

Grate expectations

Photo: Oliver Lim

A NNA Sandstom is not a fashion or music company PA. Yet Ralph Lauren, Cher, Naomi Campbell, Vanessa Mae and Jamiroquai's Jay Kay have all trooped through her office.

What Anna does is help celebrities searching for that special something to complete the look of their new mansion — at period furnishing specialists Renaissance London.

Anna's office is a converted pub in City Road, EC1, with a bright purple front you can't miss.

Inside, her computer, telephone and paperwork are surrounded by hundreds of original fireplaces, grates, crucifixes, doors, urns, gates, radiators, chandeliers and decorative objects that her boss, Owen Pacey, has salvaged from around the world.

Some items, such as the original doors from the Royal Opera House and the garden gates from Hampton Court Palace, are truly unique.

Renaissance has been in City Road for five years. Before that, Pacey had a smaller shop in Essex Road, where Anna started as his assistant seven years ago, minding the place one day a week and on holidays.

She studied economics and languages in her native Sweden, but learned about administration, art history and antiques on the job.

"I've had to learn everything about art and different periods — the difference between Georgian and Victorian, and so on," says Anna.

"I didn't know anything when I started. I just picked it up as I went along."

When pieces arrive at Renaissance, they are cleaned up or restored before being placed in the shop for sale. Occasionally, pieces are offered to Renaissance, and if Owen is away,



Anna Sandstom advises celebs on that special something for their home. **Kate Crockett** meets a salvage expert

Anna will decide whether to buy them.

She arranges any necessary restoration, and inventories new stock. The larger pieces are stored in the basement.

"The most popular objects are the big stone fireplace

surrounds," Anna says. "The polished radiators are also much sought-after, along with French doors and crucifixes."

When a customer chooses something from the shop, Anna is in charge of handling all the details of the sale — from invoice to installation.

If, for example, a client chooses a fireplace, she will note the measurements and place an order with the stonemason if it's made-to-measure.

She will also order such extras as the hearth and grate and organise contractors to install them.

"You've got to be very patient, take accurate measurements and ask a lot of questions, because nothing's ever straightforward."

"If the customer asks for something in the period of

the house, they've got to get the right thing."

For clients who can't make it to the shop, Anna has put Renaissance's ever-changing stock on the internet, with digital images of the merchandise, and she will e-mail it to potential clients, particularly in America.

She also uses the computer for word processing, but prefers to do the book-keeping by hand. Anna organises Pacey's diary and handles all the related calls. She also organises travel documents and hotel bookings for Pacey's salvage trips abroad, and will occasionally accompany him.

"It's such an interesting job because no two days are the same, says Anna. "There are a lot of things going on and I'll be organising everything and making sure it's all done on time."

He says ...

"ANNA knows the business inside out," explains Owen Pacey, owner of Renaissance. "She does a lot of the buying — she's got a good eye for stone — and she knows all about gas regulations and plumbing. Anna also does my books and accounts. On top of that, she could sell sand to an Arab."

"If I didn't have Anna here, I wouldn't feel safe about going away. We buy stuff from people that drop in, so if I had someone who didn't know what they were doing I'd be in trouble."

"Someone came in yesterday with a marble fireplace and told Anna it was Georgian, but it wasn't. Anna knew straight away that it was an Edwardian copy of a Georgian fireplace."

"Anna has been approached twice, but she didn't want to leave us. We've got a close team of fitters and we're like a little family — and she's invaluable."