

THE NEW NATURALISTS

Inside the Homes of Creative Collectors



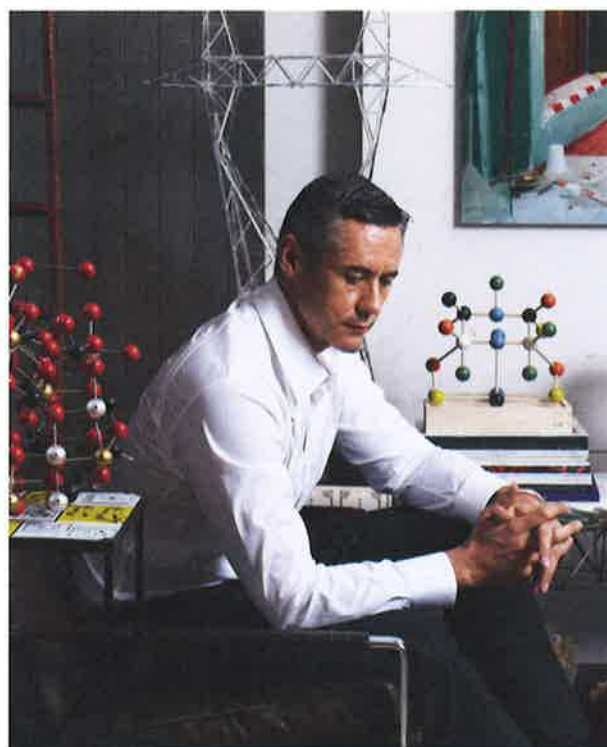
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Claire Bingham

LIVING INSIDE A CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

Hubert Zandberg, London, UK

There are people who live inside their heads and find white walls and minimal interiors inspiring. Then there are others, more extrovert, who prefer to be surrounded by colour and things. This home falls into the later category. Conceived as a full-size cabinet of curiosities, the interplay between natural artefacts, modernist design and contemporary art is highly individual and mostly about style. Reflecting the owner's African roots alongside European art, this interior isn't concerned with creating an inventory of the natural-history world. Instead, the collection is about how objects communicate with each other, bringing continents, cultures and epochs together as one.



Display cases – found or custom-made, contemporary or reclaimed from shops – have been used to form cabinets of curiosities all over the house. The grouped objects coalesce into a single piece, to bring balance to a room or keep the clutter under control, allowing the eye to take everything in.





The striking backdrop of African objects, colourful artworks and idiosyncratic pieces are arranged in considered vignettes. On either side of the fireplace, the layout is symmetrical, with a bookcase designed by Bruno Peinado dividing the space and providing more surface area for display.



'I don't collect things to categorize or to focus on one aspect,' explains interior designer Hubert Zandberg, whose love of collecting natural history has its origins in a childhood spent in South Africa, layered with a taste for Brazilian modernism and European art. 'For me, it's to do with the relationship of objects and their dialogue together. I could go to a museum to look at every example of a cowrie shell if I wished. In my own home, that's not what I'm after at all.'

What drives this individualist designer and collector is the desire to use pieces as building blocks for creating a narrative, and he will happily segue from the primitive to the modern, northern hemisphere to southern, bringing the ripple effects of his life and interests together like a beautiful storm. It's dense, it's eclectic, and there are many moods. 'I become a conductor, making a symphony of all of these notes,' he says. 'That's what makes collecting interesting for me.'

When it comes to manipulating space with collected items, there has to be relevance. If Hubert was to come across the most beautiful shell on the beach, he would only pick it up if he knew where, or how, he was going to use it. 'If not, there's no reason for me to have it,' he explains. 'It's the same with buying pieces. There are many spectacular items that I would love to own, but if I don't see a context within the hegemony of what I'm creating, then it's not for me. It's for someone else.'

Growing up on a farm in the Karoo desert, immersed in nature, formed Hubert's early experience of aesthetics, scale and culture. 'If you had an interest in art, it was

all to do with bird's nests, stones and porcupine quills,' he says. 'My first cabinet of curiosities really happened when I was about five or six, gathering rocks. When I look back on those things now, it's a feeling of pure nostalgia.'

Informed by time spent among the indigenous Khoisan people as a child, Hubert's views on taxidermy are that it is a celebration of nature. 'When it became all the rage in the art world and every artist jumped on the bandwagon to have a dead animal in their installation, some did it with more respect and success than others,' he says. 'Soon after, all the restaurants were full of it. For me, that was for all the wrong reasons. It was a fad and diminished my relationship with the pieces that I have. Times change. What was perhaps OK a while ago may be not so OK now. The jury is still out on that one, but it's something I always think about when appropriating natural history and bringing it into my home.'

And for those who want to channel a similar vibe, combining a trove of eclectic works of art with a flair for the flamboyant, Hubert's advice is to keep the scheme monochromatic. His living room, painted inky blue to showcase the white natural pieces, plays the juxtaposition card wonderfully, with the contrast emphasizing their beauty. Each room has a different story, giving insight into a beautiful, imagined world.

'They say your personality is formed by the age of four,' Hubert says of his passion for acquiring treasures from the natural world. 'I look at my collections and can absolutely see that my personality was formed back then. Once a collector, always a collector.'

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'Collections are best displayed en masse,' Hubert says. All-white items, including a whale vertebra, coral pipes and a hippopotamus skull, are grouped together against the dark blue walls of the living room. Beneath the stairs is a collection of miniature ladders from the Dogon tribe in Mali.



In the bedroom, a chest and coffee table act as cabinets of curiosities, while the headboard features a traditional Zulu skirt, along with a crucifix and an abstract work. The interior of the house has a mostly neutral colour palette, allowing the natural textures of Hubert's collections to stand out.





Hubert's decorative taste is 'more is more'. Vintage red mirrors from the Porte de Clignancourt flea market in Paris are hung beside a custom-designed four-poster bed. Fabric from the Venetian firm Rubelli forms the canopy, and the butterfly throw is from Kokon To Zai.

HUBERT'S TIPS FOR BUILDING A COLLECTION

- 1 Don't worry about the monetary value of objects. Beauty and inspiration can be found all around us, and nature offers the most inexpensive treasures if we allow ourselves to 'see'. Treat your prized shell as you would a Fabergé egg.
- 2 Be true to yourself and collect things that you love. By doing so, you ensure the longevity of your collection. Nature is never out of style.
- 3 For a successful and captivating collection, think about what represents your life and love. Try holding on to items that hold a narrative of your life and memories.
- 4 To create interesting dialogues, try juxtaposing disparate objects, cultures, epochs and styles. This gives new meaning to the pieces, and the collection becomes more than the sum of its parts.
- 5 Try combining items from nature with contemporary art. If you use colour as an unexpected backdrop, this is an easy place to start.
- 6 Let the collection dictate the decoration of a room. Look at the shapes, colours and textures, and then add furniture to the space around it.
- 7 Be brave. A collection with a clear direction, narrative and point of view is always dynamic and inspiring.
- 8 To contain smaller collections, it is a good idea to use a display case. You can create a cabinet of curiosities in the most minimal of spaces.

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