



THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION

A Museum of Fine and Decorative Arts

incorporating

Fairhall house-museum | Lectures | Reference Library | Shop

MEDIA RELEASE

MARTIN ALLEN REARRANGES WILLIAM JOHNSTON'S COLLECTION

The annual *William Johnston and his collection* house-museum tour
Friday 13 March 2015 – Tuesday 23 June 2015

Martin Allen from Martin Allen Antiques in South Melbourne, will bring his great knowledge and infectious passion for antiques to The Johnston Collection, in his rearrangement of *Fairhall* house-museum.

It was William Johnston's wish that *Fairhall*, his former residence, be regularly rearranged. Past rearrangements have included those by fashion designer, Akira Isogawa; architect and designer Pascale Gomes-McNabb; fashion-house *Romance Was Born*; contemporary Melbourne artist Rosslynd Piggott; and David McAllister AM, Artistic Director of The Australian Ballet.

This series of rearrangements provides an opportunity to re-imagine William Johnston's extraordinary collection in new ways. Continuing the series, this month The Johnston Collection presents a house-museum tour created by Martin Allen, a collector and antique dealer with a love of 17th and 18th century English furniture.

MARTIN ALLEN REARRANGES WILLIAM JOHNSTON'S COLLECTION, which runs from Friday 13 March until Tuesday 23 June 2015, will give visitors to *Fairhall* an opportunity to view the Collection, through the eyes and aesthetic of a collector and antique dealer who, in many ways, is similar to William Johnston himself. Like William Johnston, Allen has a passion for 17th and 18th century English furniture. Like Johnston, Allen enjoys sourcing his antiques from interesting places around the world, in particular, from the United Kingdom, where Allen travels regularly to attend auctions of the contents of English Country Houses.

Allen is a 'maximalist' when it comes to interior design and for his rearrangement of *Fairhall*, he will bring out from storage more items from The Johnston Collection than have ever been displayed before. The rooms of *Fairhall* will be extravagantly decorated, revealing the true extent and magnificence of William Johnston's collection.

Allen is a great admirer of the famous 18th century London cabinet-maker and furniture designer, Thomas Chippendale Jnr. To encourage more people to think about and enjoy Chippendale's work, Allen has commissioned Emily Holmes, a Melbourne-based surface design artist to create a series of soft furnishings depicting Thomas Chippendale Jnr. These will be incorporated into *Fairhall*, reinforcing ideas around the enduring power of furniture and the craftspeople who made them.

Allen was delighted to accept the invitation to interpret William Johnston's collection at *Fairhall*, seeing the collaboration as an opportunity to introduce the fine and decorative arts to a new audience. He says he understands why William Johnston left his collection to the people of Victoria for everyone to enjoy. "One of my longstanding clients got his passion for 18th century antiques because he visited The Johnson Collection", Allen says.

Allen says, "I've had heaps of fun with this project at The Johnston Collection and I hope the stories told with the antiques in the Collection will connect with people and inspire a new sense of discovery and joy."

Johnston's astonishing collection, amassed over his lifetime, holds more than 1,200 items of Georgian, Regency and Louis XV furniture, paintings, ceramics and *objet d'art* and is displayed in a constantly changing domestic setting in his former residence *Fairhall*.

The Johnston Collection is another of Melbourne's hidden treasures, tucked away in a quiet residential street in East Melbourne. The address is not advertised (a requirement of the City of Melbourne's permit to operate as a museum in a residential area) and visitors are brought to The Johnston Collection in a courtesy bus from a prearranged meeting point.

For further information, images or interviews, please contact:

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ABOUT | Martin Allen

Martin Allen is founder of Martin Allen Antiques, located in South Melbourne. Allen brings with him an enormous depth of knowledge and passion for antiques, having worked in the antiques trade for more than three decades.

His love of antiques started as a young boy hunting out old padlocks, wind-up phones and other curios at the back of his father's hardware store. These pieces had travelled there from his grandfather's furniture store.

At age sixteen, Allen was lucky enough to rent the former stables behind Parkside Antiques in South Melbourne. This business was his entry to fine arts and antiques. The very special family that owned Parkside Antiques, also owned the stables that he rented and shared stories about the pieces they had in their shop. They had Bow and Chelsea porcelain, 18th century glass, silver, and many other exquisite pieces, inspiring Allen's lifelong passion for antiques and collecting.

Allen began to travel overseas to buy antiques. In England, he became good friends with Peter Keil of HW Keil in Broadway, Worcestershire, one of England's greatest antique dealers. He would spend days looking at his collection and learning from a great master of the trade.

Returning to Melbourne, Allen established a shop in High St, Armadale before relocating to South Melbourne.

ABOUT | William Johnston and The Johnston Collection

The Johnston Collection is a house-museum of fine and decorative arts centred in an historic Melbourne townhouse.

William Robert Johnston was born in Lilydale, Victoria in 1911, the only child of Robert Alexander Johnston and Louise Friedrichs. His father was a boot-maker and his mother, before her marriage, worked as a maid at Stanford House, East Melbourne, now the site of Freemason's hospital.

Around the age of eight, William was given a Minton cup by his grandmother, Mary Theresa Friedrichs (nee Clarke). This became the first piece of his collection and provided the inspiration for a career in antiques that took Johnston around the world.

After an early career in window merchandising in Melbourne, Johnston relocated to London to begin a fulltime business, dealing in antiques. He purchased *Fairhall* in 1952 with money made from the sale of antiques brought back from England. Originally named *Cadzow*, built in 1860 and extended ten years later, Johnston renamed it *Fairhall* and remodelled it in order to create the appearance of a late 18th century Georgian-style townhouse. The interior rooms were converted into three rental flats.

By 1972, Johnston decided to return to live part-time in Melbourne, and gathered his expanding collection of Georgian, Regency and Louis XV fine and decorative arts into *Fairhall* and other rental properties he owned in the area. At the same time he opened Kent Antiques in High St, Armadale.

Johnston's house, collection and estate were bequeathed to the people of Victoria after his death in 1986, 'as a place of historical and educational interest,' now administered as an independent not-for-profit museum by The WR Johnston Trust. *Fairhall* was converted into the house-museum and a garden was designed in the English manner, to highlight Johnston's love of gardening. The Trust also acquires new works for the permanent collection, which now cares for over 1200 items.

For over twenty years, *Fairhall* has displayed works from Johnston's collection, and is currently rearranged for three themed tours per year. Today, The Johnston Collection incorporates a reference library, as well as a dedicated gallery and lecture space, offering an active and engaging range of exhibitions, lectures, workshops and events for all.

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