



A cornucopia of untold wonders

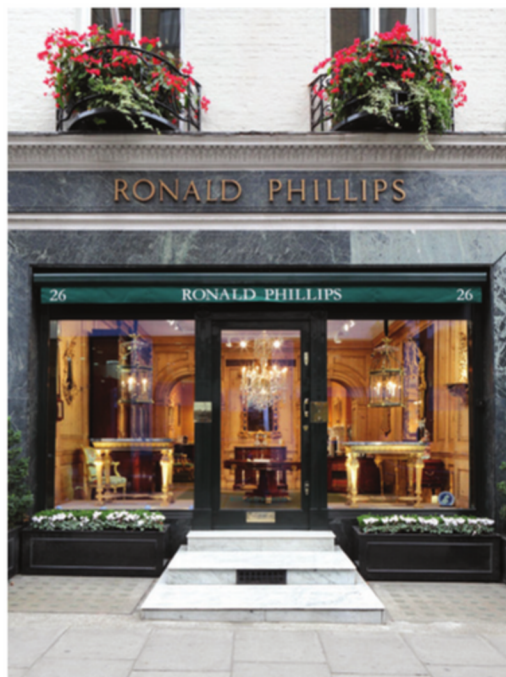
If you are ever fortunate enough to receive a luncheon invitation at Ronald Phillips Fine English Antiques, do accept.

Inside the elegant glass façade of the Bruton Street gallery, in the heart of Mayfair just steps from Berkeley Square, are untold wonders: 6,600-square feet of wood-paneled rooms decorated with fine Georgian consoles, Regency mirrors, glittering crystal chandeliers and massive antique globes. The varied spaces – and there are many – chockablock with English treasures are furnished with enough stock to fill more than a few of the grandest houses in England (or abroad).

If you go to lunch, you will be led to an intimate dining room dominated by a round antique English mahogany table. This is where the current owner, Simon Phillips (Ronald's son), will serve a gourmet lunch made by his private chef. Phillips pairs each course with a fine wine from his own cellar (in my case, a memorable Chassagne Montrachet). Due warning: If you don't leave right after lunch, you may be tempted to make some spontaneous purchases.

Phillips is an amiable host and wonderful conversationalist. He is a charming man, full of tales of his own family life and talk of the trade, but he is most passionate, and erudite, when taking about English antiques. He knows his stuff.

The message is all about quality. The gallery his father opened in 1952 was known for selling good, solid English antiques, from the Queen Anne period to the Regency (roughly 1700 to 1840), but in the last decade Phillips decided to eschew the ordinary for the extraordinary.



"In my father's day, there were many more collectors of English antiques," he says. "And more competitors. Now there are fewer." Several prominent dealers specializing in English antiques, like Jeremy and Hotspur, closed in recent years due to death or retirement.

So Simon Phillips went upscale and, as he puts it, "away from providing dining-room furniture." He wants to sell only spectacular pieces that he considers "works of art."

And he has a loyal, long-term clientele that includes Americans, foreigners living in England and English collectors. He boasts pieces by renowned 18th-century British designers and cabinetmakers, including Robert Adam, Thomas Chippendale, George Hepplewhite, Thomas Hope and William Kent.

And he will willingly brag about provenance: current name drops include antiques once owned by the Earl of



*The St. Giles House Commodes
A Pair of George III Chinese Lacquer
Commodes Almost Certainly By John Cobb*



*A George III Carved Giltwood
Chimneypiece attributed to
Matthias Lock*



*The Windsor Castle Cabinets
A Pair Of Regency Ormolu Mounted Mahogany Side
Cabinets Attributed To Tatham Bailey And Sanders*

Warwick, the Duke of Leeds and the Americans Walter P. Chrysler, Jr. and Barbara Hutton. (At the same time, he is utterly discreet about recent provenances and current clients.)

Phillips was born for the job. He attended Harrow, took a decorative arts course at the Victoria & Albert Museum, worked at a London auction house and then went to join his father at the family firm in 1979.

He is energetic and forward thinking. He does not wait for clients to walk through the door, well aware of the uncertain market for 18th-century English. A few years ago, when the Grosvenor House show closed (it was, arguably, London's most prestigious antiques fair, Phillips helped organize a new fair, Masterpiece London, with colleagues from two other top English firms: Mallett and Apter-Fredericks, along with Asprey and Stabilo, the company that constructs the stands at TEFAF, the European Fine Art Fair, that takes place each March in the Netherlands.

This year Masterpiece London attracted more than 35,000 visitors and was considered a huge success. Simon says most of clients find him "by word of mouth." But like other serious dealers he leaves little to chance. He regularly produced luxurious but also scholarly catalogue on his antiques in stock, organizes exhibitions abroad and participates in high caliber fairs like the International Fine Art & Antique Dealers Show in New York in October.

What distinguishes his gallery is his rarified taste. He specializes in high-style, drop dead pieces like his George III carved chimneypiece attributed

to Matthias Lock; this Chinese Chippendale mantle is wall-size, with phoenixes, waterfalls and flowering trees. (There is a 1752 Lock drawing of it in the V&A.) Equally dazzling is a pair of George III Chinese lacquer commodes attributed to John Cobb; they were ordered by the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury for his dressing room in St. Giles, Dorset in about 1765.

Not everything is Georgian. There is a fine Regency reclining armchair by William Pocock and a fantastically colorful pair of Chinese Export Canton enamel wall sconces.

Antique English mirrors are what he calls his "personal interest" and he has a large collection of them, both singles and pairs, in various styles and forms ranging from, he says, the "earliest petit-point mirrors of Charles II to large Regency convex mirrors surmounted by eagles." The mirrors are extravagantly carved and gilded, festooned with shells, cupids, imaginary birds and fanciful foliage. Many retain their original plate glass.

What is evident is Phillips's insistence on rarity, enviable provenance, top quality, original condition and that certain indescribable extra, perhaps defined as "best in class." You never know what you will find at his gallery, but it's always worth taking a look.

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*The Glemham Hall Gainsborough Armchairs
A Magnificent Pair of George II
Mahogany Library Armchairs*



*The Dundas Console Table
A George III Giltwood Demi-Lune Console Table Designed By
Robert Adam And Made By William France And John Bradburn*



*The Percival D. Griffiths
Card Table
A George II Walnut Card Table*