



STYLE COMPASS

CHRISTOPHER HODSOLL

This London dealer, who long has specialized in exquisite examples of classic English antiques, also takes on select interior design commissions from some of the boldest-faced names out there, Mick Jagger, Damien Hirst and Charles Saatchi among them.

BY DAVID A. KEEPS

SEPTEMBER 2014

A

lthough he has sold centuries-old treasures to Paul Simon and Paul Smith, Steve Martin and Sting and created sumptuous rooms for royals (Prince Philip; Princess Firyal of Jordan) and celebrities (Mick Jagger), the London antiques dealer (with a 1stdibs storefront) and interior designer Christopher Hodsohl lives a bit more humbly. “I have a row house near Portobello Road in the poor part of Notting Hill,” he says, smiling. “I still haven’t found time to finish it.”

Whether Christopher Hodsohl is in London or L.A. — where he’s photographed in Kathryn M. Ireland’s new studio/showroom that also showcases his antiques — he can often be found in a white shirt, navy blazer and khaki shorts (photo by Samuel C. Frost). Previous page: Hodsohl’s first solo design job, in 1985, was decorating bank headquarters for Edmond Safra in London’s Berkeley Square (photo by Peter Hodsohl).



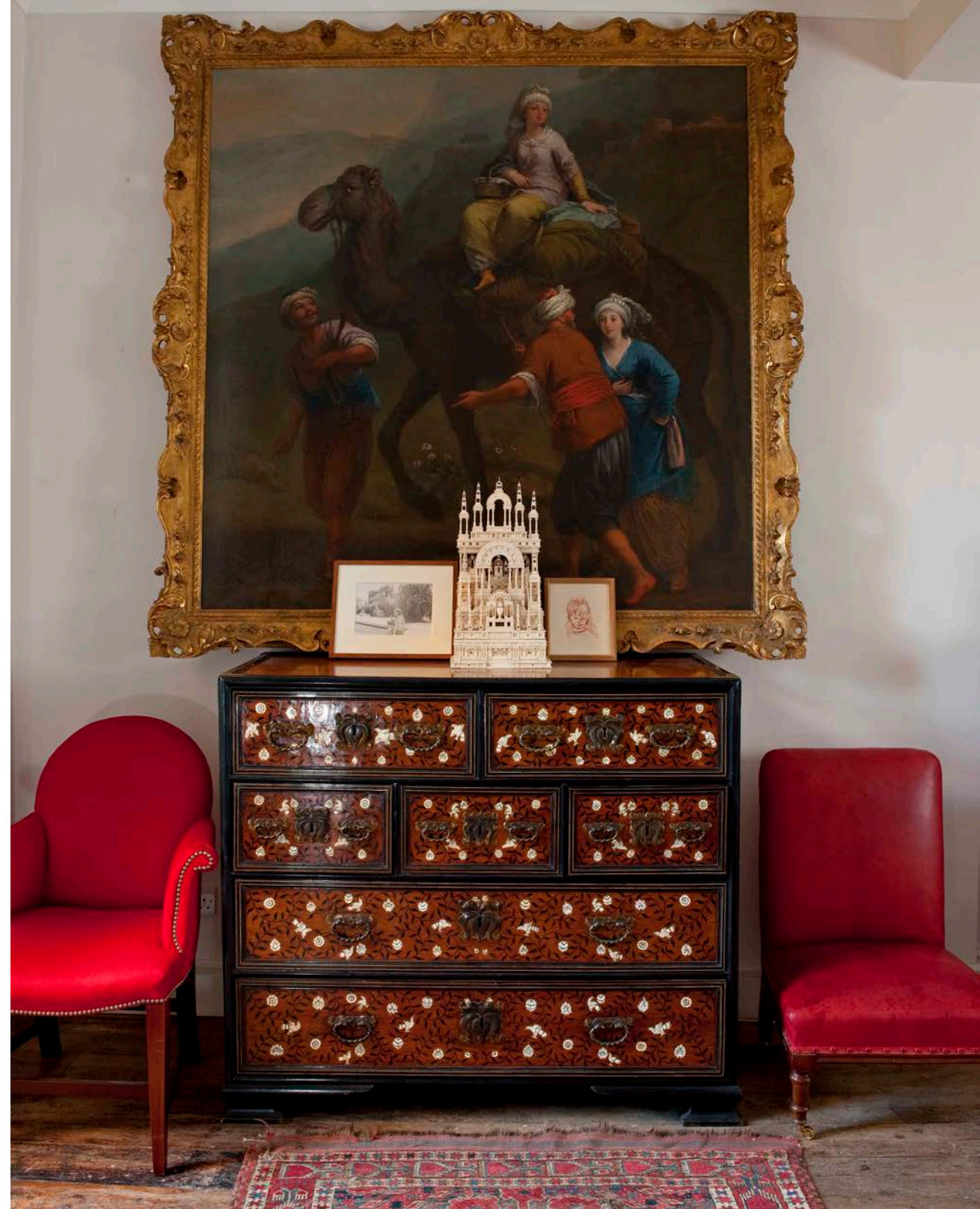


Probably not. The designer, a co-founder with Lulu Lytle of Soane, the highly regarded classicist furniture collection, has been somewhat pre-occupied. Having recently established a beachhead in the U.S., Hodsoll, already beloved by Los Angeles designers Michael S. Smith, Rose Tarlow and Martyn Lawrence Bullard, has outfitted fellow Brit Kathryn M. Ireland's new L.A. studio and showroom with some of his treasures: 1720s Venetian giltwood chandeliers, 1840s Scottish and Irish cabinets, a 28-foot-long 19th-century Sultanabad carpet and chairs from La Mamounia hotel in Morocco. "We met years ago working on Lorne Michaels's apartment in New York," says Ireland of the joint venture. "We were both dramatic Leos and rather frightened of each other but have come to be longstanding friends. And it's great to share a space with the most knowledgeable antiques dealer there is."

