

IN BRIEF

Collecting

Viktor Wynd
VIKTOR WYND'S CABINET OF
WONDERS

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Viktor Wynd's star has risen on the London cultural scene over the past few years with his salon, the Last Tuesday Society, and his Little Shop of Horrors, a gallery, venue (and not least shop) in Hackney, east London. Crammed with all manner of wonderful and frankly weird things, including the mummified erection of a hanged man that allegedly belonged to Oscar Wilde, the shop was an artwork in itself, and the original entrance to its basement museum was through "a wardrobe stuffed with fur coats in homage to Narnia".

The fur coats are gone, but the whole venture has recently relaunched as the Viktor Wynd Museum of Curiosities. Like the late Alistair McAlpine, Wynd is one of the great latter-day collectors: not just an art shopper but a man with dodo bones, giant clam shells, ferns, cocos de mer, shrunken heads, hornbill skulls, netsuke, pictures by Austin Osman Spare, epiphytic air plants, chameleons, a Viagra packet from a Rolling Stones tour, and several bottled babies. His beautiful book is not just

about a collection but an aesthetic, giving generous space to several other collectors.

Wynd describes Malplaquet House, the Mile End Road home of the Fitzwilliam Museum director Tim Knox, as "a perfect example of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art", and this is an underlying idea throughout. Bourne House, belonging to the dealer David McKinley, tends towards natural history, with a cabinet of hornbill skulls, but also finds space for a waxwork old woman at an attic window. Errol Fuller's house is similarly given to natural history, along with ethnographica, while Andy Wilkinson at Triffid Nurseries has Britain's largest collection of carnivorous plants. The supreme example of a collection that becomes a work in itself is surely the Pitt-Rivers ethnographic museum in Oxford, celebrated for its shrunken heads. Wynd remembers frightening himself by visiting it on LSD.

The Wynd aesthetic is tinged with decadence, and his charming text is a self-flagellating contribution to the narcissistic psychology of collecting. He experiences it as a defence against depression, and writes evocatively about the ambivalent fascination of things not acquired and his boredom with acquired things that no longer bring the happiness they promised. "I am sick and I know it," he says, "and I write this book as a warning."

PHIL BAKER

