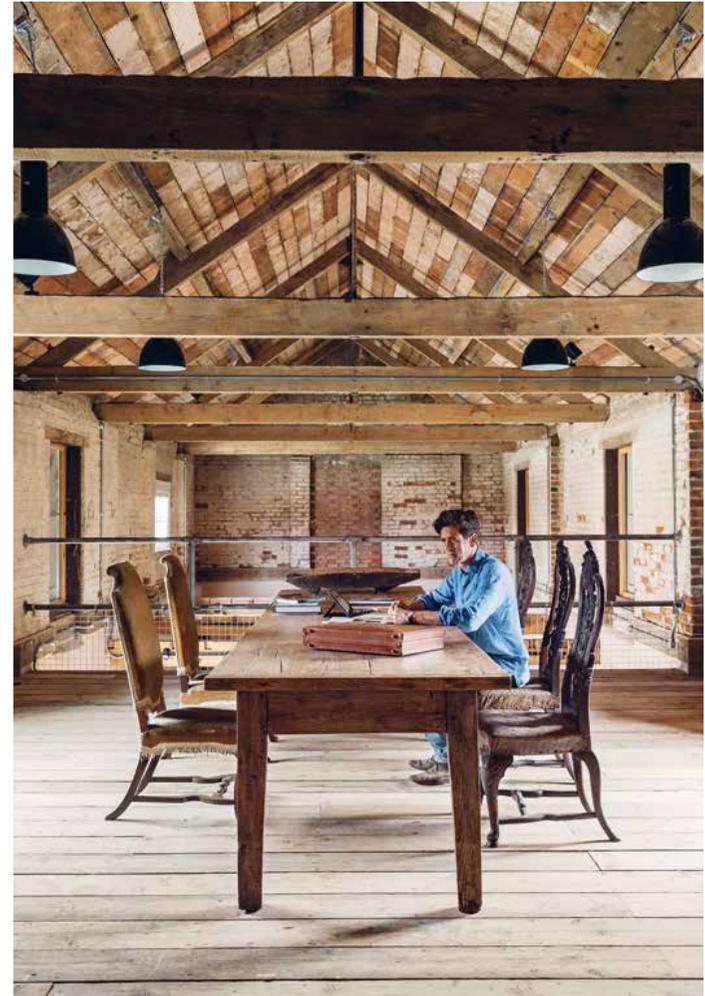




THIS PAGE In this panelled space on the upper floor, a rare set of George III painted chairs from c1790 stands in front of a Regency carved mahogany side table. **OPPOSITE** Edward at his desk, a table dating from the early nineteenth century

Hunter gatherer



Hatta Byng visits the antique dealer and interior consultant **EDWARD HURST** at the 'store' he has created from run-down farm buildings at his Dorset home, to showcase his rare and beautiful finds

PHOTOGRAPHS **DEAN HEARNE**

Edward Hurst

has had a variety of shops and showrooms over his career, starting with one in Nettlebed, Oxfordshire, which, he says, 'was exactly what you would expect of an antique shop in the Eighties'. Next he moved to a late-seventeenth-century townhouse in Salisbury with 'wonderful wide floorboards and painted paneling', where he and his wife Jane lived above the shop. This was followed by a converted Sixties chicken shed outside Salisbury, which still contained the old battery crates when he picked up the keys. But just last year he moved his 'store' - he does not like calling it a gallery - back home into a former granary-turned-dairy in deepest, most rural Dorset.

Semi-derelict, with 'a swimming pool of water' on the ground floor, this 1830s farm building provided the means to create the sort of space Edward had envisaged since he opened his first shop at 19 years old. Here was the opportunity not only to start from scratch but also for drama, with its large rooms and soaring double-height ceiling at one end. 'It has been exciting to place pieces in the different spaces and see how they work,' he muses.

