

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

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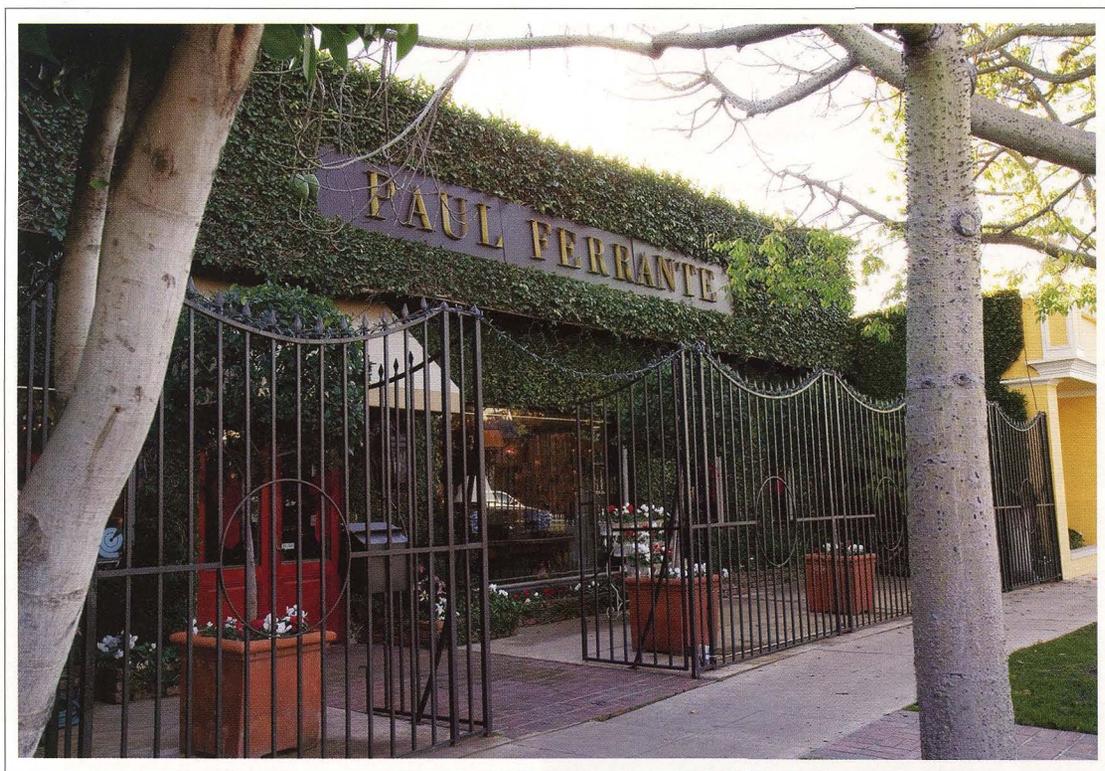
THE WORLD COMES TO THE CLOISTER

Renewing an icon's timeless traditions

the best of
EVERYTHING

FROM ENGLISH COUNTRY LANES
TO PARIS SIDE STREETS,
ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE CLOISTER

BY BETTY GOODWIN





Tom Raynor at his Los Angeles workshop with chandeliers readied for The Cloister; his Melrose Place antiques shop, Paul Ferrante (opposite page).



Raynor's European selections (left) for The Cloister include two French upholstered Louis XV-style walnut armchairs, a Spanish-style 19th-century settee and a yacht's bench with a reversible back rail. Other Cloister finds (opposite page), such as a painted wheat basket along with an antique wire birdcage and English milk bowl, sit in front of a reproduction of an 18th-century corner cabinet.

FROM ITS COMMANDING public spaces to the intimate seating areas of its guest rooms, the new Cloister hotel had to meet a set of high standards established by history itself. Those standards called for the finest quality antique furniture and lighting, in multiples and on a grand scale. For so ambitious an assignment, The Cloister's interior designer, Pamela Hughes, turned to antiques dealer Tom Raynor. Over the course of a year, Hughes purchased not 10, 20 or 50 important pieces, but more than 3,000 items—urns, tables, cupboards, planters, lanterns and chandeliers—from Raynor, owner of Paul Ferrante, an antiques shop that has been a fixture on Los Angeles's posh Melrose Place since 1960. Paul Ferrante is a destination for designers across the U.S., and pieces there have found their way into the homes of everyone from music star Sheryl Crow to philanthropist Wallis Annenberg.

