

JAMB PACKED

Will Fisher has spent 20 years accumulating antiques and curiosities that have filled his home – and various shipping containers – in south London. With his reproduction and fireplace company, Jamb, moving to smaller premises, a sale of its stock has extended to the house itself – right down to the kitchen clock. Charlotte Edwards pays a visit ahead of the removal vans. Photography: Simon Upton



A stuffed French fighting dog warms himself by the drawing-room fire. The antique chimney piece inspired Jamb's 'Oxford' design. The George II giltwood mirror above it reputedly came from Newhailes House in Musselburgh





Top: a cabinet of 'talismans' rests on a George II mahogany side table in the hall. An enamel *News of the World* advert leans against the wall.

Above: Jamb's reproduction lighting – including this 'Pickford' table lamp and the 'Windsor' lantern in the drawing room – is used throughout the house. Opposite: two George IV oak hall chairs in the manner of George Bullock flank a mahogany side table crowded with statuary

'WHOSE LEG IS THAT?' Will Fisher and Charlotte Freemantle's five-year-old daughter was only mildly curious when a set of articulated bones (once the property of a horse, in fact) appeared on the dining-room wall. But then both Eliza and her little brother Monty have grown accustomed to the exotic parade of objects and artefacts that crosses the threshold of their south London home on a daily basis, contending for space with their scooters and Peppa Pig paraphernalia. Perhaps the only thing that could ever surprise them would be to find their house entirely empty.

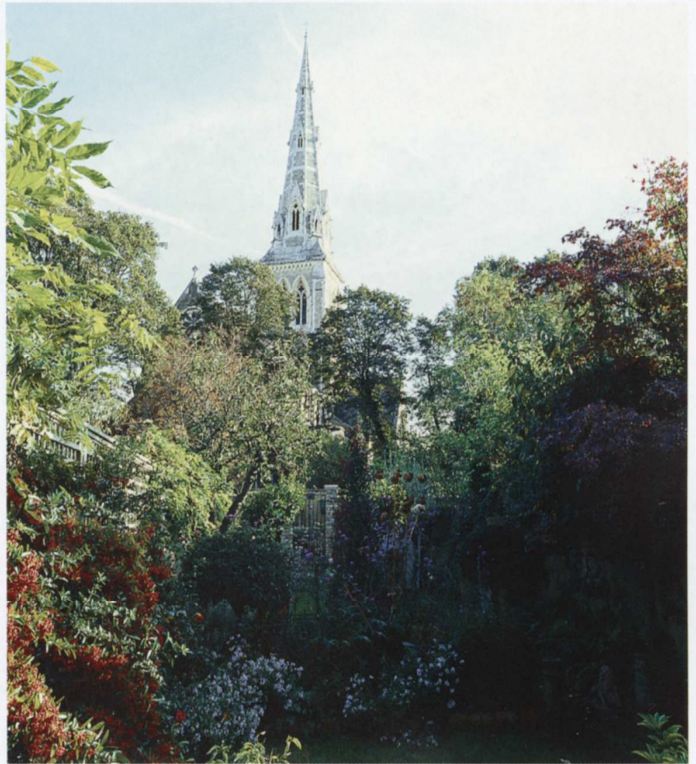
Yet that's what has happened, almost overnight, in advance of this month's sale of all the worldly goods accumulated by antique-dealer Will in the course of his 20-year career. Stored at home, at the Pimlico Road premises of his company Jamb, and in shipping containers 'here, there and everywhere', the collection includes 50 of the finest antique English chimney pieces – including a museum-quality George II verde-antico-and-marble mantel thought to be by Isaac Ware – as well as English and Irish furniture, lighting, zoological oddities, paintings, sculpture, architectural fragments and garden statuary that have directly or indirectly inspired Jamb's thriving reproduction lines.

Will and Charlotte, who works alongside him at Jamb, arrived at 'a pivotal moment' last year, when they received confirmation that their 1,400sq m mews showroom had been sold for development. Securing a new – but inevitably smaller – space round the corner called for what Charlotte describes as 'a sense of good housekeeping. We realised how much Will had amassed. It was just endless.' Christie's, where Will had worked as a precocious 16-year-old, had long declared interest in a sale, so he offered them the lot, with the contents of the showroom joined by art and antiques he had squirrelled away for himself. Many pieces had only just fallen into place in the family's newly completed home, a handsome 1780 town house in which 'layer upon layer' had been stripped out and 18th-century floors and fireplaces installed in a three-year restoration project. 'We had this perfect moment,' sighs Charlotte. 'It lasted for about five minutes.' 'My poor mother was more shocked than anyone,' Will says ruefully. 'She came over and said, "Oh darling, the house looks so beautiful, and at last you've got a comfortable chair for me to sit in."' Charlotte had to tell her that it was all going off to auction the very next day. Fortunately, we had the opportunity to photograph it in advance.

