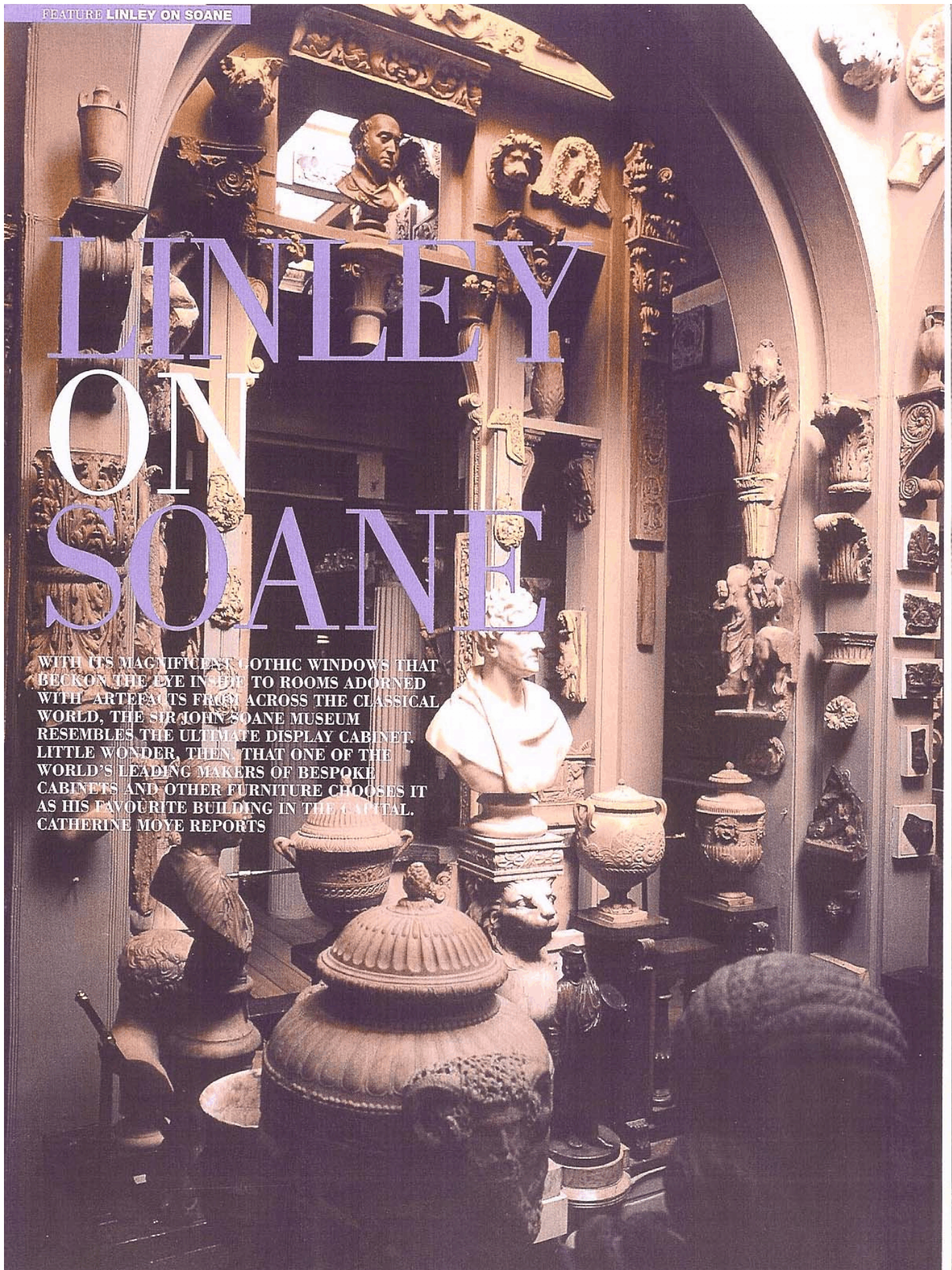
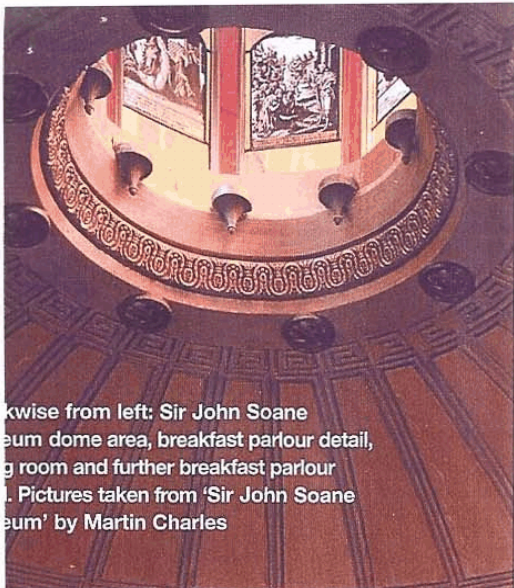


# LINLEY ON SOANE

WITH ITS MAGNIFICENT GOTHIC WINDOWS THAT BECKON THE EYE IN TO ROOMS ADORNED WITH ARTEFACTS FROM ACROSS THE CLASSICAL WORLD, THE SIR JOHN SOANE MUSEUM RESEMBLES THE ULTIMATE DISPLAY CABINET. LITTLE WONDER, THEN, THAT ONE OF THE WORLD'S LEADING MAKERS OF BESPOKE CABINETS AND OTHER FURNITURE CHOOSES IT AS HIS FAVOURITE BUILDING IN THE CAPITAL. CATHERINE MOYE REPORTS





clockwise from left: Sir John Soane Museum dome area, breakfast parlour detail, study room and further breakfast parlour detail. Pictures taken from 'Sir John Soane Museum' by Martin Charles



With its magnificent Gothic windows that beckon the eye inside to rooms adorned with artefacts from across the classical world, the Sir John Soane Museum resembles the ultimate display cabinet. Little wonder then, that one of the world's leading makers of bespoke cabinets and other furniture chooses it as his favourite building in the capital.

