

FOR COLLECTORS

The Growing Mystique of Antiques from Films

By Hunter Drohojowska



COURTESY MARC WANAMAKER/BISON ARCHIVES/PARAMOUNT PICTURES



WAYNE ROWE

Captivated by the beauty of decorative arts and the mystique of movies, Eugene Edelman and Marc Wanamaker have combined their fields of interest in a search for antiques that have appeared in films. ABOVE: In a scene from Billy Wilder's *A Foreign Affair* (1948), a comedy staged against the backdrop of postwar Berlin, Marlene Dietrich poses on a circa 1810 Roman-style painted chair. LEFT: Edelman acquired the chair from Paramount Pictures.

During the glory days of the studio, entire estates were often bought to be used as props.

EUGENE EDELMAN is fascinated by the role of destiny in the lives of people and their possessions. More than the patina of age or incomparable craftsmanship, for him the allure of an antique lies in its mysterious past life. A compelling past, he reasons, will usually be beautiful.

"If your own knowledge tells you the object is meaningful," he explains, "you know the object has a story. I think, 'This piece must talk. Who made it? For whom? And why did they dispose of it? War? Revolution? Was it stolen, or did the family eccentric sell it?'"

This is to be expected from a man who was employed as a storyteller—that is, as a director of films—for Soviet television in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For years he collected antiques possessed of potent historical anecdotes, pieces that had traveled with the fortunes of the aristocracy in Europe. It was destiny, a twist of fate worthy of Tolstoy, that led Edelman to mesh his two areas of expertise—antiques and the movies.

While others are watching the actors in classic films like *Gone With the Wind*, Edelman is taking in the props—the period furniture, the art, the candlesticks. His cousin Marc Wanamaker, a historical consultant and owner of Bison Archives in Hollywood, shares his interest in film and collaborates with him in the search for antiques.

During the glory days of the studio system, the contents of entire estates were often bought to be used as props, and certain directors insisted that authentic antiques be used in their productions. Director Erich von Stroheim, in fact, stopped work on his 1928 film *Wedding March* to wait for an early-nineteenth-century Rus-

continued on page 76

The Growing Mystique of Antiques from Films
continued from page 73



COURTESY MARC WANAMAKER/BERSON ARCHIVE/SELZNICK INTERNATIONAL/AMC



DERRY MOORE

ABOVE LEFT: A pair of painted plaster casts, circa 1820–50, from Bertel Thorvaldsen’s marble carvings *Day* and *Night* once appointed the set of *Gone With the Wind* (1939). ABOVE RIGHT: The casts (*Day* shown here)—whose pale green ground appeared red on the screen because of the Technicolor process—are now in Edelman’s London residence. Purchased at auction and bearing the studio inscription and inventory number, they were among many authentic pieces used by David O. Selznick to recreate the period.

apartment, testimony to his current passion for collecting, and often selling, antiques that have been associated with America’s own aristocracy—movie stars.

Edelman saw a few of the classic American movies while a film student in Moscow. “I never believed I would own the objects I’d seen in these movies, sit on a chair that Marlene Dietrich sat on!” he says. The spoon-back satinwood chair he refers to appeared, with Dietrich, in Billy Wilder’s *A Foreign Affair* (1948). Wanamaker and Edelman tracked it down, as they do many pieces, from film stills and purchased it directly from Paramount studios.

On the wall of Edelman’s apartment hang a pair of painted plaster

sian bed to be sent to Hollywood. The Russian princess in *his* film could not die in a reproduction.

As a result, forgotten antiques may be found in the basements of Hollywood movie lots. When an auction in 1985 featured items from the 20th Century-Fox property department, Edelman bought a number of pieces. “At that auction, I saw a marble bust of Jupiter and thought, ‘That’s a beautiful piece.’ Then Marc told me of its place in pictures.” The late-eighteenth-century *Jupiter of Otricoli*, a period copy of an excavated sculpture now in the Vatican collection, actually had a role in *Cleopatra* (1963). It now stands in Edelman’s London



COURTESY MARC WANAMAKER/BERSON ARCHIVE/TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX



DERRY MOORE

ABOVE: Ten years in the making, *The Robe* was released by 20th Century-Fox in 1953 and was the first CinemaScope film. Jean Simmons, then 24, played the role of Diana opposite Richard Burton. In the movie, Simmons sits on a circa 1810 English X-frame stool. LEFT: The stool is now in Edelman’s collection.

The Growing Mystique of Antiques from Films
continued from page 76

casts, circa 1820–50, from marble carvings titled *Day* and *Night* by the Danish Neoclassical sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. They also hung on the wall of Aunt Pittypat’s parlor in Atlanta in *Gone With the Wind*. “I realized that the Hollywood provenance added to the allure of the legitimate antique,” he explains.

