

A Relaxed Approach to Life, Up for Sale

By WENDY MOONAN MARCH 23, 2007

“I’m editing,” said David Easton, the New York interior designer, with typical understatement. “I sold my house a year ago and put everything in a warehouse. Then I thought, ‘Why should all those things sit in a warehouse?’ ” On Wednesday Doyle New York will auction nearly 600 lots of furniture, decorations and paintings from Mr. Easton’s former weekend house in Suffern, N.Y.

Such possessions are the building blocks of the Easton style, a relaxed, American version of the English country house style. It involves a mix of antiques (not all grand), batches of blue and white Dutch Delft, good upholstered chairs and dollops of charm (including detailed watercolors of English country house interiors by Mr. Easton’s partner, James M. Steinmeyer). The presale view begins tomorrow at 175 East 87th Street in Manhattan.

Mr. Easton’s particular style reached its height of popularity in the 1980s, when he was decorating for high-profile clients like John and Patricia Kluge, Julian and Josie Robertson, the Basses of Texas and Sumner Redstone. He furnished their houses with fine antiques purchased in New York, London and Paris.

“Very clean, modern design may be popular now, but David’s style will never go out of fashion,” said Mary F. Cunningham, furniture specialist at Doyle. “It is comfortable and reflects a very sophisticated lifestyle. I’ve been getting calls about the sale from all over the country.”

She has put low estimates on most lots in the sale, which is expected to realize about \$1 million. On the other hand Mr. Easton is not selling any important antiques. Even the 18th-century pieces are fairly reasonable, including a George III mahogany architect’s table (estimate: \$6,000 to \$8,000); a Swedish painted chest of drawers (\$3,000 to \$5,000); an Italian rococo painted tray-top table (\$6,000 to \$8,000); and a pair of Spanish baroque ebonized mirrors from Gene Tyson, who was a top New York dealer (\$15,000 to \$25,000). What is probably the most charming lot in the sale was originally acquired from the London dealer Geoffrey Bennison: a pair of Victorian ivory-inlaid tilt-top tables depicting the picturesque 13th-century Ruthin Castle of Wales, where they were made.

Mr. Easton is building a 3,500-square-foot modular house in Charlottesville, Va. He said he was modeling it on a Potsdam pavilion designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel, with a two-story room lined with books and modern furniture. “It’s a new world — our aesthetic has changed enormously in the last two years,” he said. “We are designing modern houses and hotels. We are researching all kinds of sustainable new materials. The old order changeth.”

Born in Louisville, Ky., Mr. Easton studied architecture at Pratt before a series of jobs with Edward Wormley, Valerian Rybar and the Parish-Hadley firm. He opened his office in Manhattan in 1972 and now has a staff of 60. “The future of the world is not haute couture,” he said.

Is he sad about the sale? “It hurts sometimes to see things go,” he said. “They were wonderful things in my life, but we don’t need them now.”

Several dealers have organized piggyback shows to coincide with the International Asian Art Fair this week. M. D. Flacks, at 38 East 57th Street, Manhattan, has a small, select group of fine Ming chairs, tables and stools in huanghuali and jumu wood. Of note is a pair of 300-year-old imperial marble garden stools boldly carved with five-clawed, scaly dragons, phoenixes, clouds and foliage.

“The tops are carved in a geometric pattern to look like silk brocade cushions,” Marcus Flacks said. “That’s what imperial is all about — over the top.” Their creamy white marble, he said, is known as “Chinese white jade.”

In the Fuller Building, 41 East 57th Street, the Danon Gallery of Rome and Doris Leslie Blau of New York have a show of what are thought to be magnificent Qing dynasty carpets made for the Forbidden City in Beijing. “We were in the fair for the first time last year and did so well we decided to expand to New York,” said Enzo Danon, who owns the third-generation business with his brother Roberto.

Mounted on the walls, silk carpets laced with gold and silver threads are covered with imperial dragons chasing pearls (representing the emperors’ search for truth and wisdom), lotus flowers (purity, virtue) and pomegranates (fertility). The catalog recounts famous tales of Chinese court life that reveal the meanings of the motifs.

“The symbolism works on different levels,” Mr. Danon said. “Many carpets were made by monks and show a strong Buddhist influence.”

Others have Chinese markings at the top. “There were more than a thousand pavilions in the Forbidden City,” Mr. Danon explained. “The inscriptions say where the carpets go.”

Woven in burnt orange, lavender, indigo blue and yellow silks, the carpets vibrate with color. All but three are available, from \$35,000 to \$160,000.

Anthony Lin of Hong Kong has taken over Hazlitt Gooden & Fox, 17 East 76th Street, with a diverse show that includes pottery figures from the Tang dynasty (618-907).

The largest is a proud sancai horse glazed in white, green and creamy browns with white polka dots on its hide and frog medallions hanging off its ceremonial harness. “It is one of only three horses I’ve ever seen with dappled flanks,” Mr. Lin said.

He also has two full-bodied court ladies. The first, in a black gown decorated in turquoise, red and white flowers, was probably made from a mold. The second, wearing a red overcoat casually thrown off one shoulder, was sculptured by hand. “One of the Tang emperors lavished so much attention on a fat lady, it started a fashion for Rubenesque women,” he said.

The private dealer Michael C. Hughes is showing Asian works of art at Ingrao, 17 East 64th Street. He has several Noh masks, some from the 15th century, made for actors of classical Japanese drama. Each is meticulously carved to represent a specific character.

Even more remarkable is a pair of Qing dynasty imperial wood sculptures of odd-looking Westerners, one youthful, one bearded, sitting atop lions. Every possible carving technique has been employed to render their foreign faces and odd outfits with mocking precision.

An 18th-century Chinese embroidered silk hanging depicts a large bearded sage. The surface is in various colors of gold thread, each section in stitches facing different directions. As you move, the reflections change, animating the image. An auspicious bat flies overhead. The sage speaks to a spotted deer at his side. The deer smiles back at him. The scene is irresistible.

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