

OTHER PASSIONS



Malcolm Enright

COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT AND GRAPHIC DESIGNER

— STORY BY JAN HOWLIN
— PHOTOGRAPH BY ANTHONY BROWELL

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THE HOUSE MAL ENRIGHT shares with his jeweller wife Barbara Heath in suburban Brisbane is a classic Queenslander with a difference. Its contents testify to the full-blown collection addiction that has underpinned both Enright's life and his artist's eye. The focus of his latest fascination is antique clocks, which are displayed in and around the glass cabinets, antique furniture, decorative arts and collections of memorabilia that rise from cedar floor to ceiling, room after room. Patina abounds: old timbers glow, gilt gleams; and Enright enthusiastically describes even minor pieces with an extensive knowledge of their provenance.

“Basically, I knew I wanted to be a designer by about 10,” he says. By 11 he had started working with a dealer and came “into contact with things antique. I worked for him until I was 29 and by that stage I'd had numerous collections. Over the years I've amassed marketing material, advertising, package design, printed ephemera and trade cards.” Explaining “what it is to be a collector”, he says: “It's this mania! It's something that's inherent in you. This collecting thing is in my stars. It's in all of my experience, and it's fun!”

Time has been central to Enright's two major collecting phases. “When I started making real money, I collected and curated contemporary art. I did that for 30 years, then I sold it in one big pop. I had \$70,000 left over from the auction and I thought, well, the one thing that I've always wanted to get involved with is the engineering side of horology. So then I absolutely immersed myself in the category by reading every single thing I could get on clocks, and in almost five years I've managed to collect something like 116 clocks.”

Initially, Enright had three clocks he wanted to learn about. He contacted the local branch of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors and, despite introducing himself by saying, “Look I'm not a club person, I'm a boundary rider, mate”, he became a member. He took his 1722 English lantern clock to the association's most respected repairer Paul Jones, who dismantled it, repaired it, and taught Enright how to put it back together. “I ended up doing wheel work, learning the lathe,” he says, “and that's what seduced me into getting under the bonnet of clocks.”

Through Jones, Enright developed an understanding of the various English, French, German and American clocks. “I started really getting to know drum movements. I moved from restoration of casework and movements to doing complete restorations of bronze work, dial work. In horology, any damage to the dial of a clock is a disgrace,” he says. At first, he painstakingly reinstated the worn numerals and type by hand with a fine sable-hair brush. Later, he began recreating identical typography as computer art and silk-screening it over the original.

“I then started buying every key clock that Jones had, because he had really pristine excellent things [including a 1763 Will Snow 30-hour country long-case clock],” says Enright. “I spent probably 14 months finding out everything I could about [the] Padsie [clock] makers from Yorkshire before I was allowed to spend \$10,000 to buy the clock!”

“I astound my wife with the amount of [investigation] I do. I don't watch any television. I'm just reading on horology. I'm a member of three different clock fraternities ... so I now have relationships with horologists all round the world.

“I do have a wish list for completing a clock collection but most clocks are only shared within a select little group of collectors. And to break into these things is a lifetime's work — that's the rest of my lifetime's work.”

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MALCOLM ENRIGHT
Communications and graphic designer

The house Mal Enright shares with his jeweller wife Barbara Heath in suburban brisbane is a classic Queenslander with a difference. Its contents testify to the full-blown collection addiction that has underpinned Enright's life, and equally, to his artist's eye. The focus of his latest fascination is antique clocks, which are displayed in and around the glass cabinets, antique furniture, decorative arts and collections of memorabilia that rise from cedar floor to ceiling, in room after room. Patina abounds: old timbers glow, gilt and mirror reflect and magnify; and Enright enthusiastically describes even minor details with an extensive knowledge of their history and provenance.

"Basically, I knew I wanted to be a designer by about ten," he says. But by 11 he had started working with a dealer and "came into contact with things antique. I worked for him until I was 29, and by that stage I'd had numerous collections. I loved all of the early kitchenalia. I loved depression-ware furniture, particularly anything that was hand-made by an Australian. Over the years I've amassed marketing material, advertising, package design, printed ephemera and trade-cards. Explaining "what it is to be a collector," he says, "It's this mania! It's something that's inherent in you. This collecting thing is in my stars. It's in all of my experience, and it's fun!"

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At the outset Enright had three clocks he wanted to learn about. He contacted the local branch of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors (NAWCC) and despite introducing himself by saying, "Look I'm not a club person, I'm a boundary rider, mate," he became a member. He took his 1722 English lantern clock to the Clock Club's most respected repairer, "Clockman - a Mr Paul Jones," who dismantled it, repaired it, and taught Enright how to put it back together. "I ended up doing bushings, learning the lathe," he says, "and that's what seduced me into getting under the bonnet of clocks." Through Jones Enright developed an understanding of the various English, French, German and American clocks. "I started really getting to know drum movements. I moved from restoration of casework and movements to doing complete restorations of bronze work, dial work. In horology any damage to the dial of a clock is a disgrace," he says. Initially he painstakingly reinstated the worn numerals and type by hand with a fine sable-hair brush. Later he began recreating identical typography as computer art and silk-screening it over the original.

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"I astound my wife with the amount of [investigation] I do. I don't watch any television. I'm just reading on horology. I'm a member of three different clock fraternities, internet-wise. You [find] information that doesn't exist out there in print is exchanged openly through a friendship of people that you'd never ever think to meet. So I now have relationships with horologists all round the world.

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