

EVERY PIECE HAS A STORY TO TELL

How should you juxtapose the old and the new so that they can bring out the best in each other? **Tom Jeffreys** talks to designer Mike Fisher about working with antiques in a new and creative way

In an ever-changing world, having connections with the past is even more important, and the best art and antiques will always be relevant, believes Mike Fisher, creative director of Chelsea-based Studio Indigo. Each new generation reinterprets the work of the past in new and creative ways – but how can you breathe new life into old furniture? And how do you know which pieces will really stand the test of time?

The key is to have fun – to enjoy the experience of learning about art and antiques and developing your own personal taste. “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” says Fisher. “You have to trust your own judgement. The more you look, the more you see, the more you know.”

Fisher and his 50-strong team of architects and designers have worked on handsome London townhouses, lavish superyachts, even aircraft interiors. Recently, Studio Indigo carried out a sensitive restoration of the façade of Notting Hill’s Grade II-listed Coronet Theatre, which dates from the 1890s.

The team has also completed the major refurbishment of a house in Wimbledon, hardly touched since about 1900, but now updated with a swimming pool and spa complex.

Fisher’s signature is a polyphonic mix of different styles, periods, colours and textures. Rather than recreate a particular place or period, he has pioneered a much more expressive



Eye of the beholder You need to trust your own taste and have fun making your choices

and idiosyncratic approach to interior design. This is characterised by judicious juxtapositions of different pieces, such as Chinoiserie cupboards set against cleaned-up bare brickwork for the house in Wimbledon.

In part, this approach stems from Fisher’s personal taste. He describes himself as a magpie. He collects furniture and porcelain, although silver – especially Georgian silver – is his biggest passion. It is these passions that Fisher is looking

to indulge at the BADA fair this March. The fair is also a great place to learn and hone your personal taste. “Look at how dealers display their stands,” Fisher advises. “This will give you ideas for your own home. It will also help you to know which dealers share your taste.”

Fisher’s aim is always to bring old pieces to life in new ways. “One simple trick is to take antique furniture and introduce some contrasting materials,” Fisher explains. “Brown furniture, for example, has been seen as unfashionable, but if it’s good quality you can keep updating it.” Try placing a 1970s brass table next to your old dark wood furniture and watch as each one item brings new energy to the other.

Another easy tip is to reupholster antique furniture with more tactile and practical modern materials. Instead of precious fabrics, Fisher suggests linen or chenille. “The contemporary makes antiques less formal and less pompous,” he says.

It is this constant openness to reinterpretation that makes art and antiques so different from much contemporary consumerism.

“Antiques are not disposable,” says Fisher. “Things I may have bought 20 or 30 years ago – they become part of who you are, especially if you bought them for a particular reason. You should keep things and learn to use them in different ways. Life is about storytelling and antiques tell wonderful stories.”

To find out more, go to badafair.com

BADA
Fine Art / Design / Antiques
20–26 March 2019



GODSON & COLES: ABSTRACT PAINTING BY SANDRA BLOW

Richard Coles at South Kensington’s Godson & Coles is another whose approach to interiors Mike Fisher extols. “I particularly admire how Richard mixes traditional furniture with contemporary and abstract art: a Georgian console with a Sandra Blow above,” says Fisher. “They create a visual tension.” For BADA, Godson & Coles will present a typically eclectic mix of objects including an 18th-century mahogany cabinet, carved pedestals by the great Robert Adam, and one of Blow’s gutsy abstract paintings, dated 1960.



MARY COOKE: GEORGE III SILVER SOUP TERRINE

As an avid collector of Georgian silverware, Mike Fisher is always sure to visit Mary Cooke’s stand at the BADA fair. “Mary has exquisite taste,” he says, “and I’m always fascinated to know what new things she has in store.” This year, he’s especially interested in an impressive George III silver soup terrine by John Ernes (also known as an engraver and watercolourist). “It’s just on the cusp between Georgian restraint and the heavier Regency style. It’s amazing,” says Fisher.



