



Time for a change?

Goodbye Acorn Antiques. Meet the dealers who are transforming the way we shop

FEATURE NATASHA GOODFELLOW PHOTOGRAPHS MIKE ABRAHAMS

Hard as we try to bring you news of interesting, exciting dealers, the image of antiques shops as dusty, fusty places run by eccentric, often grumpy men in their middle years endures, outside the pages of this magazine at least.

It's easy to see why. While mid-century dealers – especially those in vintage fashion – have captured the zeitgeist with welcoming, friendly shops, easy-to-use websites and, increasingly, have-to-be-there events, the more traditional end of the market has been slow to catch on.

Happily, times they are a-changing. Slowly, dealers are realising that the customer (and not just the trade buyer) is indeed king. Furthermore, while we love to know the history and provenance of a piece, when it comes right down to it, many of us are simply trying to find something beautiful for our homes.

Over the next four pages, we meet six dealers who understand that their competition is not only other antiques dealers, but also the high street (and the web), and who are bringing some much-needed fresh ideas to the way we buy antiques.



Clockwise from top **Benoit Vliegen** and **John Read**, who run **Collections Of**; **Rebecca Holmes** of **Miles Griffiths Antiques**, based in **Clitheroe, Lancashire**; **James Gooch** and **Jade Marriott**, co-owners with **David James** of **Doe & Hope**; and **Amanda Knox** of **Decorative Country Living**





This page, clockwise from left *Collection Of's* namesakes include bud vases from the 1960s; 23 brightly coloured vases, fruit bowls and wall pockets made by SylvaC; Hornsea Pottery urns from the 1960s Facing page, clockwise from top Eras and styles are mixed to great effect at Miles Griffiths Antiques; the shop is known locally for its eye-catching window displays; pieces are bought or upholstered to reflect the seasons

JOHN READ AND BENOIT VLIEGEN, *Collections Of*

Anyone who has ever collected something knows how easily it can take over your life. How impossible it is to walk past an antiques shop, just in case it has that missing piece you're looking for (not to mention the agonies that the possibilities of the web present); the never-ending quest to acquire the finest pieces in the best condition in your field of interest.

But for Benoit Vliegen and John Read, the urge to collect is not driven by academic or acquisitive motives, but the purely visual. 'We don't see ourselves as antiques dealers at all,' says John. 'We sell collections of vintage and antique goods, but they're not defined by genre. Instead we collect things for how they look and feel.'

The pair began the business three years ago after Benoit, an interior designer, had the idea of using a couple of glass fish a client had as the basis of an installation in a room. Since then, they

have amassed collections of everything from 19th and 20th century carpet beaters, Vallauris plates and Ethiopian walking sticks, to Fulham pottery, globes and Murano glass animals.

Although they expected their client base to be mainly interior designers, just as many sales have been to private clients, from teenagers who might have bought a small collection of three vases of the same shape, for example, to people in their 60s and 70s who think the presentation is 'just wonderful'. People who 'were wandering down the Lillie Road, glanced into the shop and liked what they saw', as John puts it.

'We're selling things in a decorative way and with decoration in mind,' says John in summary. 'It's not really about the objects themselves – for us, we're creating a piece of art.'

Collections Of, Gallery Quindry, 299 Lillie Road, London. 07883 584919; collectionsof.com



‘We’re selling things in a decorative way and with decoration in mind’



‘It’s about giving antiques a more 21st-century look’

REBECCA HOLMES, *Miles Griffiths Antiques*

Driving though the market town of Clitheroe, Lancashire, it's impossible to miss Miles Griffiths Antiques.

Although it's not slap-bang in the centre, its large, beautifully dressed and regularly changing windows – real fir trees at Christmas; red furniture for Valentine's Day – ensure that it gets more than its fair share of attention.

'Huge windows were one of the primary factors for us when we were looking for a shop,' says Rebecca Holmes, who runs the business with her partner, Miles. 'Some antiques shops can seem quite stuffy and we were very keen to combat that. Here, people can see right in. It's amazing how many people call on a Monday saying they spotted a piece in the shop on Saturday night.'

Rebecca's flair for display runs to the shop floor, too. 'We love the elegance of Regency style, but we like oversized things too – big club chairs, enormous mirrors, church candlesticks. Items are carefully placed for maximum effect, with modern art hanging alongside antique oils. 'People have a mental image of what an "antiques shop" should be, and we don't really fit that,' she confides, admitting that she and Miles often wonder whether to drop the word 'antiques' entirely from their name. 'It's about giving antiques a more 21st-century look,' she says.

