

Antiques are a passion for Lady Henrietta Spencer-Churchill, and her ancestral family home, Blenheim Palace, makes a perfect stately backdrop for The Cotswold Art & Antique Dealers' Association Fair in April.

Lady Henrietta, eldest daughter of the Duke of Marlborough, is patron of CADA – but it is not just an honorary role. She will be making the most of the opportunity to showcase her own collection of antiques, which she is now selling via her website and, she says, would provide a special finishing touch for any home or business.

"I love antiques and always have – they are one of my passions," explained Lady Henrietta when I met her at her Woodstock showroom accompanied by her two dogs, Buggy, a black labrador, and Bounty, an elderly terrier.

She launched her own interior design business Spencer-Churchill Designs 32 years ago. She has a shop in Woodstock and offices in London, and an international reputation in the interiors market.

"Antiques can be bought incredibly well at the moment," she said. "It is a shame the younger generation do not really appreciate them and tend to think they are rather fuddy-duddy – but they should look at the quality of the way they are made in relation to a lot of new furniture from high street and chain stores – self-assembly, not built to last and expensive for what they are. Quite frankly, I would rather have an antique chest of drawers than that, and it is amazing what antiques you can pick up – they are really good value.

"I shop a lot at local auctions such as Bonhams and Mallams, and I pick up pieces for my clients. I use a lot of antiques in my work. I have some here at our Woodstock shop, and a big warehouse is also full of them. We are just getting it all sorted, and we will be taking people there to see what we have.

"I have not completely got my act together yet – I have been juggling too many balls in the air! – but we have photographed all the items now and are putting them on our website. This is one reason for exhibiting at the CADA Fair, to make people aware we do this."

This is the second CADA Fair at Blenheim and it takes place over a period of four days from April 18 to 21. More than 4,000 people visited last year, and the 29 exhibitors are looking forward to another successful show. Everything is for sale, with prices starting at about £100 and rising into six figures.

As well as the 22 dealers from last year, there are seven new exhibitors, including Spencer-Churchill Designs. The addition of the fair at Blenheim has significantly enhanced the profile of CADA and the membership has grown to 47 dealers.

Lady Henrietta is planning to be running her stall for part of the fair, but it coincides with an interiors show in the USA called High Point, so she will be handing over to staff and catching a plane halfway through. America is an important source of business and she has spent a great deal of time there in the past five months, much of it lecturing. She produces a range of furniture which is "quite classical but with a contemporary twist" for an American company called Maitland-Smith, and is about to start designing a rug collection.

She is also a profuse writer and has ten books under her belt. The latest *The Life of the*



## A passion for

*House. The Evolution of Rooms*, was published last autumn.

She revealed that her interiors business in the UK had been busy, despite the recession, although in America there had been a noticeable slow down.

She always loved art and drawing, and concedes that being brought up in lovely houses with beautiful architecture and beautiful furnishings did have an influence on her choice of career.

"I studied art history in Florence for six months and then another nine months in Paris, and then went to Inchbald School of Design.

"What keeps me interested is that every job is different – different clients, different styles, different requirements.

"Some projects can extend to one, two or three years. If it is a new-build, we are involved from the start with the client and architect, doing the space planning and architectural details, and then the decoration and furnishings.

"I like working on new-build houses as it gives the chance to be more creative – you can put in character and architectural details. With an existing house you are working with what is already there. There are some beautiful old houses, but you have to be creative in the decoration, not the architecture," Lady

Henrietta said. "However, we are a service industry, and we are carrying out the job for a client generally because they do not have time to do it, do not know how, and do not have the contacts. We are taking the painful process out of it for the client, and doing it for them.

"At the end of the day it is the client who is going to live in the house, not you, so it is often a compromise. That could be a compromise on the space planning side because it suits their lifestyle better, or maybe they want a fabric or colour you do not necessarily think works. You do the best to make it work for the client and do not have a big ego!

"There are a lot of people involved and a lot of co-ordination is needed. Often people say to me it must be lovely to be so creative, but in fact a maximum of ten per cent is creative and the rest is administrative, getting it all organised! It has been 32 years since I started my company, but I still do enjoy it."

An ongoing client is Blenheim Palace, home of her father the Duke of Marlborough. Lady Henrietta's grandfather lived there when she was young, and she was brought up at another house, in Charlbury.

"We do all the work at Blenheim, and it makes sense because we have got all the contacts and can get good prices.

"Doing things at Blenheim is very costly, but





Denise Barkley meets  
Lady Henrietta  
Spencer-Churchill,  
patron of the Cotswold  
Art & Antique  
Dealers Association

# antiques

equally there is a lot of wear and tear due to the visitors – so there is a lot of general maintenance work, certainly not luxuries. We also do work sometimes on the estate's rental properties.

"My grandfather died when I was 12, and we spent more time at Blenheim after that," she explained. "I suppose it did inspire me, but you cannot relate a lot of Blenheim to a real house."

"My inspiration came mainly from the other houses we lived in. After all, how many grand, austere, baroque houses do you get to work in?"

Both Lady Henrietta's sons are grown-up – one is a historian and the other works in banking.