S&S TIMMS: SATINWOOD SECRETAIRE

Another classically elegant piece of furniture from the reign of George III. Dating from around 1790, this satinwood secretaire cabinet has been firmly attributed to Gillows of Lancaster, a furniture maker so highly regarded that they were referred to by Jane Austen, William Thackeray and Gilbert and Sullivan. Featuring oval inlaid panel doors and still with its original brass handles, this is a quiet-spoken star among the brown furniture classics on show with Bedfordshire-based dealer S&S Timms.



HATCHWELL ANTIQUES: JAPANESE NAVY BINOCULARS

This ruggedly handsome pair of binoculars was made in around 1940 for use by the Japanese navy during the Second World War. Complete with its original box and accessories, this is one of the highlights on show at Chelsea-based family business Hatchwell Antiques. The brass trimmings and functional design aesthetic would make a great contrast next to a piece of classic brown furniture. This is exactly the kind of unexpected pairing that Mike Fisher advocates to keep your interior feeling fresh.

HOWARD WALWYN: CLOCKS GALORE

Celebrating his 40th year as an independent dealer, Howard Walwyn is a leading specialist in English clocks from the 17th century to the mid-19th century. “Howard is always fascinating,” says Fisher, who especially loves the sense of “audible history” you get from spending time surrounded by the clocks at Walwyn’s stand at BADA. From lantern clocks and wall-mounted tavern clocks to impressive longcases and exquisite table clocks, Walwyn’s stand is a treat for both eyes and ears. You’ll want to take your time.



GUY DENNLER: MAHOGANY DRUM TABLE

Guy Dennler and Mike Fisher are near neighbours, based near Wincanton in the beautiful Somerset countryside. The two have different styles and approaches to interior design: Fisher is a self-described “magpie” while Dennler specialises in English furniture and interiors from the 18th and 19th centuries. Nonetheless, “he’s a wonderful, charming antiques dealer,” says Fisher, “and he tells the best stories.” This year, look out for a specially fine George III mahogany drum table among Dennler’s impressive selection of period furniture.



HOLLY JOHNSON: DOG-SHAPED UMBRELLA STAND

Based on the outskirts of Macclesfield, Cheshire, Holly Johnson fields a broad range of expertise across art, furniture and interiors. But it is the mid 20th-century Italian design objects that tend to catch Fisher’s eye, especially those by Gio Ponti or Piero Fornasetti. One quirky highlight at BADA is a lithographically printed metal umbrella stand in the shape of a rather handsome collie dog. Dating from 1950, it’s an early work by Fornasetti. “These items are great to mix in with more traditional pieces,” says Fisher.



LENNOX CATO: TIMELESS BROWN FURNITURE

You may recognise Lennox Cato from his regular appearances as an expert on the BBC’s *Antiques Roadshow*. He founded his own business in 1978 with a focus on the furniture of the 18th and 19th centuries. At BADA, among the range of beautiful pieces that Cato is bringing from his gallery in Kent, is this classic George III mahogany collector’s chest from 1800, with elegantly turned ebony handles. This is the kind of timeless design and quality that never goes out of style.



SANTOS: CHINESE PORCELAIN TUREEN AND STAND

Alberto Santos has been dealing in Chinese porcelain since 1979 so you can expect a selection of only the finest pieces on show at his stand in the BADA fair. Made for the export market, this porcelain tureen and stand dates to around 1750, during the reign of Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty. Decorated after a Meissen form, in opaque enamels from the famille rose palette, the porcelain tureen features a pattern of flowers and roosters. Try placing them against a wall of exposed brick for a striking, contemporary look.

BADA 2019: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

Wednesday 20 March 11am–8pm
Thursday 21 March 11am–8pm
Friday 22 March 11am–8pm
Saturday 23 March 11am–6pm
Sunday 24 March 11am–6pm
Monday 25 March 11am–8pm
Tuesday 26 March 11am–6pm

Buying tickets
Admission is £20 per person. Tickets are sold at the entrance to the fair or can be purchased online at badafair.com

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