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Design

Grocon's Daniel Grollo to sell rare collection of Hermès furnishings

'In a quarter of a century ... I've never seen a furniture and objets d'art collection like this come to market,' says the chairman of auction house Leonard Joel.



Hermes homewares on offer include a Philippe Nigro Cheval d'arçons bench (\$8000 - \$12,000), Philippe Nigro Cabriolet armchair (\$5000 - \$8000), Pantograph desk lamp (\$5000 - \$8000) and J.-M. Frank Cupboard Of Secrets (\$16,000 - \$20,000).

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The *pièce de résistance* of the largest collection of Hermès furnishings ever auctioned in Australia – probably the world – is a shoe cabinet.

Not any old shoe cabinet, though. This hand-made *coffre à chaussures* – commissioned by Daniel Grollo, the former multimillionaire boss of the [failed Grocon empire](#) – is hand-crafted in Canaletto walnut and Essentiel bull calfskin.



The shoe cabinet is hand-crafted in is hand-crafted in Canaletto walnut and Essentiel bull calfskin and comes complete with a drop-down seat and foot mirror.

It also has, according to descriptions by experts at the auction house Leonard Joel, “a drop-down seat and foot mirror, internal leather shelves, and shoe compartments with hand-stitched branding. The exterior case is finished in a stunning cobalt blue leather with Tectona Grandis fixtures.”

The guide price is only available on application to cashed-up connoisseurs. Assume, however, it will go for serious money since the *dressoir à thè* the

porcelain”. Naturally. The exterior is lined with hand-stitched branding, and the interior compartments are of the highest-grade lacquer, wood and bull calf leather).



Daniel Grollo, executive chairman of Grocon, in 2018. **Wayne Taylor**

Grocon, founded as a concrete company by Grollo’s grandfather Luigi in the 1940s, was once one of Australia’s most successful private construction companies, responsible for shaping Melbourne’s modern skyline with buildings including the Rialto and Eureka skyscrapers.

It went pear-shaped last December when grandson Daniel, a charismatic deal-maker and lover of bespoke luxury, [addressed the creditors of 43 insolvent Grocon companies](#), flagging the end to the company’s 73-year history, with debts of more than \$100 million.

Grollo has pledged the sale of his Hermès homeware, originally purchased for a private project, “is another step forward for me, providing funds to begin to repay loans associated with the recent Grocon administration process”.

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More than 60 per cent of the pieces are from the Metiers Collection, Hermès' first “interiors” range, launched with great fanfare in Milan in 2011. The rest are made-to-order or pieces bought via Hermès Le Maison. “The entire collection was one purchase, the biggest commission Hermès Australia had ever had,” Albrecht says.



Daniel Grollo and his father Bruno at a Grocon Christmas party in better days. **Craig Sillitoe**

“Every item is stored in a handmade crate designed specifically for the piece and still wrapped in its signature Hermès linen dust covers.”

undervaluation. Anyone trying to order the same pieces directly from Hermès might spend up to \$3 million.)



The four-door tea trunk designed to store Hermès porcelain has an estimate of \$200,000 to \$250,000.

Examples of Hermès furniture and objets d'art are rarely auctioned, Albrecht explains. "This is the first time a Hermès collection of interiors this good has been auctioned. And I'll be surprised if it ever happens again."

Leonard Joel, established in 1919, fought off several international auction houses to stage this sale. "But never underestimate the value of our own

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Hermès, of course, is usually associated with scarves, jewellery, fashion and its [classic handbags](#) – particularly those named after actresses Grace Kelly and Jane Birkin. The furniture and interiors are [a more recent addition](#) to the label, but similarly devoted to the luxury goods ethos established by German-born saddle-maker Thierry Hermès in Paris in 1837.

“When clients ask what these auction pieces are like, I say they’re of artisan quality,” Albrecht explains.

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Isn’t artisan a pejorative word, somewhere south of “artist”?

“This might not be the dictionary definition,” Albrecht says. “But to me, ‘artisan’ speaks to three-dimensional works completely focused on a beautiful, well-made, functional object.”



Attention to detail in the Hermès workshop in Paris. **Getty**

Fabergé's workshop was full of artisans. He was uncompromising. If his artisans produced things he wasn't happy with, he'd smash them – even though they were beautiful.

“The pieces in this collection have that same artisan quality. Everything is hand-crafted. They're either specifically commissioned by [Grollo] or limited editions.”



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A vintage Hermès handbag is a collector's item, with an auction market around the world. “Daniel's collection, because it's unique and contemporary, has instant collectability because it's so rare.”

Whatever his excesses, Daniel Grollo has a good eye. “One of our VIP clients got a sneak peek of his collection and almost laid an egg,” says

NEED TO KNOW

“An Important Collection of Hermès Interiors” will be on view at Leonard Joel’s Melbourne saleroom from September 10 to 12, ahead of the auction on September 13. See leonardjoel.com.au



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