

A PASSION FOR COLLECTING



THE ART OF DISPLAYING OBJECTS FROM THE EXOTIC TO THE EVERYDAY

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CULTURAL INSPIRATION

Hubert Zandberg also collects ethnic art – partly for its beauty and partly for the memories his pieces hold. Brought up in South Africa, his tiny flat in London is filled with ethnic pieces, in particular a collection of beautiful, extravagantly decorated headdresses, which have for him a resonance that is perhaps lacking for some Westerners. 'To me, a headdress isn't just an object, it gives you back something. Many of these pieces are my youth, as well as my memories.' We may not be able to share Hubert Zandberg's memories, but we can certainly appreciate the beauty and style of the headdresses. These are made even stronger by the sophisticated way in which Zandberg displays them. Throughout the apartment, they are used as decorative elements, worked in with other disparate objects to make a harmonious whole. One is used for its colour tones, another for its contrasting shape. Adorned with cowry shells and seeds, displayed on small hat stands, each one stands alone and appears very contemporary. In one room there is a strong arrangement in which various headdresses are combined with different objects all relatively similar in shape – a hat mould, a sphere and, rather wittily, an angled lamp whose stem echoes the stands of the hats. In another, colour is the key: the hot colours of headpieces and tribal objects are combined in an eye-stopper group. Zandberg knows that there are limits to what you can do: 'It is important to be immediate when you arrange collections, and also to know when to stop,' he advises. 'It doesn't always have to be perfect; it is second nature to me to place things in a certain way, although others might call that obsessive.'

Left Although combined with other natural objects, Africa dominates this corner of decorator Hubert Zandberg's London apartment. The colour scheme – tawny gold and deep brown – is that of the veldt, and draws all the elements in the room together.

Above right Zandberg's gift is of displaying beautiful but difficult objects, such as these tribal hats, as pieces of contemporary art. Each shape, including the angled lamp, is seen as a sculptural piece in its own right.

Below right A striking display in the tiny hall includes a ceremonial tribal chicken-feather hat from Africa as the centrepiece of a vertical group that uses colour and symmetry to make its impact.



Below left *There can be few people who know how to display completely disparate objects as cleverly as Hubert Zandberg. In this corner of his apartment, the flamingo dominates but does not overpower the smaller pieces.*

Below right *Were the bright eyes of the stuffed head underneath the canopy above Hubert Zandberg's bed once in a box, like those in a perspex case by the bedside? And is that a carapace above the angled reading light?*

WILD LIFE

'Dried animals' are often mentioned in inventories of famous collections of the past, although not so much is said of stuffed ones. Today, however, many collectors appreciate and, indeed, relish the results of the taxidermist's art. Hubert Zandberg, a successful interior decorator in London, has a fascination with the natural world and all its manifestations. He thinks that this derives from his upbringing in South Africa, where nature is impossible to ignore, larger than life and surrounds you like a wrap-around cinema screen. As do many of the other naturalist collectors, Hubert Zandberg has

several examples of the taxidermist's art, mostly South African birds and beasts, of which he is very fond. 'People have a thing about taxidermy and about nature being perceived in the most contrived way,' he comments. 'But I feel that if, like me, you grew up with wild animals around you and the first thing that you were taught was to respect wildlife as I was, then it's a completely different way of thinking. Perhaps these stuffed animals do not have the same connotations that they do for others.'

Porcupine quills, horns and tusks; coral and sticks; eggs and shells cover the surfaces of Zandberg's minute apartment. There is a flamingo and a basket of tortoises' shells in the sitting room; a cockateel and a tiger's head in the bedroom; horns on the floor and pressed flowers and coral on the walls. There is also something I have never seen before – a pale, preserved shrimp in all its rock-pool glory, displayed like an interesting relic, box-framed and hanging on the wall. Perhaps

'I grew up with wild life all around me, so these stuffed animals do not have the same connotations for me as they do for some'





Top left There is a beauty in quill and horn, bone and shell that is often best comprehended when seen in as simple a form as possible, so that all the subtle, natural variations can be appreciated at close view.

Above left Bleached-out whole tortoise shells have a certain melancholic air, but look very beautiful displayed as a group on a pale background. To bring them into contrast, Zandberg has placed a small African ceremonial cap immediately behind the shells.



