

# The Passionate COLLECTOR

A beginner's guide to antique collecting by Anthony Bernbaum of The Peartree Collection which was shown at the Art & Antiques Fair in London last June.

“All extremes of feeling are allied with madness”, so said Virginia Woolf in her book Orlando. To be a great collector you need to be passionate about what you are doing and in the eyes of those close to you, quite probably a little mad, certainly obsessional. So be prepared. Are you single and looking for a partner? Don't start collecting.

Passion is important firstly because it is only worthwhile building a collection about which you have such strong emotion. Secondly, a collection needs passion to drive the curiosity, the research, and the eye for detail which can secure great objects for a collection.

So whatever you collect, pick an area about which you are passionate. To this, I would go a step further and recommend that you only buy items which you love. Passionately love. If you are buying an item because it's undervalued, or in spite of some doubts, or because you think your friends will admire it, forget it. If you wake up thinking of your item, start googling about it, talking about it, then you know to buy it.

Eagerness and impatience are the enemy of a good collection. Take your time to become expert; visit museums, other collectors and dealers. Expertise by reading books and articles is always important too but there is no substitute for handling, owning and discussing a piece with an expert. Immersing yourself in your chosen area is all part of the process of building a collection.

What to buy is subjective but there are some key guidelines worth following. A great object should have an aesthetic, a history, a context and importance. It should also be in good condition, and not from over restoration. As most collections grow

and develop these latter factors typically become ever more important. Beware those pieces that have aesthetic appeal only.

With this in mind how do you start to build a collection? I would suggest two very different strategies, both can be combined of course.

One is to buy low priced items. Recognise you will probably be making mistakes, but buy things, learn from those mistakes and then be prepared to sell items. Show dealers or experts what you have bought and listen to what they say. There is nothing like handling an object or buying a fake to

take you up a learning curve - but just make sure it was affordable.

The alternative strategy is to only buy the best you can afford and from the best and most reputable dealers or auction houses. On this basis your collection can start as it means to go on, and by buying well from reputable vendors, expensive mistakes should be avoided.

Ultimately, focus on what you can afford in your chosen area and then buy the best you can. Many collectors want to buy well and hold their collections as an investment, but buying “bargains” will never create the collection you want. So don't focus on bargains but do focus on not overpaying for items. Make sure you know the “right” price as part of your expertise. Checking historic auction prices on many of the online databases available has become a key aspect of collecting know how.

I would always say that the pleasure of purchasing and owning an item alone should justify the price. If you want to profit too then you should expect to hold onto pieces for quite a while, or become sufficiently expert to occasionally outwit a vendor. Always buy the very best and rarest items. Whilst antique fashions come and go, owning the best within any segment has always proven the place to be.

Finally, to those brave or foolhardy enough to let their passion run wild, and start to buy what you once perhaps only dreamed of, I wish you good luck. My love of arts and crafts silver is now into its second decade and has become The Peartree Collection, one of the leading galleries for arts and crafts and art nouveau silver. The hunt for great pieces never stops I am pleased to say.

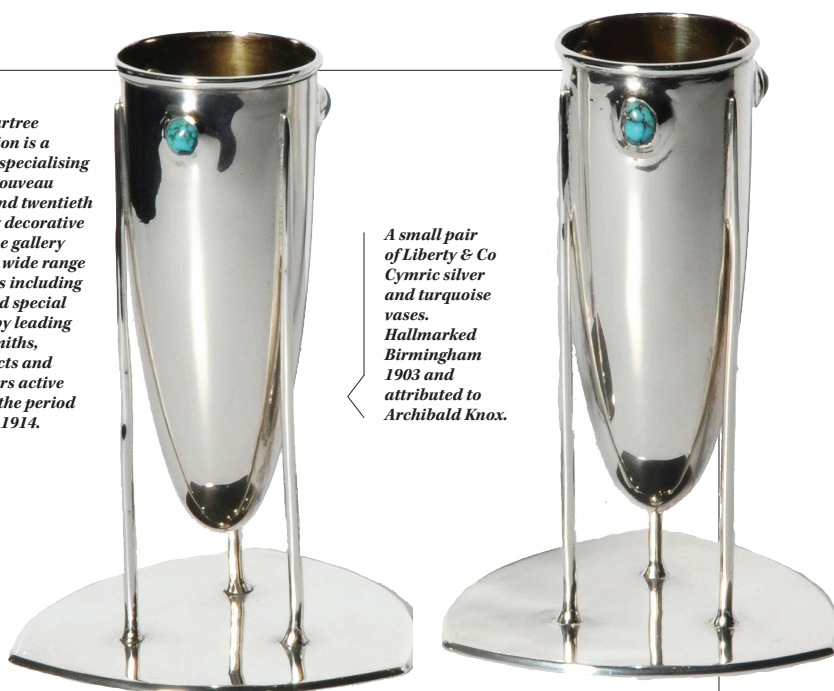
[thepeartreecollection.com](http://thepeartreecollection.com)



A large, Elkhington aesthetic vase, fully hall-marked for Birmingham 1879. The vase is decorated with Japanese motifs in silver, silver gilt (worn) and copper. The handles show more of a Chinese influence and are of dragons in silver with bands of copper.



*The Peartree Collection is a gallery specialising in art nouveau silver and twentieth century decorative arts. The gallery offers a wide range of items including rare and special pieces by leading silversmiths, architects and designers active during the period 1890 to 1914.*



*A small pair of Liberty & Co Cymric silver and turquoise vases. Hallmarked Birmingham 1903 and attributed to Archibald Knox.*



*A Kate Harris silver ring dish in the art nouveau style with maidens heads fitting to an overall organic design. Marked for London, 1904 by William*

*Silver bowl set with green chrysoprase. This bowl is of a heavy gauge of silver, made to a very high standard with stunning stones. The piece is marked for "Minns Howie".*



*A silver cigarette box by Archibald Knox inset with a large turquoise stone. Hallmarked for William Hair Haseler, Birmingham 1906. An exceptional example of Knox's Celtic art nouveau style.*

