



PROFILE

Lennox Cato

Antiques dealer and *Antiques Roadshow* furniture specialist

INTERVIEW ROSANNA MORRIS

It was inevitable Lennox Cato would make art and antiques his profession. He spent his childhood immersed in the colourful, exciting and bustling world around the antiques shops in the warren of narrow, twisting alleyways of The Lanes in Brighton in the Sixties and Seventies.

'I was adopted and my parents were antiques dealers,' he says. 'They were also picture dealers and my father would go from shop to shop selling. He was what would have been known as a runner. Every other shop in The Lanes was an antiques dealer – it was cheek by jowl. The business was buzzing. The more deals you did, the more money you earned. If you were hungry, it was there for the taking. It was like picking cherries off a cherry tree. It was a way of life. All our friends and family were dealers.'

That's what you did – you dealt. You tried to be richer and happier than the day before. Brighton was a hub of some amazing dealers. We had foreign dealers coming here from all over the world.'

While at school, Lennox was learning the trade. 'I would go down to the Gardener Street Saturday antiques market with a wad of cash, buy something and sell it on. The secret is you just keep trading up. My girlfriend (now my wife Susan) and I would also go looking through windows in the antiques shops and work out why dealers bought a particular piece of furniture. Once you get your eye in, you understand why that

dealer bought that chest of drawers and not another one – its colour or proportions – there are many factors.'

Lennox left school at 16 to become an antiques dealer. He married Sue and they had two children.

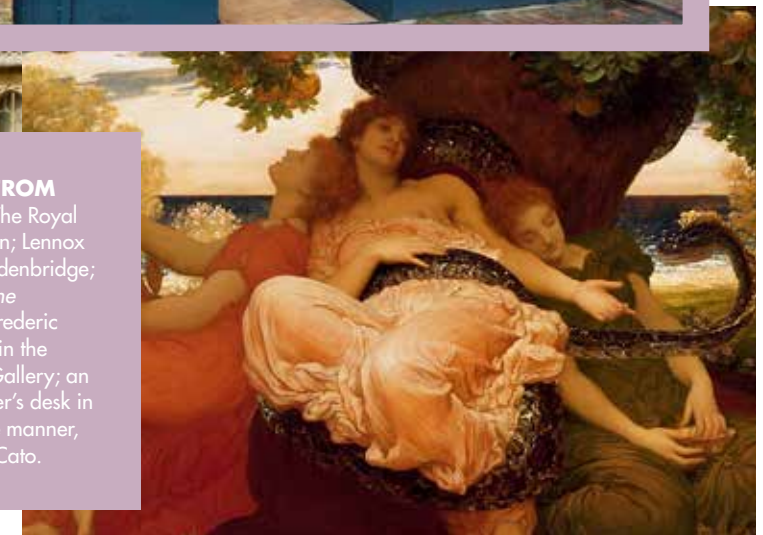
After running a couple of antiques shops in Brighton followed by one in Lewes, they settled in Edenbridge, Kent where they've had a showroom for the last 24 years, specialising in 18th and 19th-century furniture. Lennox and Sue have also exhibited at top antiques fairs over the years, including the LAPADA event every autumn. 'I've been dealing for 43 years and I'm as ambitious now as I was when I first



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Dealer Lennox Cato; *The Swing* by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, one of the most famous paintings in The Wallace Collection; a 1759 Sevres porcelain ink stand, also in The Wallace Collection; the sign to the famous Brighton Lanes.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT The Royal Pavilion, Brighton; Lennox Cato's shop in Edenbridge; *The Garden of the Hesperides* by Frederic Leighton, found in the Lady Lever Art Gallery; an important partner's desk in the Chippendale manner, POA at Lennox Cato.



started,' says Lennox. 'I have done the same thing ever since and I've kept moving up the ladder. It takes a certain ambition. I'm still learning and listening to what people like.'

For Lennox, it's not about buying and selling, but about the excitement of finding something interesting with a story; about learning something new; and about providing an exceptional service. 'I'm always learning. I go to as many houses and museums as I possibly can. I look and learn. I'm like a sponge and I absorb information. I like all sorts of things – pictures, silver, not just furniture. I want to know where it was made, who designed it and what materials were used. One of my favourite museums is The Wallace Collection on Manchester Square in London, especially for its French furniture. I like to tag on to a guide as there is so much information there, it's amazing. The V&A, the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Liverpool.'

Career highlights include selling pieces to museums, becoming a member of antiques associations LAPADA and BADA and, of course, becoming a specialist on the BBC's *Antiques Roadshow* 16

years ago. 'Selling to museums has been a wonderful accolade. You get a real sense of achievement being acknowledged for something that you bought. I was so proud and still am to be a board member of BADA. It means nothing to the majority of people who think more about me being on telly.'

Geoffrey Godden, a ceramics dealer in Worthing, put Lennox forward for the TV show. 'I was asked to shadow presenter John Bly at Cambridge. I was so daunted. I had to do a piece to camera at the end of the day. They fitted a microphone and asked me to talk about a piece of furniture. I was so nervous, I said I couldn't do it as the trauma was too great. But then one of the new assistants said to me "are you nuts?"

How many black people are in this industry?' and I realised I had to do it. Even now when I go on camera, I get incredibly anxious.'

After over four decades of dealing, Lennox is a virtuoso at buying antiques. 'It's intuitive,' he says. But one mustn't take oneself too seriously. We're all selling second-hand furniture at the end of the day – but we're enjoying the journey.'



Trustees of The Wallace Collection; Jim Holden/Alamy Stock Photo; iStock / Getty Images Plus; Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images