Above The complete naturalist's group, including the tortoise shells, is shown to be a complex and harmonious display. A sawfish bill gives height at one side of a sepia-toned photograph and is balanced by an ornate cowry-shell beaddress on the other.



Left In this group, the delicacy of nature can be appreciated and admired. The fragility of a leaf's veining, the airy pallor of a piece of bleached coral and the near translucent body of a small crustacean are all objects of beauty.



entering the kitchen is like stepping into a field-guide: glass-fronted cases of stuffed birds line the walls and owls, auks and razorbills stare down on you beadily

because the flat is so small, you really do get a sense of being in a genuine seventeenth- or eighteenth-century cabinet of curiosities, because all is really very curious indeed.

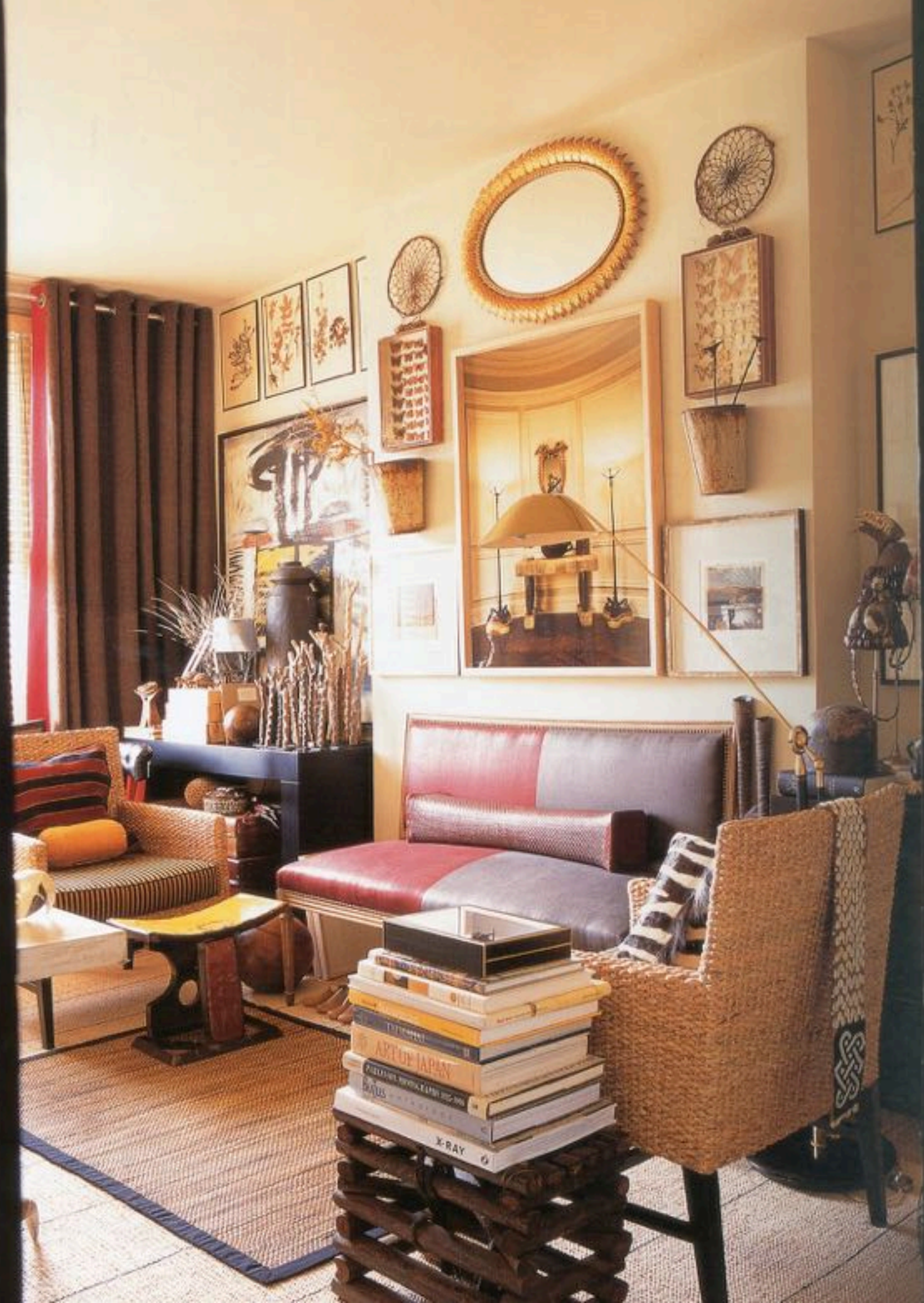
Another nature lover, Emma Hawkins, lives in a tall, very elegant Regency house in Edinburgh. She has representatives of many branches of the tree of life – particularly those of the bird kingdom. Only one – a chatty parrot – is alive, however, as the rest are stuffed and perch on plinths, in display cases and under glass domes. Entering the kitchen is an Alice-like step into the pages of a field-guide to birds: glass-fronted cases of stuffed birds line the walls and owls, auks and razorbills stare down beadily from above the Aga. Emma Hawkins has a fascination with taxidermy and – like other lovers of the

