潮流卻是以地區設計的深度而定。王晰博說：「過去十年，中國收藏家只購買王朝藝術品，因罕有和優越質素而被視為最高層次的藝術，畢竟它們專為王室打造。今天，愈來愈多具知識的收藏家不再只為炫耀財富而收藏，而是希望反映他們對祖國文化傳統的深厚知識。」

古董是須付出、讓你回首的媒體，也是細小、而與歷史有形的連繫。王晰博表示：「人們購買中國藝術品的推動力在於自家文化價值。藝術在歷史上劃下印記，價值超凡。拍賣定下的商業價格便成該珍品的估定價值。」價格雖然被市場推動，但終歸「情人眼裡出西施」。Côme指：「一位收藏家友人曾說過：『錢不難找，唯佳作難尋。』以你擁有的金錢購買最優質的作品，才會對自己擁有的收藏感欣喜。」

#### PRICELESS ARTEFACTS

01  
American designer and TV host, Vern Yip, integrates antiques into a formal dining room setting by juxtaposing an ikat-patterned table runner with a Chinese horse sculpture

02  
This three-piece, silver-plated antique tea set was made by James Dixon & Sons and is available at Authentiques HK, which stocks precious finds from Europe at their Sheung Wan showroom and online via 1stdibs.com



Courtesy of Vern Yip



Courtesy of Authentiques HK





#### RETRO REVIVAL

01 A sculptural armchair design by Aldo Morbelli

02 The stylish and eclectic Irene Capriz

03 Inside the new Casa Capriz retail space in Wong Chuk Hang, which also features contemporary Italian designer furnishings

04 The Meret Oppenheim-designed *Traccia* table

05 Assorted vintage finds are stocked at the Hong Kong store, but Irene can also source items directly from Europe



#### DEFINING DECADES

As a rule of thumb, anything over 100 years old is an antique and anything under is considered vintage. We turn to Irene Capriz of Casa Capriz for tips on choosing the right retro pieces.

**From furniture,** you can actually recall how people used to live. For example, the height of dining tables was 170-180 inches. They were higher because the way you sit used to be straighter, more formal, whereas nowadays the way we interact is more casual.

**I also have items that aren't so old** but they're out of production. I just bought a couple of lamps by Philippe Starck for Flos. They are recent items from the 1990s and they're not made anymore. So in 10-15 years, they'll be collectible pieces.

**The one thing I would suggest to collectors is:** don't go for items that you see copies of everywhere. For example, a Panton Chair. Even if it's an original, it won't go up in value because you see it too much and people tend to get tired of the design.

**Gino Sarfatti is a designer** that is definitely worth keeping an eye on. With a background in aeronaval engineering, he was entirely self-taught and started designing luminaires from 1939 and set up Arteluce, which soon became a major reference point for the industry.

**Italian design really dominated the 1950s, 60s and 70s** – there's no doubt about it. That's why I think there's a lot more space to invest in Italian makers. I specialise in Italian design because I'm half Italian and it's something I truly love. [casacapriz.com](http://casacapriz.com)

#### 劃時代之作

超過100年歷史的稱為古董，短於此這年期的則為經典作品。我們跟Casa Capriz的Irene Capriz請教挑選合適的復古精品。

**透過傢具，**你會憶起人們以前的生活模式。例如，以前的餐桌高度為170至180吋，因為古時的人坐得更挺直、正規，今天則相對隨意。

**我擁有一些不算太古老但已停產的作品。**數盡Philippe Starck為Flos設計的燈具來自90年代，已不再生產，10至15年後將成為收藏品。

**我建議收藏家別買常被複製的作品，**如Panton椅。原版也不會升值，因見得太多，容易令人生厭。

**設計師Gino Sarfatti值得注目。**他擁有工程知識背景，完全自學，並於1939年開始設計燈具及設立Arteluce，成為行業的參考對象。

**意大利設計主宰50、60及70年代，**投資意大利製造商空間很大。專營意大利設計因為我也為半個意國人，而且確切喜愛。 [casacapriz.com](http://casacapriz.com)