Hodsoll designed the rooms of this house-like tent for Prince Philip's 70th birthday party in 1991. Photo by Peter Hodsoll

While setting up shop with Ireland, Hodsoll rented a furnished, suitably storybook, early-20th-century cottage in Santa Monica, to which the 60-year-old father of four made only a few decorative adjustments. He had a shelf of personal books and DVDs, a pair of vivid watercolors by his visiting daughter and a small collection of dried cactus spines. “I’ve always been attracted to unusual things,” says the dyed-in-the-wool Englishman, who favors a white shirt and navy linen blazer (albeit with khaki shorts) even on the warmest California days. “Even when I was young, I’d scurry around antique shops, buying strange objects of natural history and old minerals in Victorian cases.”

In a 2004 project in Notting Hill, Hodsoll paired an Indian chest of drawers from 1750 with the painting *Turkish Pilgrims En Route to Mecca* by 18th-century Italian painter Francesco Zuccarelli. Photo by James Mortimer



Hodsoll adorned the bathroom of the Notting Hill residence with framed shell collections from the 19th century and a cart, sofa and sheepskin-covered stool from his own furniture collection, Soane. Photo by James Mortimer



Hodsoll grew up in a rambling 17th-century brick-and-timber manor house in Sussex with a pub on the side of it, which his father ran after retiring from advertising. “He came from an ancient Kent family that went broke in 1803,” he recalls, chuckling. “There were antiques, but that was because old family furniture was much cheaper than buying something new.” Young Christopher studied liberal arts at an English public school, but he was far more interested in playing chess and racing Mini Coopers. When his parents divorced, he moved to London, and, at 17, he began working for a Mayfair dealer, researching antiquities, Renaissance artworks and early European antiques that were sold to old-money clients and institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York.

