

# HOMES & GARDENS®

FEBRUARY 2015  
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## TIMELESS STYLE

HOMES TO INSPIRE

**SPACE  
& LIGHT**  
EXTENSIONS  
MADE SIMPLE

**REINVENTING  
THE PAST**  
FROM MURALS  
TO MODERNISM

**SMART  
SHOPPING**  
RUGS, ROCKERS  
& CUSHIONS

*Bright new start*

FRESH DESIGN FOR THE COMING YEAR



Owen Pacey (left) and long-time associate Angelo Attanasio in the Renaissance showroom in east London's City Road.

RESTORATION EXPERT  
**OWEN PACEY**

*Whether reproducing antique fireplaces or sourcing architectural salvage and lighting for his London showroom, the Renaissance founder's keen sense for the exuberantly decorative and unique shines through*

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Over the course of his 25-year career, East End born Owen Pacey has established a reputation as a foremost expert in architectural salvage. As well as offering a vast array of original pieces, from furniture and lighting to mirrors and statuary in his Renaissance showroom, he has developed a bespoke fireplace service, meticulously matching historical designs. Owen has gained quite a following, with clients including English Heritage, Grosvenor Estate, Soho House, The Arts Club and the artists Gilbert & George.

**Tell us a little about your background.**

I started off stripping pine doors and Georgian cast-iron fireplace inserts that I'd bought from a builder. I discovered I could sell them for quite a bit of money, and thought it wasn't a bad living. It was 1992, and such a simple set-up – a rented lock-up with a caustic soda dipping tank. I fell in love with the whole restoration process and things quickly took off, so I upgraded to a shop on Essex Road in Islington. By a stroke of luck, the largest antique fireplace dealer in the country was moving in three doors away. I learned a lot from them. When our current showroom came on the market in 1995, I was desperate for more space. The building was a wreck, so needed a complete refurbishment and, back then, Shoreditch was a no man's land, but I couldn't have chosen a better location to expand the operation.

**How did the business take shape?**

I'd accrued quite a collection of period fireplaces from all over Europe to fill the huge space (the basement under the showroom is also packed with pieces, which spill over into a studio warehouse next door). Gradually, I built up a team of experts and we started doing house

visits as well, restoring old fireplaces to their original glory. We soon obtained approval to work on listed buildings, and teamed up with interior design companies on period houses for Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, The Howard de Walden Estate in Marylebone and The Bedford Estates in Bloomsbury. Once our fireplaces are showcased in properties such as these, they sell themselves.

**What did you do next?** I saw a niche in the market for handmade fireplaces, with immaculate carving and details, that were indistinguishable from the originals. Clients also asked for an aged effect, so we started developing our own techniques for doing this. Then, ten years ago, I moved into lighting after getting hold of some Baccarat crystal chandeliers that everyone was clamouring to buy.

**Where do you find design inspiration?**

I'm good at spotting trends, as I see so many fabulous houses and always take the time to talk to the interior designers; I learn so much this way. When I'm abroad, I find inspiration wherever I go, from a monastery in Italy to an old Citroen factory in France. Gilbert & George are also a big influence.

**Where do you source stock?** I travel all over Europe searching for unique and interesting fireplaces, reclaimed lighting and architectural salvage. I take a trip abroad once a month, usually for three days. Angelo Attanasio, who has worked for me for 22 years, goes around all the markets buying up old components of fireplaces, which he then sends to Italy to have moulds made.

**Describe the process of copying a fireplace.** First, we take a high-definition photograph, then make up a mould. A

wooden box is prepared, the fireplace is put inside, then a silicone rubber compound is poured in to fill every nook and cranny. All the stages of the ageing process take about a week – remember, an original may have had hundreds of years of wear, with corners eroded and areas rubbed smooth. People wrongly believe that we use tea, but all I'm going to reveal is that dentist's tools are involved. With fireplaces and furnishings, my general rule is to match architectural pieces to the period of the property you live in. Personally, I love ornate Georgian fireplaces best.

**Talk us through a typical day.** Every morning starts in the same way – I take my Labradoodle, Maggie, for a walk in the park. After this, no two days are the same. Generally, we look at the job sheets, load the vans and off go the fitters. I spend around half of my time in the shop, and usually meet clients on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I finish at about 5pm, and by 5.30pm, I've got my feet up on the sofa – it takes me 30 seconds to get home from work, as I live above the showroom. My advice to myself is never to fall in love with items in the collection because at some point someone will want to purchase them – lots of people end up coming upstairs and buying my favourite pieces from my flat.

**What are your plans for the business?**

I want to convert the warehouse next door, and use it to showcase lighting, such as the old lanterns I'm bringing in from France and a complete collection of chandeliers that I managed to buy from an old Italian palazzo. I'm going to start focusing on high-end copies of lighting, too. I'm also planning to open a second shop this year. □  
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**CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE** One of Renaissance's team of reproduction specialists, an orange Murano glass chandelier, multi-arm Italian Spider designs and a three-cluster mother-of-pearl hanging lamp are among the reclaimed lighting on offer in the showroom; master craftsman Angelo Attanasio, who has worked with Owen for 22 years; original Georgian Adam-style corbels are mirrored in a meticulously copied free surround; an antique chandelier with coloured glass clusters, sourced in France; the components of a sculptural French lion paw fire surround; this corner of the showroom exhibits a typically eclectic mix, including furniture and fireplaces, elaborate lighting and an early Victorian gate. **CENTRE** The distinctive shop front in London's Shoreditch.