Rebecca also offers an interior design service – anything from upholstering a chair to sourcing key pieces. As ever, her approach is slightly out of the ordinary: 'We might use unusual fabrics or vintage buttons and we only ever do one-offs.' *Miles Griffiths Antiques, 2/2a Shawbridge Street, Clitheroe, Lancashire. 01200 443658; milesgriffithsantiques.co.uk*



JAMES GOOCH
& JADE MARRIOTT,
Doe & Hope

From the moment your cursor lands on doeandhope.com, it's clear that this is no ordinary antiques website. Yes, there's a tasteful Voysey wallpaper in the background and, yes, there's an inventory of stock from the 16th to the 20th centuries. But there's also a drawing of a gorilla in top hat and tails on the home page, and, if you click on 'contact us', you'll find the site purports to be run by Count James Du Bonnet, Baron David Von Oberlitzer and Dame Jade Dobrowski-Keyes – colourful characters one and all.

'Its meant to be fun,' says James Gooch, one of three friends, all under 30, behind the company. 'Many antiques sites are aesthetically stuffy and a bit outdated,' he says. 'We're still cataloguing and describing pieces in the traditional way, but we're taking a slightly more light-hearted approach and incorporating Facebook and Twitter too – it's very obviously aimed at a younger generation.'

Not only are prices displayed alongside several pictures of the object, but customers are able to buy online – almost unheard of in the trade. 'Our generation are used to clicking, adding to the cart and paying,' says James. But what about those for whom price negotiations are half the fun of buying antiques? 'We've introduced an online haggling facility,' he smiles.

Despite having launched less than a year ago, the company has a growing client base and has sent pieces to around 15 countries, including an 1880 photographic enlarger to Ukraine, a bee cage (used for delivering bees) to France and, in a glorious case of coals to Newcastle, a bull's head to Spain. Prices range from £20-£30 to £3,000, a conscious decision since 'not many people under 40 have £5,000 to spend on one piece.'

Happily, all this accessibility and ease does nothing to diminish the uniqueness of the pieces they sell – something no modern product could possibly emulate. 'I don't like to say we're selling objects or items,' says James. 'For us, it's all about the history and memories to do with a piece. People are looking for something different and I think antiques can provide that.'

Doe & Hope. 07729 213013; doeandhope.com



‘We’re taking a more light-hearted approach, aiming at a younger generation’



This page, clockwise from top **Doe & Hope** (run by James Gooch, Jade Marriott and David James) offers eclectic pieces including a fairground sign from the early 20th century; two turned wooden money boxes from c1880; and an Arts and Crafts hammered bowl Facing page, clockwise from left: The stock at **Decorative Country Living** includes new items such as the charming knitted tooth fairies on the bottom shelf of this wall cabinet; Amanda creates vignettes to show how antiques can be used in the home; displays are changed regularly to keep the shop looking fresh



AMANDA KNOX, *Decorative Country Living*

With its pretty, pastel mix of old and new, heavy on the bunting and bereft of brown furniture, many dealers might be quick to dismiss Amanda Knox's shop as not selling antiques at all. In fact, Amanda estimates she stocks 50 per cent antique and vintage items and 50 per cent new. 'I like to think of my business as an antiques shop which sells lovely modern things too,' she says. It's clearly a formula that works. *Decorative Country Living* is now in its 10th year, posted record profits last year and has more than doubled its turnover via the website in the last two years. Not bad for a shop in a little village in rural Lincolnshire.

Part of her success is down to what she sells and how she displays it. Dressing tables boast lamps, bits of jewellery and beautifully packaged

soaps; dotty parasols shade old French café tables; and dressers brim with crockery, kitchen utensils and postcards. 'I'm trying to create a lifestyle and show people what they can do in their own home,' says Amanda. 'I hope what I do is to take antique pieces and give them a younger, fun spin.'

Prices start at £2.50 for a ribbed glass votive and this range of cheaper, modern items means it's rare for a visitor to leave empty-handed. 'I can see that people want to buy something, especially if they've come a long way,' she says. 'It might sound silly, but nice printed bags and pretty tissue paper are important to us too, it's all part of creating a pleasant shopping experience.'

Decorative Country Living, The Chapel, Chapel Lane, Caythorpe, Nr Grantham, Lincolnshire. 01400 273632; decorativecountryliving.com



‘It’s all part of creating a pleasant shopping experience’