In Edmond Safra’s office from Hodsoll’s 1985 Berkeley Square bank project, silk Fortuny curtains and a 16th-century Flemish tapestry help create a sophisticated aura that’s rare for a workplace. Photo by Peter Hodsoll





It was quite a lonely job,” he remembers. “A five-year monkish education in a solitary university.” Hodson then ran a gallery for “a rather eccentric” dealer named Peter Twining. “It was a very rough, beaten-up shop in Notting Hill, and he was the most impossible man with customers, but he was my tutor,” he recalls. “He taught me how to understand scale and that things didn’t have to be immaculate.” His next mentor was the antiques dealer, interior decorator and fabric designer Geoffrey Bennison, who created lavish residences for jetsetters like Guy and David de Rothschild in the mid-1970s. “They lived in such a grand style,” says Hodson, who sourced accessories for Bennison’s clients, “and he was obsessed with getting everything just right.”

In the entrance hall of an Eaton Square residence Hodson designed for real-estate magnate Elliott Bernerd in 2000, a series of watercolors depicting Hong Kong’s harbor line the walls. Photo by Peter Hodson

Hodsoll works in his own Eaton Square home in 1985. Photo by Fritz von der Schulenburg. Right: Hodsoll more recently with his vintage Aston Martin. Photo by Daniel Beres

