

Sotheby's unveils 'Mario Buatta: Prince of Interiors'



Jan van Os, Still life of various flowers arranged in a glass vase with goldfish, two butterflies, and other insects all on a stone ledge. Estimate: \$60/80,000. Courtesy Sotheby's.

NEW YORK, NY.- Sotheby's unveils nearly 1,000 items on offer in Mario Buatta: Prince of Interiors, an auction dedicated to the personal collection of interior designer legend Mario Buatta.

Most influenced by the understated elegance of Colefax & Fowler and the doyenne of exuberant American décor, Sister Parish, Mario Buatta reinvented the English Country House style stateside for clients such as Henry Ford II, Barbara Walters, Malcolm Forbes, Mariah Carey, Patricia Altschul and for Blair House, the President's guest quarters. The collection features works emerging from Buatta's Upper East Side apartment in New York City and the William Mason House, an historic gothic-style home in Thompson, Connecticut, as well as many pieces that have long been admired in showhouse rooms and shelter magazines over the years.

Sotheby's auction will be held on 23 & 24 January, during one of the busiest weeks in the New York market calendar – alongside both The Winter Show and Sotheby's Americana Week sales series. The sale will be preceded by a public exhibition in Sotheby's York Avenue galleries beginning 16 January, designed by Rush Jenkins of WRJ Interior Design.

Dennis Harrington, Head of Sotheby's English & European Furniture Department in New York, said: "In addition to being one of America's best loved interior designers, Mario Buatta was a passionate lifelong collector of antique furniture, ceramics and decorative objects. He famously remarked, 'If you don't know about the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, you can't decorate for the twenty-first.' Antiques were an integral part of his aesthetic, and he never chose anything for a client that he wouldn't have wanted to live with himself. This sale aptly demonstrates his philosophy that antiques are timeless and essential to every interior, and it represents an unmissable opportunity to acquire a piece of his legacy. With estimates from \$500 to \$50,000 and the majority of lots sold without reserve, there is something here for everyone."

Emily Eerdmans, design expert and co-author of *Mario Buatta: Fifty Years of American Interior Decoration*, commented: "Captured in this auction is what Mario Buatta called the scrapbook of his life. Here are pieces that traveled with him from as early as his first apartment in the early 1960s, such as his beloved 'Floral Bouquet' living room curtains, whose length he continued to augment as he moved, to objects that belonged to his design idols and inspirations Nancy Lancaster and Mrs. Henry 'Sister' Parish II. He spent over fifty years creating this collection which, until now, has been hidden away and never fully comprehended in its impressive scale and quality."

Auction highlights

"My apartment today is full of things I've collected over the years. Everything here tells a story. Some of it is good, some of it is chipped and broken, but it's a collection. It's what John Fowler called 'pleasing decay', which many don't understand today...it means that something looks well-worn and I lived with, like an old pair of shoes that you love or an old jacket that gets better with age, it has character." – Mario Buatta

Furniture

In keeping with the classic English Country House idiom, which reflects a multitude of styles, periods and countries accumulated by families over many years both in England and from travels abroad, Mario Buatta's furniture collection is predominantly English, from the Georgian and Regency periods, mixed with a smaller group of French and Italian rococo and neoclassical works, as well as a unique assemblage of Gothic Revival furniture and objects.

Important offerings include: an early 18th century George I Gilt-Gesso Side Table from the collection of former Vogue editor Louise Melhado (Lot 170); a George III Giltwood and Gilt Carton Pierre Overmantel Mirror (Lot 693); two pairs of George III Open Armchairs from Gordon Castle, Scotland (Lots 908-909); a George III White-Painted Fireplace surround and architectural elements from a Palm Room (Lot 897); and an unusually large Regency Convex Mirror (Lot 703). Notable Continental works are highlighted by a pair of Louis XV Painted Fauteuils upholstered in Colefax & Fowler Jubilee Chintz (Lot 534), and a pair of Venetian Polychrome Blackamoors (Lot 528).

