

books



VIKTOR WYND'S CABINET OF WONDERS (by Viktor Wynd; [Prestel](#), rrp £29.99) 'A little too much is just enough for me!' said Jean Cocteau. The artist and collector Viktor Wynd would disagree – far too much is his starting point. There is something heroic about his single-minded acquisition of huge quantities of stuff, and this sumptuous volume – part aesthetic manifesto, part confession, part Argos catalogue redesigned by a Florentine madman – is an utterly enthralling guide to an unsettling personality.

Wynd runs a cluttered shop in Hackney, a cabinet of curiosities that's a mecca for East End hipsters. His home is an equally crowded *Kunstkammer*, crammed with narwhal tusks and sawfish rostrums and ostrich eggs and stuffed parrots and crows and so on, a bewildering concentration of natural objects mixed up with Star Wars Lego, half-eaten breakfasts and the odd Furby. For Wynd, we discover, it is the act of acquisition, not possession, that feeds his need – the visual result is a side-effect.

Is he a collector, then, or simply a hoarder? He often describes his behaviour as pathological, and has suffered in the past from depression (personified as 'Gerald'). He appears to be a lonely man who enjoys the consolations of solitude and knows a great deal about orchids, sea-shells, worms, flesh-eating plants and taxidermy.

When objects count for more than intimate human relationships, it's tempting to take the psychoanalytic view that possession is a search for symbolic omnipotence, that the insecure child latches onto transitional objects (Wynd

still sleeps with his childhood teddy bear), and that the troubled adult seeks a sense of identity through the ownership of totemic artefacts. We all do this, of course, but few of us do so on such an epic scale. Cheerfully acknowledging his oddness, Wynd reflects on his inner world and its spectacular outward manifestation.

The autobiographical passages are moving, with moments of startling candour. He aims for the airy register of his heroes Quentin Crisp and Stephen Tennant, but his writing is short on quotable aphorisms. I did, however, like his professional advice to would-be collectors: 'Buy as much as you can whenever you can.' There is much else to enjoy, especially the many images of Malplaquet House (*Wol* Oct 2003), the home of Tim Knox and Todd Longstaffe-Gowan. The interior of this 18th-century pile on the Mile End Road resembles Sir John Soane's Museum (Knox was once its director) in its marvellous accumulation of statuary, paintings, taxidermy and architectural

fragments. Here a controlling aesthetic intelligence lends coherence to what would otherwise be a jumble of flea-market esoterica. Images of rooms in the homes of some of Wynd's other customers and friends left me feeling that, despite the covetted elephant skulls and prosthetic limbs and stuffed penguins, more can be less.

Wynd's tastes tend to the macabre (shrun-