Two hundred lots swiftly became 500. 'I started off thinking, oh, I can't sell this, how can I live without that, but once we got involved in the process it was a rollercoaster, impossible to get off,' Will explains. 'Christie's were beside themselves in the end, saying "no more stuff!" Then something else would turn up that was fantastic and they'd say, oh







Left: the Arts and Crafts dining table was designed by Lutyens for a yacht. Top: the garden is overlooked by the parish church. This view – ‘like being somewhere in Kent’ – encouraged the couple to buy the house. Above: Will has made a pond for every house his parents have ever lived in. Here, he says, he ‘took it to its extreme’. The fountain, bought in Reggio Emilia, Italy, is surrounded by his collection of 18th-century keystones and capitals



Top: the kitchen island was hand-built using reclaimed teak and tiles salvaged from the New York subway – Will exchanged the first lot he'd bought because the glaze didn't have enough crackle. Above: antique pine racks, once used to store deeds, provide shelving. Right: Jamb's adjustable 'Scholar's Lamp' was based on reading lights in the V&A. The jars from the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew once held seeds. The flooring is hand-cut Purbeck stone





Top: in the bathroom, two 19th-century ebonised beech-framed mirrors hang above the double sink. Above: Jamb's 'St James' chimney piece was inspired by the mid-18th-century marble surround in the bedroom. The crewelwork bedspread is an early 20th-century copy of a late 17th-century English design. Opposite: the 1903 painting of a fish was a find at Ardingly antique fair, while the hippopotamus skull is a relic of Will's former flat

well, maybe one more thing...' The sale includes the contents of Will's previous flat (*Wol* June 2001) which he couldn't bear to part with when he sold the place: a combination of antique and modern pieces that created 'an amalgam of two worlds, very sparse, quite masculine in feel'. 'I think he was hoping to go back to his bachelor ways,' says Charlotte, 'so he kept his entire flat in a container.' 'It was perfectly preserved,' Will admits. 'I didn't find any ex-girlfriends in there, though.'

What remained in the house was mostly a matter of practicality. The dining table and the couple's brass bed were kept, even if chairs and sofas weren't ('We're going to have to sit on the floor for 30 years,' laughs Will). Perhaps to Charlotte's relief, much of the natural-history collection has gone, although Will flatly refused to part with his favourite antelope head. 'It was symbolic, a lucky charm,' he insists. 'I thought it had been stolen, so when I found it again it just didn't make sense to let it go. Things that have gone missing like that acquire a legendary status.' As had the kitchen clock that Will bought when he was 20 and was delighted to rediscover. 'I've been looking for it for five years, my life has been miserable without it,' he grins. 'But when I walked into the showroom, Christie's grabbed it.'

At least Christie's couldn't take the kitchen: a brick-tiled homage to 'the below-stairs, less sophisticated parts of grand country houses', and a larger version of the kitchen in Will's bachelor pad. While that earlier incarnation had a more industrial feel, with a Smeg cooker and metal cabinets, here there's an Aga, flagstones and an island fitted with custom-made wooden drawers. 'It makes far more sense here, because it's in a basement, and because of the date of the house,' Will explains. 'So it's appropriate, but it's also the most functional it could be. It gets the job done.' Georgian simplicity was the organising principle inside the house, but outside, says Will, grinning: 'Charlotte always says I became Liberate.' At the end of the garden – an 'actually kind of fabulous' tangle of brambles and climbing roses when the family first moved in – they created a gated classical water garden adorned with huge ferns and architectural fragments. In the deep pool, enormous koi carp move in slow, mesmerising circles, arresting even Will's attention.

His energy and enthusiasm are such that it's a fair bet that the house won't remain empty for long; as he is keen to emphasise: 'The sale isn't an ending, it's a beginning – or a freeze-frame, at least.' Charlotte agrees. 'Will will just carry on buying,' she says, 'but maybe this gives us a chance to take things more slowly. His first brief is to buy some new comfy chairs for his mum' ■

The Collection of Will Fisher will be sold at Christie's South Kensington on 2 Feb (020 7930 6074; christies.com). The lots can be viewed at Jamb, 107a Pimlico Rd, London SW1 (020 7730 2122; jamblimited.com), from 28 Jan to 1 Feb