Edelman’s peripatetic life finds parallels in that of his objects. For instance, a bust of Plato, which he bought from Paramount, was derived from one found in an excavation at Herculaneum. In addition, it was fea-



WAYNE ROWE



COURTESY MARC WAMMAKER/ROBIN ARCHIVES/PARAMOUNT PICTURES

ABOVE LEFT: A bronze bust of Plato, circa 1845, was acquired by Edelman at a studio auction. ABOVE RIGHT: Once the property of RKO Studios, the bust appeared in *Citizen Kane* (1941) and numerous B movies, and was leased out for use in *Gone With the Wind*.



WAYNE ROWE

LEFT: Elements of classical architecture and ornamentation give form to an English carved and gilded mirror frame, circa 1750. BELOW: The mirror appeared in Paramount’s romantic comedy *Kitty* (1945), a story set in 18th-century London. Paulette Goddard, right, reached the height of her career in the role of a guttersnipe transformed into a duchess by a conniving fop (Ray Milland) and his accomplice, the dowager (Constance Collier).



COURTESY MARC WAMMAKER/ROBIN ARCHIVES/PARAMOUNT PICTURES

continued on page 84

The Growing Mystique of Antiques from Films
continued from page 80

tured in *Gone With the Wind*, *Citizen Kane*, the television series *Star Trek* and a host of B movies. Like an aging but enduring star, it has survived the shifts of world history as well as those of Hollywood.

Edelman's interest in the influential early-nineteenth-century patron and designer Thomas Hope led him to buy an English X-frame gilt stool, circa 1810. The existing provenance was enhanced, for him, by the sight of Jean Simmons resting on it in *The Robe* (1953). "The mystique of the objects used in these movies is unbelievable," says Edelman. "I've lived among works of art all my life—now they are objects related to films."

Edelman believes his talent for finding special objects with unconventional pasts began when he was twelve. He lived on Kropotkin Street in Moscow in one of the few remaining stately homes that had been divided into apartments. Having found a pair of eighteenth-century Russian chairs in the attic, he started the research that led to the discovery that his house had been built by Denis Davidov, an aristocrat mentioned in *War and Peace*. Another house on the street, recalls Edelman, had belonged to Aleksandr Pushkin, and young Edelman badgered the curator for clues as to what had become of the original furnishings. "That's how it started," says Edelman. "I didn't know it would become a business."

By age twenty-five, Edelman was directing films of classic stories by Gogol or Chekhov for Soviet television. "There were no prop departments then. You had to look around for the original objects. But I knew where they were. I found a set of furniture stored in the Central Museum of the Revolution on Gorky Street. I found pieces in villages where peasants kept what they had been able to take from the revolution, a carved chair or a bureau."

Four years later, he was given just twenty-four hours to leave the USSR, apparently as retribution for his request to visit the West, where

he intended to see director Sam Wanamaker, who lived in London. He lost his citizenship, his income and his collection of furniture, Russian icons, and art related to Serge Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes. "I didn't hesitate to leave everything behind," he insists.

After a few disillusioning months in Hollywood, Edelman went to live in London in 1975. "I had to reeducate myself that film was a business. I couldn't even understand the idea of making a living."

Nonetheless, though he spoke no English, he found his way to Portobello Road. There, he saw a five-by-seven-inch painting on a wood panel and used all his remaining money to buy it. His expertise in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch and Flemish painting paid off when an expert at Christie's agreed that it was a work by Théobald Michau. It sold at auction for two thousand pounds, ten times what Edelman had paid for it. His lifelong hobby had suddenly become his new career.

"I loved that picture," Edelman recalls. "But I've been forced to sell many great works of art. I'm a collector. But the collection is always moving. I don't believe that art is bought and sold, I believe in destiny, that art is rewarded and repossessed."

In the past five years, Edelman and Wanamaker have developed a rare expertise in Hollywood antiques. They organized last December's auction at Christie's of antiques from the Paramount property department. The field appeals to Edelman's faith in destiny. "By the mystery of life, an eighteenth-century sculpture winds up not in a stately home but in Hollywood, in the basement of a prop department. But this can be a great pedigree of its own," he insists. "Say an object was made for Marie Antoinette. It's an important object. If the same object were made for someone else, it would be less important. If an object was chosen by Orson Welles, its value is enlarged for those who love the movies." □

Send For A Free Windowscaping® Idea Book
or call 1-800-524-3700.

I plan to: build remodel replace

Name _____

Address _____

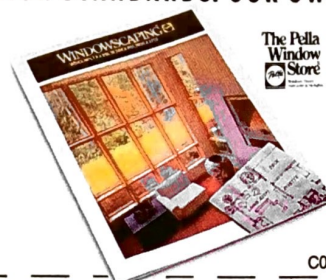
City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone _____



This coupon will be answered within 24 hours.
Mail to: Pella® Windows and Doors,
Dept. 1-3, 100 Main Street, Pella, IA 50219.
Also available throughout Canada.

**BUILT TO IMPOSSIBLY
HIGH STANDARDS. OUR OWN.™**



C010D0

**ONCE YOU LOOK INTO
OUR WINDOWS
YOU'LL WANT TO
LOOK OUT OF THEM.**