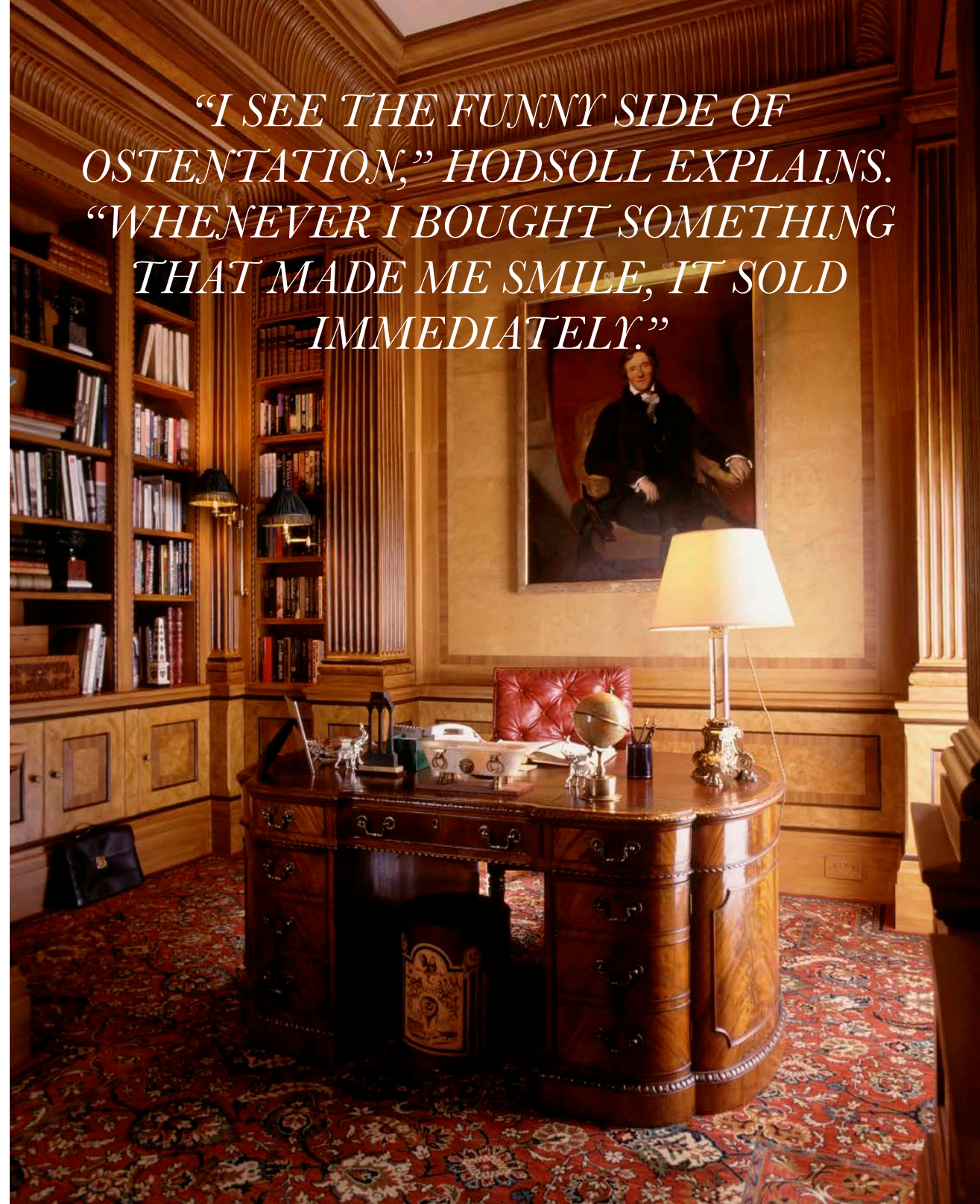


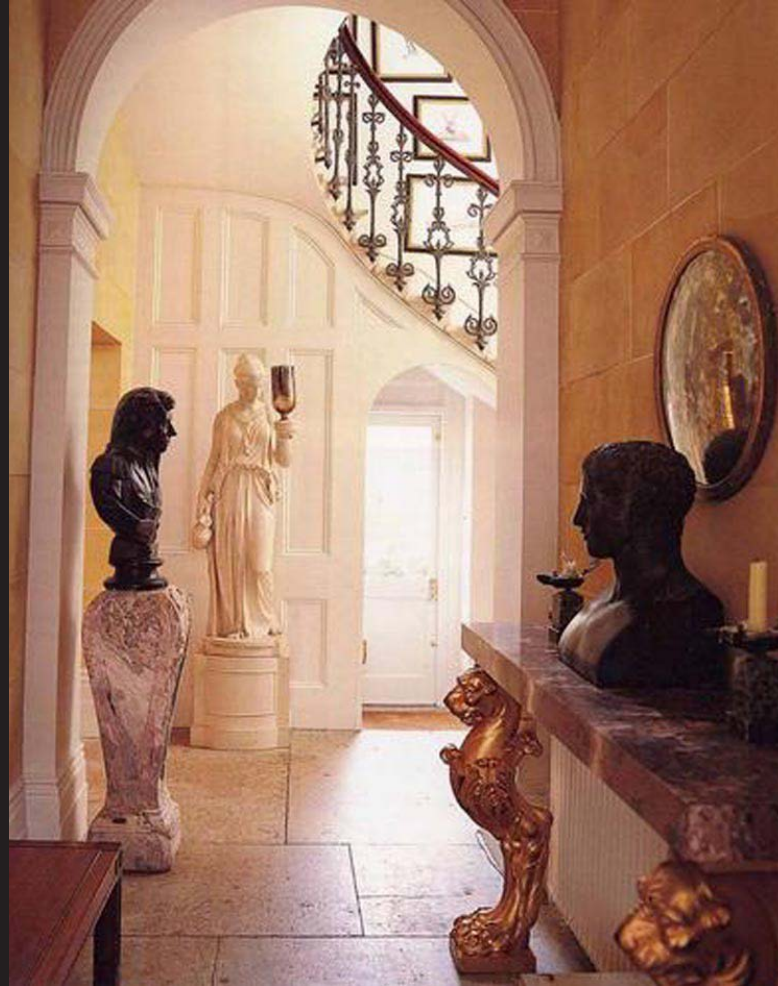
Hodsoll left Bennison in 1982 and opened a small shop on Pimlico Road, London's famed antiques destination. When Bennison died in 1984, he left Hodsoll with partial ownership of his successful shop nearby and Hodsoll eventually expanded to five storefronts, attracting an international crowd besotted with the English look. "It was the time when there were only twenty or thirty billionaires in the world," he notes, "and everyone was trying to outdo one another." Along with Italian Baroque furniture, he specialized in quirky pieces. "I see the funny side of ostentation," explains the owner of a vintage Aston Martin that prompts onlookers to make James Bond jokes. "Whenever I bought something that made me smile, it sold immediately. Bill Blass would come in the shop, see something and burst out laughing and then ten minutes later he'd buy it."