Unsurprisingly for those familiar with his exuberantly colorful interiors, Mario Buatta had a horror vacui love of furniture and objects with rich surface decoration, and his collection is unprecedented for its quantity and quality of lacquered works, both Chinese Export and English japanned, as well as Regency penwork, decalcomania objects, and both Chinese and European works in the Brighton Pavilion taste. Highlights include a George II Red-Japanned Bureau Cabinet that traveled with Mario through several of his apartments and used to display his favorite group of porcelain tulip cups (Lot 119), and an important Chinese Export Black and Gold Lacquer Bureau Cabinet, one of the finest of its kind to appear on the market in decades (Lot 555).

In addition, Mario Buatta was celebrated for his bedrooms, and the sale will feature his own Four-Poster Canopy Brown and Gold Lacquer Bed reputedly from Brighton Pavilion (Lot 636) that appears in a celebrated Drawing of Mario Buatta by the artist Konstantin Kakanias, commissioned by the New York Times (Lot 969). Among the penwork items, arguably the largest group of its kind ever to appear at auction, are a rare signed and dated collector's Cabinet on Stand (Lot 304) and Gueridon with chequerboard top (Lot 719).

The collection also pays homage to design legends who had a major influence on Buatta's style, among them Sister Parish, John Fowler and Nancy Lancaster. Examples include an unusual pair of Italian Chinoiserie Tole Peinte Vases on Stands from Sister Parish's apartment (Lot 350) and works from every one of Nancy Lancaster's celebrated English interiors, such as a Regency X-Frame Stool from the Ditchley Park bedroom used by Winston Churchill during the war (Lot 496), and a pair of Venetian Etched Glass Mirrors from Lancaster's iconic 'Butter Yellow' room in London (Lot 497).

Ceramics

Mario Buatta's taste in ceramics was every bit as eclectic as his taste in furniture. A significant part of his ceramic collection is formed of wares imitating naturalistic forms. Highlights include a vegetable garden in ceramic, featuring melons (Lots 179-182), peaches (Lot 165), asparagus (Lots 183-187), grapes, and a large array of cabbages and cauliflowers, by factories such as Chelsea, Longton Hall and Worcester, as well as European factories. Buatta was famed for his love of tulips and the sale features a large group of porcelain in the form of tulips, including a rare pair of Frankenthal Tulip-Form Stands once in the collection of Doris Duke (Lot 147). The sale features 24 dinner and dessert services from his collection spanning the factories of England ranging in date from the turn of the 19th century to the mid-20th century: an Assembled Creamware Botanical Service, circa 1800 (lot 734); a Wedgwood 'Wreathed Shell' Dessert Service, circa 1820 and 1864-82 (lot 493); and a modern Dodie Thayer Lettuce Ware Service (lot 202).

Fine Art

Mario Buatta's diverse collection is further distinguished by a group of paintings and decorative prints and watercolors, most famously an ensemble of over fifty dog paintings, illustrating the designer's love for what he called his canine 'ancestors'. One of these by the Victorian female artist Frances Fairman celebrates the treaty between England and France ending the Boxer Rebellion in China, and features a boxer with Buatta's favorite breed: the Cavalier King Charles spaniel (Lot 69). Buatta also acquired a small ensemble of floral still lifes, including an important picture by Dutch painter Jan van Os (1744-1808) (Lot 256) and a 20th century Paris scene by the Russian émigré artist Yury Annenkov (Lot 950).

Chintz

No celebration of Buatta's life would be complete without examples of the designer's trademark floral print fabric. The sale features two groups of Buatta chintz teddy bears (Lots 933 and 934), the designer's own chintz fabric cape (Lot 932), and the set of Brunschwig & Fils Verrières pattern curtains from Buatta's 1984 Kips Bay Showhouse Room (Lot 930), which first earned him the title of 'The Prince of Chintz'.