inanimate – finds the idea enjoyable, rather than repellent. A true naturalist, she also collects other parts of animals and displays them in a most un-museum-like way. An immense whale bone stands on a round hall table, like an ultra-contemporary piece of modern sculpture. Instead of embroidered silk bell-pulls, sawfish bills hang either side of the drawing-room fireplace. Delicate small birds' skulls arranged together on a low table look like polished ivory carvings, and an elephant's skull on the floor masquerades as a large, uncomfortable stool. The precision and detail with which she arranges everything throughout the house makes the elements of her entire collection look less like natural phenomena and far more like examples of fine craft and design.

Above left On a pair of matching cupboards, birds in glass cases flank a portrait of Mona Guthrie painted by St John Helier Lander that is hung over the fireplace. On the floor, a game bird struts his stuff, albeit confined within his glass case.

Above right Sawfish bills emphasize the high, gilded mirror; antique, boxed collections of shells sit on tables; and coral and giant clam shells are used as ornament – altogether a perfect example of how to integrate natural curiosities into a domestic, traditional setting.

Right On the table is a wooden dish of cricket balls, well polished on many a pair of white flannels; on the wall behind hang a camel and a buffalo skull, together with a swooping bird. Feathers and dried branches make an alternative flower arrangement.



AN INSTINCTIVE ART

Albeit on a smaller scale, it is the nature of the arrangement that also dominates the collections in London of inveterate decorator-collector Hubert Zandberg. His thesis is that collections only look good when arranged in the French tradition. The word *ensemblier* might be more appropriate, and could perhaps be translated as the art of window-dressing rather than that of merely grouping things together. In his very small flat, Zandberg's collections are everywhere, and much that is preached is practised. In one corner of the kitchen, for example, caravan pennants, miniature

flags, toy cars, rolls of coloured ribbon and a cheerful model parakeet are all brought together in an exuberant group, tied together by colour, particularly yellow. And in the bathroom, natural objects, photographs, even lavatory rolls are in a crisp black and white scheme.

As Zandberg says: 'It is creating a mood that is important. For the French, it is second nature – the art of arranging is particularly appreciated, and there is a place for it. It is true that some people are intimidated by the way that a decorator arranges his collections, but then some people are intimidated by scatter cushions. When you show your collections, it is for you to make up the

rules and devise your own formula. I try to make the elements relate, bringing different objects and areas into context. When I arrange a collection, I tend to theme it so that the point can immediately be seen, but I also think that it is important that the arrangements of collections should not be contrived, too styled. Although you could say that all art is contrived – super-contrived, actually.' Zandberg strongly feels that whereas architecture can be learnt, as can an understanding of space, a decorator has to have an underlying feeling for the actual art of decoration, because 'without that, nothing will come together'.

Left Only a born decorator could arrange such a diversity of objects with such vivacity, and Hubert Zandberg fits the bill. Juxtaposition is the key word – of shape, texture, object and theme. No surface is left untouched – and it works.

Right The bathroom is a textbook example of relating objects to each other. The room is very small, so no colour of any description is allowed: everything has to fall within the black and white and neutral decorative scheme.





Above left An intricate group is arranged by Emma Haikins on a glass table. A connecting theme of material, bone and ivory is expanded and enlarged by her choice of objects – an intricately carved box, a small bust and an early set of cutlery. In every direction is something to ponder.

Above right It is always worth putting on display the smallest of objects – often miniature beauty is the finest. Here three unrelated objects have been put together on a mottled grey background with due regard to the shape that each one makes in the whole arrangement.