Hodsoll's discerning eye led to interiors commissions. "I'd been window dressing for so long," he says. "We'd do tableaux of dining rooms, sitting rooms and studies. I had years of practice, so I could do them pretty quickly." He designed residences and London offices for the late international banker Edmond Safra and advertising mogul Charles Saatchi. "He's fabulous, but the most impatient person I've ever met," Hodsoll chuckles. "I did a vast apartment for him in Eaton Square and he was having the ceiling plastered at the same time as the carpet was being laid." In 1991, Hodsoll decorated a party space for Prince Philip's 70th birthday in the garden of Windsor Castle. "It was a stately home in a tent. That was the height of my extravagance," he demurs. "I do love that over-the-top outrageousness, but who would do that today? I can see why the French nobility had their heads chopped off; they pushed it too far."

A portrait of the English architect Sir John Soane — after whom Hodsoll named his furniture line — painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence hangs in the home office of Bernerd, behind an unusually shaped 18th-century desk. Photo by Peter Hodsoll

"I SEE THE FUNNY SIDE OF OSTENTATION," HODSOLL EXPLAINS. "WHENEVER I BOUGHT SOMETHING THAT MADE ME SMILE, IT SOLD IMMEDIATELY."





Now, Hodsoll strives to create a timeless, yet livable look, rich with Old World materials, luxurious Continental fabrics and antiques, plus his favorite colors — British racing green, saffron yellow, pale aqua, Wedgwood blue and what he calls “dry, dusty pink.” “Bedrooms should be as empty as possible,” maintains the designer, who admires the work of Peter Marino, Thierry Despont, Bunny Williams and, of course, Kathryn Ireland. And Sir John Soane is such a hero of his that he named his furniture collection after the English neo-classicist architect.

“I don’t mind a dramatic living room for guests,” Hodsoll continues, “and a dining room should be slightly theatrical, because you are not going to spend that long in it.” He is quite happy to mix periods and materials, furnishing a conservatory room in London with a Louis XVI-style bergère by Syrie Maugham, a Bloomsbury Group solid-bronze console with horse legs and a 1940s table that appears to be draped and skirted but is made entirely from wicker.



The conference room of the Berkeley Square bank headquarters features a ceiling and moldings designed by Robert Adam in the late 18th century, which Hodsoll refurbished during his 1985 redo. Photo by Peter Hodsoll

An ongoing Chicago apartment project — furnished almost entirely with Soane and custom-made furniture — showcases Hodsohl's modern side. Photo courtesy of Soane



In the 21st century, the antiques market has evolved, Hodsohl says. “After 9/11, tastes changed,” he observes. “Minimalism became fashionable, and clients started going to auctions. Business was going downhill, but 1stdibs was one of the few

saviors.” As a result, his enterprise has become more mobile, and he has used his expertise as an antiques dealer to build upon his profile as a global interior designer. “I just did a job with a lot of fabulous chintz in Australia, a New York apartment with a

white lacquer-and-nickel table based on a nineteen-thirties yacht and a modern loft in Chicago,” he explains. “And I recently finished a house in Virginia that is thirty-thousand square feet on one floor — so enormous that you practically have to cycle from one end to the other.”

No matter the size of the commission, or the taste of the client, Hodsoll's design process is rooted in his own non-traditional traditionalism. "When I walk into houses, my first reaction is panic," he says, laughing. "I pad around for ages, thinking, What the hell am I going to do here? I like to lurk for as long as possible and think about the practicalities of how people want to live. But even when I do contemporary homes, the emphasis is on luxury and quality."

