



A FEW DAYS IN THE LIFE OF AN ANTIQUES DEALER

Seeking solace from his hectic life, Jamie Allpress looks to his work and store, Allpress Antiques, which provides pure enjoyment

WORDS JAMIE ALLPRESS



FAR LEFT/BELOW: An exceptional 18th-century English oak long dresser. The well-patinated two-plank moulded top above two fielded paneled doors, flanked by two banks of three graduated drawers, all with mahogany cross banding and bold fruitwood stringing to the drawers and top. Attractive book-matched paneled sides, resting on shaped bracket feet. Good overall colour and patination (later but appropriate brasswork). Height: 2'9" (84cm), width: 7'1" (216cm), depth: 1'9" (51.5cm).

It's been a busy weekend — the usual family gatherings, friends' luncheons, 40 and 50ths, riding and skateboarding with the kids. I walk into my shop often tired, battered and bruised, and I'm surrounded by relaxing, exciting, classic and modern beauty. I'm greeted by one of my beautiful staff, always with a smile on their face and a calm, relaxing voice. I'm so lucky that coming into work always makes me happy.

I check my phone messages, usually none, which also puts a smile on my face. Antique dealers, unlike say a computer business, don't receive phone enquiries every five minutes.

After morning tea I have an 11am appointment, advising a couple on how to downsize as they are moving into an apartment one-third the size of the home they have been living in for 30 years. They have an interesting collection of furniture, ceramics and books. Every piece has a certain destination, whether it is a particular antique dealer or a specific collector, various specialist auction houses and occasionally, the odd piece for me. Every now and then my customers receive a nice surprise, something they purchased in the 1970s, say an English oak dresser that broke their bank at \$500, is now retailing for between \$20,000 to \$30,000. These experiences make my business very satisfying.

The next day, on my way in to the shop, I have an appointment to advise on placing

furniture and art with a leading decorator in a wonderful home that is still a blank canvas. The interior of this 19th-century home has been redefined and modernised tastefully, generally just by using the right paints and flooring — it's exciting. The visits to this home will be many — incorporating my ideas, decorator's ideas, customer's ideas — but it soon takes shape and we always end up with the most wonderfully decorated home interior.

When I return to the shop, I drop into my workshop at the rear and go over the pieces that need to be completed that week, whether a customer's table or my latest international arrival. In this case, it's an incredible 18th-century English oak dresser (pictured). I check the progress, sometimes doing a couple of hours' colouring. This part of the business is also satisfying; working with your hands colouring, polishing or waxing can sometimes be like therapy.

Some weeks ago, an interesting AFL footballer entered the shop, his passion for antiques and the arts equivalent to mine. He longs to be shown a different way of life, a possible lead to a new career in the years to come. Today is his first day of work experience. By chance I am quoting at the Spanish Consulate today. As often happens with international shipping, a lot of damage has been suffered. I take him through the lovely home, describing each piece and the

repairs that are required as my new friend takes notes. He visits on his one day off each week and I always try to find something exciting to include him in; he, too, enjoys my customers and the interesting daily routine of the shop. We recently completed a dozen pieces for the consulate, including a 16th-century carved Spanish icon. Repairing pieces such as these is very rewarding.

We recently had a young man named Josh for work experience from RMIT for two weeks. He had a passion for anything old and antique, so we enjoyed teaching him some basics — once again a rewarding experience.

Every now and then we make a sale in the shop — very, very exciting. Making a sale is usually quite enjoyable for both myself and the customer. Nine times out of 10 the price is mentioned; haggling is not one of my favourite things. Usually a piece sells itself though. That's why I never push a sale, I merely make suggestions. I talk about the continual enjoyment of having the piece in their home, the comments they will receive from friends and family, who will ask "where did you get this?" That is the best advertising — how it will stand out among the often modern surrounding décor and finish the room, entrance, etc. I always suggest we try the piece in situ, whether furniture or art. This is a good sales ploy because if it looks good they will often stay.

These are a few insights into my life. Other than my family and friends who I love dearly, I absolutely love the antique trade; every day is a little different! Oh — except for the frequent Singer sewing machine phone calls. **APS**

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