"I do not have to worry about them any more," she said. "They were always quite focused on what they wanted to do, and, certainly, I didn't encourage them to come into my business – if I'd had a daughter, maybe I would."

Lady Henrietta is currently planning her stand for the CADA Fair at the palace. She has been involved in work on the recent addition of a new gift shop and restaurant, and says they are a real asset to Blenheim. She concluded: "Blenheim is the perfect place for the CADA Fair – it is easy to park and visitors can have coffee and snacks. We just need some nice weather to get people to come!"

## Life's rich tapestry

**T**he Cotswold Art & Antique Dealers' Association Fair runs from Thursday, April 18, to Sunday, April 21, and is open daily from 10am to 5.30pm.

There are 29 exhibitors from all over the Cotswolds who will set up in the Orangery and Campaign Rooms at Blenheim Palace.

Every kind of antique will be showcased, creating a rich tapestry of history and culture including clocks and barometers, early needlework and antique boxes, garden ornaments and statuary, jewellery, silver and glass, carpets and textiles in addition to all kinds of fine furniture and decorative items, Oriental and English ceramics, fine art and much more. Prices will range from £100 to £150,000.

There is a Blenheim connection with the exquisite early 19th-century silk embroidery of Britannia mourning the death of Nelson (pictured), from Witney Antiques.

Distinguished visitors were sometimes received by the Duke of Marlborough – but on the occasion when Horatio Nelson visited Blenheim Palace in 1802 with Lord and Lady Hamilton, the 4th Duke refused to receive him and greatly offended Nelson by sending out his refreshments into the park and not the palace.

John Howard at Antiques at Heritage has sourced a dish from the very rare 'Foliage Border Series' which carries a transfer mark on the back 'Blenheim Oxfordshire', dated around 1820 and with a price tag of £750.

Among the line-up of paintings at the fair are *A Portrait of a Lady* by Charles Edward Halle (1846-1914), and a *Still Life with Tankard and Vase* by J B Priestley (1894-1984). The celebrated English novelist, playwright and broadcaster who took up painting late in life when he lived with his third wife, Jacquetta Hawkes, at Alveston, near Stratford-upon-Avon.

There is also a watercolour by John Fulleylove (1845-1908) of *The Thames, Oxford, Christchurch College beyond*, signed 1887. For a more contemporary feel, John Noot Galleries are showing local Cotswold scenes, such as *Swans by the River Coln*. by Peter Barker.

Collectors of porcelain will enjoy the antique Grainger Worcester porcelain rectangular plaque hand-painted with a view of the Royal Crescent, Bath, after an 18th-century engraving by William Watts, c1820 from Andrew Dando priced at £1,150; a Martin Brothers sculpture of a grotesque bird, dated 1897 from Kinghams Art Pottery for £27,500; and a rare ceramic tray designed by Carl Sigmund Luber and manufactured by Johanne van Schwartz,

c1905 for £1,400 from Hallbakker. Chinese ceramics include a famille verte octagonal plate made during the Emperor Kangxi's reign, c 1710, £5,000 from Catherine Hunt Oriental Ceramics.

Many different styles of furniture will be on show, including a superb George III period mahogany, satinwood, tulipwood and kingwood library breakfront bookcase from W R Harvey & Co (Antiques) Ltd for £150,000; a pair of early 18th-century walnut armchairs with contemporary needlework, c1725 selling at £14,500 from Kit Alderson; a Regency rosewood library desk chair, c1815 from Freshfords Fine Antiques for £6,500; and for lovers of oak, Moxhams Antiques are bringing a late 18th-century oak potboard dresser from South West Wales with many of the iron cup

hooks still remaining, priced at £4,950.

Montpellier Clocks are showing a fine rosewood library clock by Benjamin Lewis Vulliamy, c1830, who was a distinguished clockmaker, succeeding his father as head of the family business and Clockmaker to the Crown.

More choice is available from Formby Clocks who are bringing a good ebony-veneered

bracket timepiece with pull quarter repeat on two bells by Jonathan Lowndes of London, c1695.

Curiosities include a Brighton Pavilion sewing compendium inspired by Nash's Brighton Pavilion, the dome enclosing a pin cushion, the lower section a thimble, tape, waxer, pin cushion and needle case, c1820, for £6,500 from Hampton Antiques.

Jewellery is well represented by Howards Jewellers bringing an Art Deco yellow and white diamond pendant necklace, c1925.

Textiles include a 19th-century silk Ikat coat from the Ferghana Valley, Uzbekistan, c1860s, in perfect condition, for £4,000 from Legge Carpets, who are also showing a fine silk Kashan rug from Iran, late 19th century, priced at £2,000.

Architectural Heritage are bringing a pair of mid-19th century wrought-iron gates stamped by the maker Butterley, who was responsible for many prestigious commissions, priced at £2,800, and a pair of mid-18th century Bath stone finials originating from Barford Park, Somerset, for £12,600.

■ A complimentary invitation to the show is available to download from the CADA website ([www.thecada.org](http://www.thecada.org)) which admits two people to the antiques fair and the palace grounds. For further enquiries, call 07831 850544 or 07855 443913.