Hodsoll sits at a monumental desk in the office of fellow designer Kathryn M. Ireland's new L.A. studio, which he helped design. Photo by Samuel C. Frost

[▶ EXPLORE CHRISTOPHER HODSOLL ON 1STDIBS](#)



Style Compass

FASHION

I am rather conservative; I usually wear shorts and a white shirt. Some brands I like are **Margaret Howell** and Private White VC. I have a few suits and tweeds from Savile Row from Anderson & Sheppard and Richard James, some of which are 30 years old.



TRAVEL

Skiing the backcountry of Idaho, Utah and Colorado in the winter; visiting France, Austria and Morocco in the summer. I also love to travel to the west coast of the British Isles, as well as Scotland, Ireland and Italy. And for work and pleasure: Australia, California, Virginia and New York



GARDENING AND FLORAL

I prefer the elysian, bucolic, arcadian, Old English garden look — see: **Isabel and Julian Bannerman's** work for the Prince of Wales at Highgrove and Trematon Castle.

COLOR

I'm bored rigid with white and beige and also loathe black cars (except London taxis). I like earthy but bright colors such as saffron yellow, ochre washed-out reds, moss green and pale sea blue.

BOOK

Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin series of novels about the Napoleonic wars

ENTERTAINING

Dinners at home for six to 14 people; Saturday morning late breakfast for a small group of scholarly and witty aesthetes who wander in after scouring the Portobello Road antiques market

RESTAURANT

Hals in Los Angeles — there are excellent others in L.A. but I can't abide the music or air-conditioning. In New York, La Esquina. In London: Wiltons, Hereford Road and **Le Café Anglais**.



GIFT

In a last-minute panic I give a piece of stock from my shop or sometimes from **Soane**.