Right The most adaptable of materials, bone and horn, have been used through the centuries to make both functional and decorative objects of every description. Here, on a natural background, Hubert Zandberg has grouped together many examples of handmade artefacts, each one unique.



BACKGROUND DESIGNS

Tightly packed displays should also be created when a collection is composed of pieces made of one material – silver, tortoiseshell, bone or ivory, perhaps – but where those pieces are varied in content, shape and design. Grouped closely, the individual pieces have a cohesion that they might otherwise lack. The background is also important here; Peter Hone displays his collection of ivory pieces on a dark wood bureau and Hubert Zandberg does the opposite, subtly laying everything out on a natural linen cloth. Certainly, neither collector accepts a mediocre middle line when designing his display.

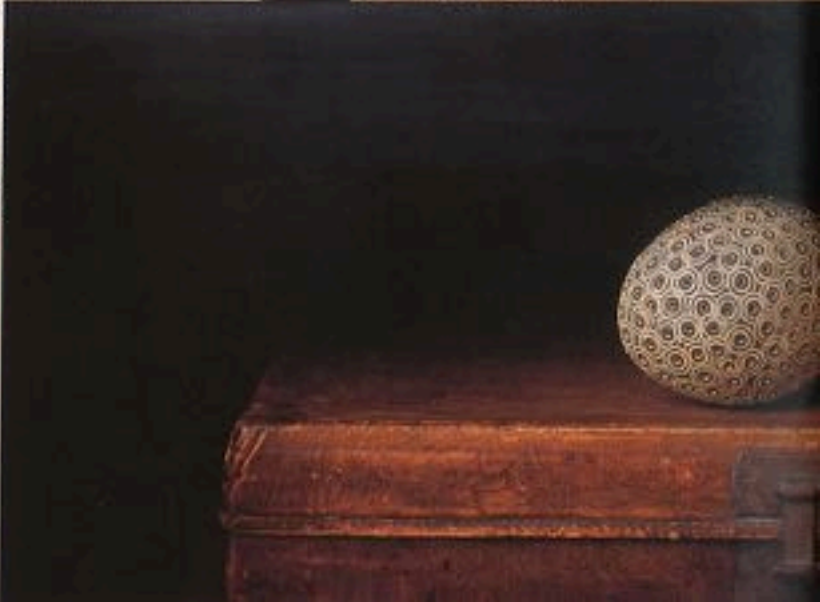
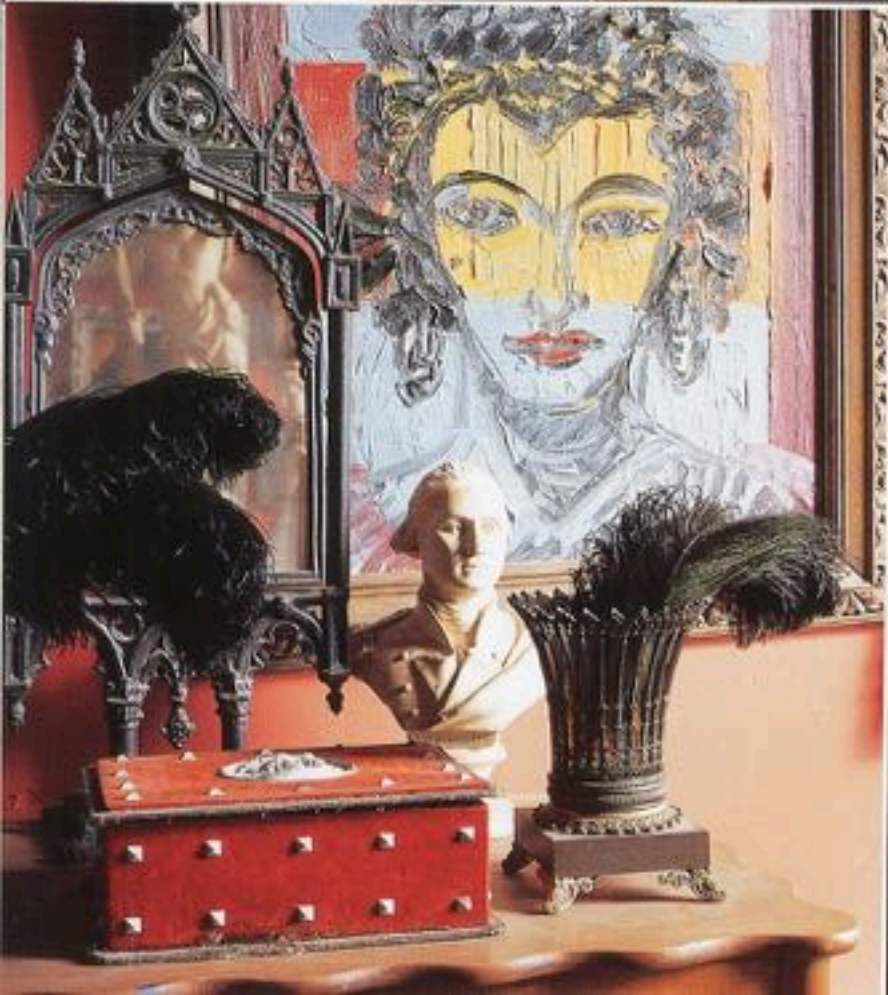
Hunt Slonem, artist that he is, breaks for the border of the acceptable grouping. 'If you buy enough of anything, even if some of it is hideous, when it is put all together it looks wonderful,' he maintains. The method is amply demonstrated in his enormous studio, where most things are grouped *en masse* – in his case, this means much *masse*. A collection of glass candlesticks, for example, is crowded along a refectory table. At different heights and of different designs, they are not