Edward is one of this generation's pre-eminent antique dealers, with an enviable eye, unerring taste and instinctive flair for finding the unusual and the beautiful. As he points out, 'Gone are the days when people bought antiques to create quasi-eighteenth-century interiors with little regard for individuality or rarity.' Edward puts his heart, soul and intellectual rigour into selecting pieces - there needs to be a thrill in the finding. Describing himself as a sifter, he can look at 1,000 Georgian side chairs and not buy one. 'As soon as I see something, I know whether I want it,' he says. Design is as crucial as quality. As is romance. He talks of holding things in his hands as a young boy and dreaming up a history for them. Original mirror plate is particularly tantalising: 'To think somebody was looking at their reflection in the same mirror 300 years ago.' His criteria have got stricter with age: 'I am constantly trying to buy better and better.'

Antiques are in his blood. His father's interest was horology and he collected English clocks, taking Edward along with him to sales and junk shops from an early age. He started buying when he was eight, and dealing in such things as silver teaspoons and tea caddies, while still at school. It is a passion that he has passed on to his son Tom, now 18 (who will be featured in next month's issue). Edward has always been aware of how things looked. Aged five or six, he would blow up houses he didn't like the look of in his mind 'to mentally remove them'.

Over the past 15 years, his work has led him into the realms of interior design, although he shies away from being called a decorator. For him it is about

'building up rooms': finding furniture, rugs, fabrics and objects that have historical resonance and chime together. One of his first jobs was at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, where he refers to his work, modestly, as 'tweaking'. He talks of it as being like 'a lovely game or puzzle, playing with the client's existing collections'. When he tells me about his current project, a Regency villa in Dorset, he describes what he does as 'taking houses back to what they should be - comfortable and happy.' Other clients have included: Claudia Rothermere at Ferne Park in Wiltshire; Evgeny Lebedev at Stud House in the grounds of Hampton Court; Jasper Conran at Ven House in Somerset and then Wardour Castle in Wiltshire; and the Shaftesburys at St Giles House in Dorset. All have been exciting collaborations for both Edward and his clients, and produced extraordinary results.

In the transformation of his own space, Edward has been equally sensitive and imaginative. Much of the work involved 'cleaning and scrubbing, getting the rat droppings out'. The wiring is surface mounted and encased in galvanised trunking so as not to interfere with the integrity of the walls. Downstairs, a couple of smaller rooms lead through to the largest space, where you can look through the joists of the floor above up to the exposed beams of the ceiling. Upstairs, his office - a minimalist space with a four-metre-long, early nineteenth-century kitchen table as his desk - looks down to the room below where the new floor, made from reclaimed scaffold boards, ends two thirds along, creating a dramatic mezzanine effect. The brick walls have been left as he found them, the layers of weathered paint creating warmth and patina.

Edward says the different spaces lend themselves to different pieces: 'The double-height room requires pieces with strength; it suits the baroque rather than the neoclassical.' A smaller, white-washed space next door is more gallery-like. When we visit, it houses among other pieces an impressive - and slightly eccentric - Regency bronzed, gilt, faux-porphry crocodile daybed. On the upper floor is a room that he describes as 'very new territory', with reclaimed pine boards used as panelling. 'Things work there that I'd never have thought would,' he says, referring to a grand and imposing carved mahogany Regency side table with sculptural legs on the back wall.

At the end of my visit, Edward says, 'I hope this is my final move; it's the space I'm happiest in.' I leave buzzing with the beauty and integrity of what he has created both in his 'store' and his house, just across the farmyard, and longing to have a project - and the budget - to collaborate on with Edward □

— Edward Hurst: edwardhurst.com

OPPOSITE TOP ROW A George IV mahogany dining table and set of George III mahogany chairs take centre stage in the double-height space. A Japanese export lacquer cabinet from c1690. An 1820s armchair in the building's entrance. MIDDLE ROW A James I oak draw-leaf table from c1610 is a particularly rare piece. The building was once a granary and then a dairy. A Regency crocodile daybed has a strong presence in the gallery-like space. BOTTOM ROW A George III bureau cabinet stands near the daybed. Weathered paint and reclaimed wood in the kitchen area of Edward's office. A George II walnut elbow chair with a mahogany commode from the same period