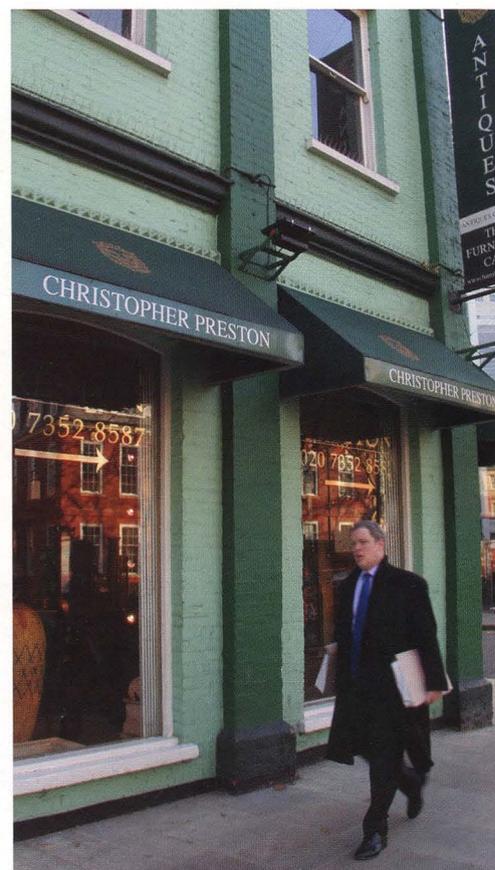
The store is a warren of small rooms, and wherever the eye lands there is another fabulous piece of furniture. Likewise, overhead, the profusion of antique lighting fixtures forms a near solid mass. You'd think that, if given the chance, Raynor would wax poetic about every last item—he does call one particular table “staggering”—but in fact he is modest about what he's amassed, quietly listening as visitors *ooh* and *aah*.

Within the design world, Raynor is considered to have a set of eyes that are the envy of collectors everywhere. He's been called a

connoisseur's connoisseur. As Hughes puts it simply, “Tommy's amazing.” When he first opened for business with his late partner, Ferrante, Raynor found European antiques in the Los Angeles area at estate sales and auctions and specialized in converting vases and other objects into lamps. In 1962, Raynor, a well-mannered man who's given to kissing a woman's hand when he greets her, began

making the first of his now quarterly buying trips to Europe. (The London portion of a recent journey turned up a pair of astonishing, larger-than-life, 19th-century marble busts of the Caesars mounted on four-foot marble pedestals.) While Raynor never takes along a shopping list, relying on his instincts and high standards to guide his purchases,

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Guinevere Antiques and The Furniture Cave (left) are situated on London's fashionable King's Road.



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his trips are nonetheless strictly regimented. Long before he departs, the shrewd collector knows what street he will be visiting on any given day. Every trip has an almost identical itinerary, starting in the English countryside and culminating in southern France. Blocks of time are always set aside for London and Paris, the ultimate destinations for acquiring antiques, Raynor maintains. "All the best merchandise filters to these cities," he says.

Finding the best, though, presents Raynor with an ever greater challenge, given the increasing scarcity of high-quality vintage furniture and accessories. Antique lighting, still the mainstay of Paul Ferrante's business, has all but evaporated. "There was such an abundance in the past," Raynor says with a sigh. "Today you have to scrounge." The antiques shortage has consequently resulted in a dramatic rise in prices. Forty years ago, Raynor says, the first European shipping container he sent back to the U.S. required

building (533 King's Road). The street, once a thriving locus of antiques dealers, now houses only six or seven shops, older businesses that sell many beautiful objects made of brass, porcelain or tortoiseshell. "The King's Road used to be endless," says a wistful Raynor. Guinevere Antiques Limited (574 to 580 King's Road), consisting of 10 showrooms, is another essential stop for the discerning collector: "It's a bit of everything. There is bedding, furniture, chandeliers. I've been going there since the early sixties."