necessarily pairs; in fact, the majority of them are single examples, but the impact they make is accentuated by their being arranged artlessly, bent candles and all, in hugger-mugger fashion.

Large objects require a different solution. Whether they are shown together or separately, they must be given enough air around them to breathe freely; crammed too closely together, they get lost and cease to have individual relevance. Each of the large photographs collected by Vicente Wolf is framed simply and given plenty of surrounding space against white walls. The same principle lies behind Laurent Dombrowicz and Franck Delmarcelle's arrangement of statues of angels and other uplifting figures. Carefully positioned throughout the house, they are seen as individual pieces, yet connect with each other and with the other grouped collections.

Large-scale pieces must also be balanced with other pieces or groups of equal weight and proportions. This formula is adopted by Jerry and Susan Lauren for their weather-vanes, which are counterbalanced by the simple, yet strong, contemporary furniture that decorates their apartment.







Above far left Like an Ancient Greek chorus, this small but enchanting group of glass and ceramics has been placed by Polly Dickens in such a way that the finer points of each piece can be seen and appreciated, and the most is made of both colour and texture.

Below far left Hunt Slonem is never one for the tentative gesture; like the pieces in one of those blindfold parlour games where the object must be identified by its texture, he has put together a group of contrived contrast.

Left For Hubert Zandberg, the fun of arranging objects is in the juxtaposition. Here is one of his more complex pictures of texture – hot and cold, rough and smooth. Carved wood, chequered quills, smooth spheres and a woven nest are a complete natural history lesson at one stoop.

TEXTURES AND CONTRASTS

Grouping pieces by common texture or by their contrasting different textures is also an important display device. This is not the same as keeping together a collection of ivory or silver; rather, it is using different textures to give a resonance similar to that of an interior decoration scheme in which hard is combined with soft, or cool with hot. Hubert Zandberg and Hunt Slonem are past masters at this texture game. Zandberg likes to make a textural picture with his displays – horn might be combined with wood, shells and leather, for example. He says that 'the fun is the juxtaposition – the putting together of the metal and wood'. Slonem, on the other hand, builds up textures in the same way that he might approach an artwork. A still life of part of his collection might contain shells combined with busts and sculptural pieces in plaster, marble and china, each slightly different in texture – some reflective, some matt – and each element adding interest to its neighbour.

Although displaying a collection based on the work of one person – lamps by the American glassmaker Louis Comfort Tiffany, perhaps – can be monotonous, it can be very effective if the designs and patterns are subtle and varied enough. This sort of signature grouping usually works best with smaller pieces, such as ceramics or silver. For example, brightly coloured twentieth-century pottery, such as that designed for Carlton Ware or Clarice Cliff, always looks best grouped together. When these collections are studied together, pleasure comes from seeing both the differences and the similarities exposed in proximity.