

# HIDDEN TREASURE IN THE PUBLIC GLARE



Rare GODWIN cabinet sells at auction for AUD \$221,075

Media Release

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Earlier this year, a vendor with a keen eye purchased an elegant art cabinet reminiscent of the Aesthetic Movement at a small auction house in Melbourne for \$1,200. He had no knowledge of its history and the auctioneer was none the wiser. But the vendor was prepared to punt on it, if for no other reason than it appealed to his artistic sensibilities. It was a decision he will never regret, with the cabinet achieving a hammer price of \$185,000 at an auction held at Leski Auctions on Sunday. The vendor, who has asked not to be named, referred the work to Leski which has a 45-year history of selling the quirky and irreverent alongside the standard fare one normally associates with antiques, art, collectibles, and memorabilia. Fortunately, Harry Glenn and his team at Leski knew the designer Edward William Godwin very well, and even referred the vendor to a handful of pieces by the famed 19th century architect that are held by the NGV. "Leski knew a great deal but what they couldn't immediately establish was where the level of interest lay among collectors," the vendor said. Leski started with a pre-sale estimate of \$20,000 and finally settled on \$40,000 to \$60,000 prior to auction once they saw how interest had grown. This was due in part to their decision to place the cabinet in the window of their premises in High Street, Armadale. Says Harry Glenn: "There are many savvy collectors in our neighbourhood and we saw this as an opportunity to pique their interest. This worked very well as we had people calling and dropping in, and adding to our knowledge of Godwin and William Watt, arguably the most important furniture manufacturer of the late 19th century. "Interest grew further once we energised our international networks and placed an advertisement in the esteemed English magazine, *Antique Trade Gazette*." Edward William Godwin was a remarkable character whose love of theatre and Japanese minimalism scandalised his conservative peers. He had many friends in art, theatre and literature, among them Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde and American painter James McNeill Whistler. Although he died at the age of 53 in 1886, he left behind a significant body of work as an architect, theatre designer and furniture maker. His collaboration with some of the most highly-acclaimed furniture makers in England, like William Watt and Collinson & Lock, resulted in acquisitions by a number of major private and public galleries including the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Little did Leski or the vendor realise just how significant the interest was. The auction on Sunday, October 28 produced a remarkable result with bidding in the room and on the phone. Ultimately, it came down to a phone bidder in New York pitted against a phone bidder from London. The latter was successful, buying the cabinet for \$185,000 excluding commission. "What appealed to me about Leski is the extent to which they go to discover the back story. That's been their way for as long as I've known them, and no-one could argue with the success of that approach. Pity there aren't more gems like this waiting to be discovered." About Leski Auctions Leski Auctions was established in 1973. Today, it is regarded as one of Australia's leading auctioneers of Sporting Memorabilia, Australian Art & Antiques, Collectables and World Philately. Among the many significant collections that Leski Auctions has been privileged to sell are those of Shirley Strickland, Ron Clarke, Sir Reginald Ansett and former RSL President, Bruce Ruxton. It has sold more 'baggy green' caps than any other auction house in the world. Charles Leski is a registered valuer for the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts' Cultural Gifts Program. He is also the valuer of the displayed items at the National Sports Museum at the MCG, Melbourne. Harry Glenn, an industry veteran with more than 20 years experience, has been working with Charles since 2012. The company is located at 727-729 High Street Armadale, Victoria 3143 Australia. Tel+61 3 8539 6150 and [www.leski.com.au](http://www.leski.com.au) Issued by: Harry Glenn, Leski Auctions Michael Krape, Michael Krape Consulting Tel: +61 (0) 425 790 735 Tel: +61 (0) 403 135 880 [harry@leski.com.au](mailto:harry@leski.com.au) [michaelkrape@krape.com.au](mailto:michaelkrape@krape.com.au)

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