HOTEL

The Carlyle, New York; Arizona Inn, Tucson

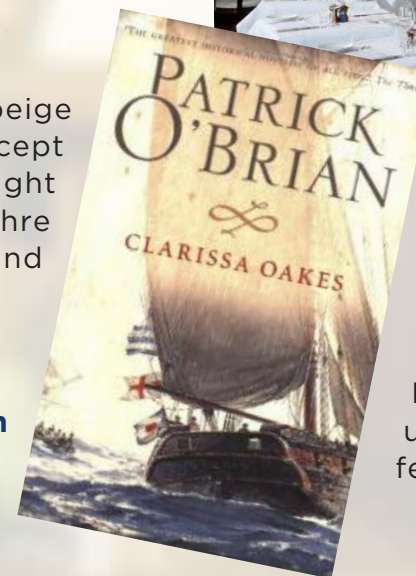
FAVORITE APP

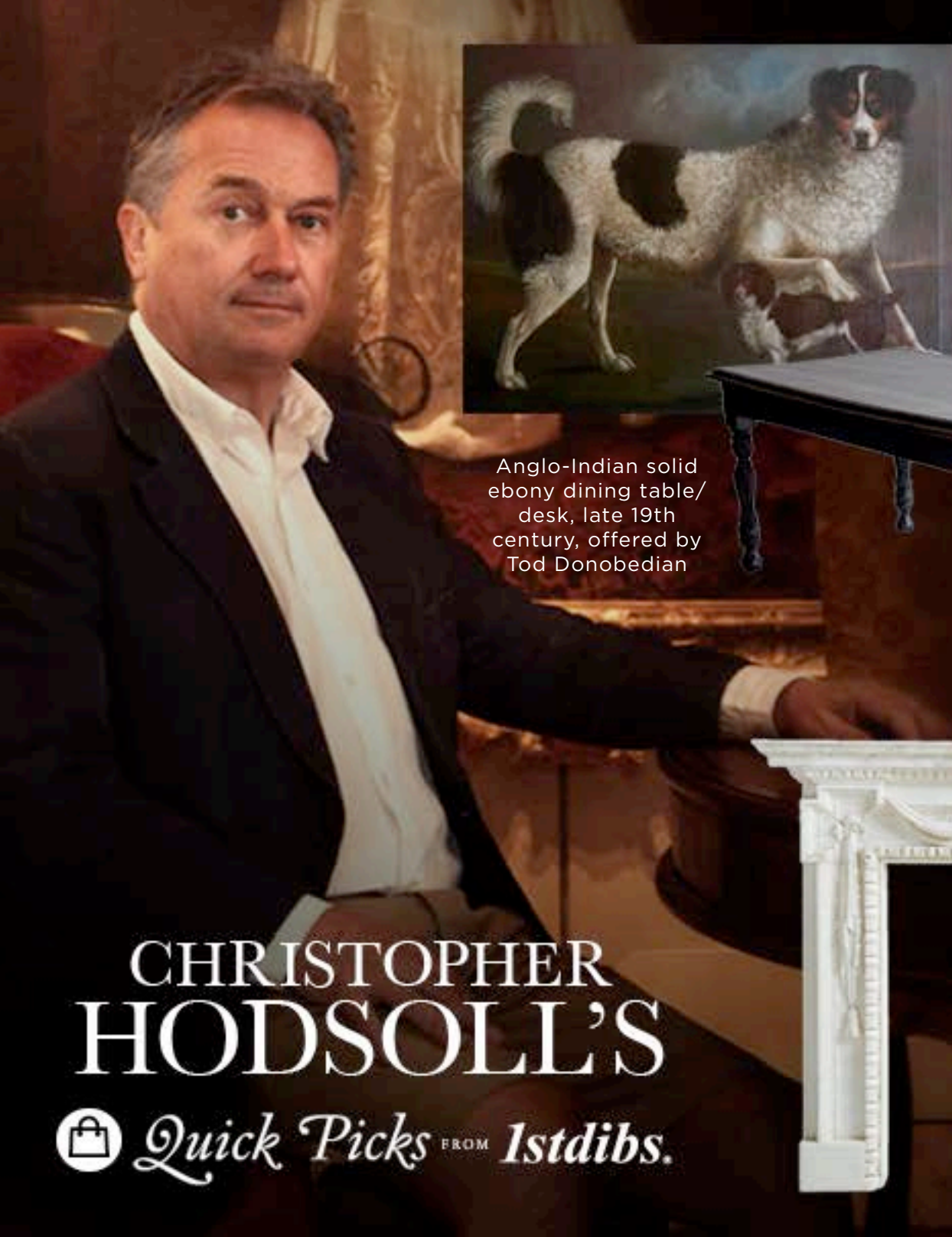
SocialChess and any voice-command app



MUSEUM

I love museums, obviously all the famous and great ones plus three smaller ones: The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, in Boston; Sir John Soane's Museum, in London; and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, in Virginia.





Newfoundland and Spaniel
in a Coastal Landscape,
early 18th century, offered
by Christopher Hodson Ltd.

Anglo-Indian solid
ebony dining table/
desk, late 19th
century, offered by
Tod Donobedian



Alabaster
and marble
chimneypiece, ca.
1925, offered by
Carlton Hobbs LLC



Large-scale wooden
camel sculpture, 19th
century, offered by
Jonathan Burden LLC



William Kent
chimneypiece,
ca. 1730, offered
by James Graham-
Stewart



Bakelite geometric forms,
1920, offered by Obsolete



CHRISTOPHER HODSON'S

 Quick Picks FROM Istdibs.

MORE STORIES YOU MIGHT LIKE



VEERE GREENEY

Helen Chislett | July 2014

Read about one man's progression from Kiwi backpacker to one of London's most elite and sought-after interior designers...



ALIDAD

Helen Chislett | February 2014

Read about the Tehran-born, London-based designer whose ultraluxe style encompasses the best of European and Middle-Eastern traditions...



KATHRYN M. IRELAND'S SUMMERS IN FRANCE

Pamela Fiori | April 2011

The interiors and textile designer celebrates life at Le Castellane, her utterly relaxed and completely enchanting summer house in France...

