

# THE YOUNG ONES

A PROVENÇAL BACKGROUND AND A SOTHEBY'S-TRAINED EYE WERE THE KEYS TO THE YOUNGS' SUCCESS – A FLOURISHING COUNTRY FURNITURE BUSINESS THAT HAS SPILLED INTO THEIR HOUSE. BY LUCINDA EGERTON

PHOTOGRAPHS/TIM BEDDOW

For many of us, childhood events influence our adult aspirations. Two things happened that were to have a lasting impression on Robert Young, a specialist dealer in country furniture and folk art.

"While I was at school, I used to gaze into the window of one of the town's antique shops, full of wonderful furniture, but never dared go in, until the old chap started dealing in coins at a penny each. It gave me an excuse to go and look around. The other incident happened one year at Chelsea Antiques Fair. I saw a chair I was desperate to buy; sadly, it turned out to have a £350 price tag and, as I only had £12 in my pocket, my offer of £1



deposit didn't get me very far! I left full of frustration – but determined to make my living out of something I loved: buying and selling country things." Married for eight years, with two small children, Robert and Josyane Young complement each other in style. His background is academic: training at Sotheby's, and working

for a top antiques dealer. Josyane grew up in an artistic atmosphere in Nice, where her father, a music publisher, had many artist friends. The fruit and flower markets of her Provençal childhood are still a vivid source of inspiration.

Robert first started dealing in antiques from the back of an old transit van. "I didn't do much business, nobody really wanted to buy what I wanted to sell. Slowly I learnt that if it had a profit in it, I had to buy it."

There was no greater impact on Robert and the business than the arrival of Josyane, employed to help when he first had a shop. Robert had dealt in a mixture of old country furniture, including mahogany as well as painted pieces. "Little by little I pushed the mahogany out to concentrate on pure folk art," Josyane says. "The shop was not very big and I thought we should have unity by displaying the furniture in room settings."

They have now established a thriving business, specialising in country furniture and folk art



**Main picture** Many favourite influences come together in the sitting room: Camargue avocets, Provençal spotted china, an English antique cotton quilt and an 18th-century tapestry. Robert painted the chimney piece using natural pigments

**Above** Robert and Josyane Young



art, as well as spongeware, pottery and treen. They buy mostly from dealers in England, Scotland and Ireland, though they also go on several spending sprees each year to France. Robert's interest in Scandinavia was prompted by the tradition of folk art, in which everything was made and painted by locals. He is now a leading expert on objects

from Scandinavia, particularly drinking vessels. Enthusiasm for the shop resulted in Josyane starting her own decorating business. Nothing is done by the book; she has no formal design training. Her natural flair allows her to follow her instincts – simple furniture, fresh-coloured fabrics, and terracotta tiles. Robert invariably does the »→




**Main picture** In the kitchen a Scottish shepherd's chair, with original paint, sits under the cupboard found in Bath. All the furniture is English hardwood.  
**Top** 19th-century spongeware from all over Britain. **Above** The "dug-out" chair





painting, working with old lime-washing and distemper effects, having discovered the recipes for the old finishes. Apart from paint effects, he is an enthusiastic artist, attempting to discipline himself to paint a picture a month. Invariably he does three a year.

A genuine love of country furniture has led Robert and Josyane to become collectors. Objects and furniture fill their home; everything is battered and worn, as though it has been in place for years. "There are things in the house that are important for one reason or another, they're like milestones along our path," explains Josyane. For instance there is the 18th-century "dug-out" chair, carved out of one solid tree trunk. When they were particularly

poor, they decided to sell it: a friend gave Robert the money but thankfully never took the chair. Josyane found the blue corner cupboard, originally covered in white paint, years ago in Bath. Pictures line the walls of every room. "In particular we collect old photographs and bad still lifes!" Often when they have not been able to afford certain pieces of furniture, they have justified the expense by giving them to each other as presents, a gesture that is typical of this warm couple, whose friendliness and genuine enthusiasm is reflected in their home. 

*Robert Young Antiques is at 68 Battersea Bridge Road, London SW11 3AG (01-228 7847).*



**Main picture** In the shop and house, terracotta walls and flowers are reminiscent of Provence. **Top** This unusual walnut chest is English, made around 1670. A journeyman painted the French picture above it. **Above** Josyane with their son Sam

