

“This desk dates back to the 18th century and was made to resemble a small rectangular table on Louis XV legs, but it does have a notable underbelly. When open, the surface flaps towards the front and the empty gap is filled in by a sort of drum (or hood) which manoeuvres in the form of a somersault and emerges from beneath.

“It is certainly an ingenious concept married with refinement and style. Apparently only a small number of these petits bureaux were made in 18th century France, and it is thought that most were created from fruitwood, as indeed, is this one.

“This exceptional piece, dating back to 1750, has been in the family for years. Though I do remember it as a child, I was never allowed to use it... my mother was always very fussy about us leaning on the furniture!”

Auctioneer Pierre Grech Pillow has had a great love of antiques since childhood. Here he presents a chest of drawers and a painting from his personal collection, as well as his antique gavel, which has followed him throughout his career.

“I grew up enveloped in the world of antiques because my father was a dealer. I always went to museums with him and was fascinated by the items we came across. When I was old enough, I started to organise independent antiques and fine arts fairs, which I loved doing because it helped to introduce more and more people to the world of antiques.

“I always dreamed of becoming an auctioneer; I believe it is a role that services both the buyer and seller. I founded Obelisk Auctions and it has since become one of the Island’s leading auction houses. I currently hold the record for selling the most expensive painting, piece of furniture and pistol ever in Malta. I also recently sold a chest of

drawers in the Borg Olivier auction, which fetched €100,000; it is the most expensive piece of Maltese furniture ever sold in the world.

“My favourite items are 17th and 18th century Maltese pieces of furniture and paintings by the Old Masters, but I have a passion for all sorts of things. This chest of drawers from the 19th century, for instance, is in my favourite style and pattern of this period. It is veneered and made from olive, walnut and cheery wood that forms a geometrical and 3D design, and ends on four tapered legs. I found this chest when I was 15, and bought it for €200. I restored it and it is now worth around €20,000.

“This painting, called Harbour Scene, is by renowned Maltese artist Willie Apap, who lived from 1918 till 1970. We have sold so many of his pieces over the years that I feel quite an emotional connection to them, particularly to this one as it came directly from one of his relatives.

“Meanwhile, this olive-wood gavel holds a lot of sentimental value. It was given to me by well-known British auctioneer Nick Smith when I first went into the profession. He had used it for over 50 years, and it was his father’s before that. A gavel is integral to an auctioneer, and I have sold thousands of items with it by my side – from €20 knick-knacks to incredible vessels and oil tankers worth millions.

“Being an auctioneer is definitely what I was meant to do, but I also feel strongly about educating people about the value of antiques – even in modern-day settings. That will hopefully become a reality very soon when I open the new Obelisk Auctions Gallery in Attard, which will include a multi-purpose space for lectures and seminars, as well as an outdoor area for cultural activities.”

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Pierre Grech Pillow with a 19th century chest of drawers, a painting by Willie Apap, and his auctioneer’s gavel.