Church Street, Marylebone, is also a key destination for Raynor. The neighborhood's shops are newer and specialize in furniture from the 1930s through the 1950s. "It's what's in vogue now," he says. A particular favorite is Andrew Nebbett Antiques (35 to 37 Church Street), an important dealer in one-of-a-kind items. A large 1930s walnut and brass planter that came from a Japanese ocean liner, for example, has been shipped again—this time to The Cloister. Raynor also pays a visit to the Pimlico Road, though

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what seemed then like a gargantuan outlay: \$15,000. He needed to take out a bank loan to finance it. "Today," he says, "I buy just one object for \$15,000." A full container shipped to Los Angeles now represents a total investment of about \$400,000.

Raynor spends the first Sunday of his antique-hunting expeditions in the rural areas of England, visiting the West Sussex towns of Petworth and Arundel in search of small quantities of "country furniture." (Sunday shopping is no problem—local dealers in those towns gladly open their doors for the gentlemanly Raynor.) Nevertheless, he maintains that in order for out-of-town jaunts to be "worth your while in the long run," a little luck had best be on your side: "There's so much traveling, and yet you may come up with just a simple box or a bowl."

In years past, Raynor would spend two weeks in London; today, it takes up only two days of his time. Many antiques stores have vanished entirely, replaced with chic restaurants and clothing shops, not unlike what's happened to Raynor's own Melrose Place. One of his main destinations is the King's Road, where he visits the Furniture Cave, a conglomeration of 17 small shops in one

he contends that there are only a dozen noteworthy antiques shops along the thoroughfare today, half of what were once there.

The hunt then typically takes Raynor to France, where he dedicates seven shopping days to Paris. He spends the first three at the legendary flea market, Marché aux Puces, at the Porte de Clignancourt. But Raynor does not bother with just any cluster of stalls. There are several thousand dealers divided among the market's 14 different sections. Raynor favors one of the newer areas, known as la Serpette, where he finds lighting, furniture and other wonderful accessories.

Raynor also shops at Cambo, des Rosiers, Biron, Paul Bert and Vernaison. On Friday mornings, he arrives at the area early, while dealers are still unloading merchandise, to get a preview of the new treasures. Returning on Saturday and Sunday, Raynor tracks down the most prized of the works he's scoped out. "It can be exhausting," he concedes. "You start early, they all close between noon and two in the afternoon, and then they're open until seven. It's a lot of reproductions and, yes, a lot of junk. But if you have a professional eye, you will find things."

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For the next four days, Raynor focuses on Left Bank shops, starting from Boulevard Saint Germain to the bridge at Quai Voltaire. This area has been something of a windfall for The Cloister. In these streets, Raynor has found: a huge 18th-century carved cabinet; a seven-foot-long 19th-century marble-topped butcher table with an iron and brass base; cast-iron urns; and a 19th-century wood-framed, upholstered Italian settee.

Raynor often plans his trips to coincide with antique fairs, including the Biennale des Antiquaires and the Salon des Tuileries in Paris and the Iron and Ham Fair in Chatou (outside Paris). After shopping in the City of Light, he spends two days in Avignon and a day each in Lyon and Rouen. Now and again, a scouting trip to Florence requires a slight adjustment to Raynor's routine.

Because The Cloister project called for a number of pieces in multiples, Raynor was able to reproduce them at his rambling Los Angeles factory, where dozens of master craftsmen can be seen hard at work carving, hammering and chiseling. He established this part of his business 15 years ago to replace and recreate pieces that have disappeared from the market. A visitor would have been dazzled by all of the treasures tagged "The Cloister." In many of the workshop's nooks and crannies, and in various stages of completion, one could spy: a pair of English oak slat-back chairs modeled on a 17th-century original; a pine wall cabinet copied, line for line, from the 18th-century English corner display sitting beside it; 14 carved alder sconces designed in the manner of a 19th-century English original, along with six matching carved chandeliers. Then there were 36 bronze sconces cast using a special "lost wax" method from an original French Louis XV piece, and an Italianate chandelier having gold leaf applied to it in the time-honored way, using a camel-hair brush, agate burnishing tool and rabbit-skin glue.

Given their unique provenance, these works will undoubtedly impart another level of worldliness to The Cloister. Originals or reproductions—the schooled eyes of a Tom Raynor or a Pamela Hughes perhaps the best judges of that—they all have at least one transcontinental trip in their past, marking the beginning of a new chapter in both the showpieces' and the hotel's histories. ■

Los Angeles-based writer Betty Goodwin has covered design, travel and entertainment for several publications, including Town & Country, the San Francisco Chronicle and the Los Angeles Times.