"It's a hidden gem of London and works on two levels, both as a superb piece of architecture and as a fantastic museum and collection of artefacts from around the world," says David, Viscount Linley, whose Pimlico Road store is itself festooned with a cornucopia of carpentry, furniture and handcrafted *objets d'art*.

Linley first discovered the Sir John Soane Museum at 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1993 when he was researching a book he was writing on furniture. "I was there all the time, especially in the library," he recalls.

Sir John Soane himself would have found it heartening that research was still being carried out in his house. Although his reputation is as a philanthropist who endowed a museum and gave his valuable collection of classical and other antiquities to the nation, he was first and foremost an academic whose passion was for educating and inspiring others.

On his appointment as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy in 1806, Soane began to arrange the books, casts and building models in order that the students might have easy access to them. Next, he opened his house the day before and the day after each of his lectures so that students might see examples of the architectural details he described. By 1827, when John Britton published the first description of the Museum, Soane's collection was being referred to as an "Academy of Architecture".

The museum is in Soane's old house, which he designed himself. To create it, he demolished and rebuilt three houses in succession on the north side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, beginning with No. 12 between 1792 and 1794, moving on to No. 13, re-built in two phases in 1808-9 and 1812, and concluding with No. 14, rebuilt in 1823-24.

"What I love about the house is that it's part of a terrace but it juts out at the front into the square in such a way that means it declares itself really strongly," says Linley. "There is something so personal and original about Soane's style, and unique about the man in his era."

Festooned with wondrous and valuable artefacts, classical statues, architectural relics, books and paintings from around the world, the Sir John Soane Museum is a monument to the part educational, part debauched, excursion that was The Grand Tour.

From the late sixteenth century onwards, it became fashionable for young aristocrats to visit Paris, Venice, Florence and, above all, Rome as the culmination of their Classical education. The Grand Tourist was typically a young man with a thorough grounding in Greek and Latin literature as well as

### 'THE MUSEUM'S IDIOSYNCRATIC AND CHAOTIC STYLE, WHICH REFLECTS THE ONE-OFF ENGLISH ECCENTRICITY OF ITS CREATOR, IS A LARGE PART OF ITS ATTRACTION'

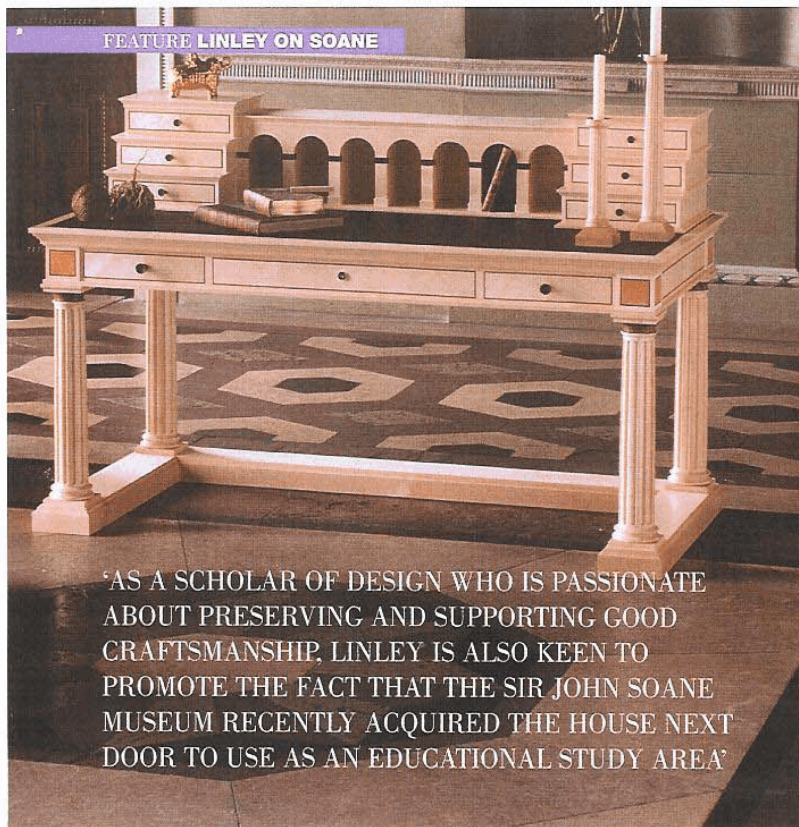
some leisure time, some means, and some interest in art. He was expected to return home with souvenirs of his travels as well as an understanding of art and architecture formed by exposure to great masterpieces.

"The Museum is like the result of this most amazing rake's progress and there is lots and lots to see there," says Linley, who could have added that these wonders are crammed higgledy piggledy into Soane's house.

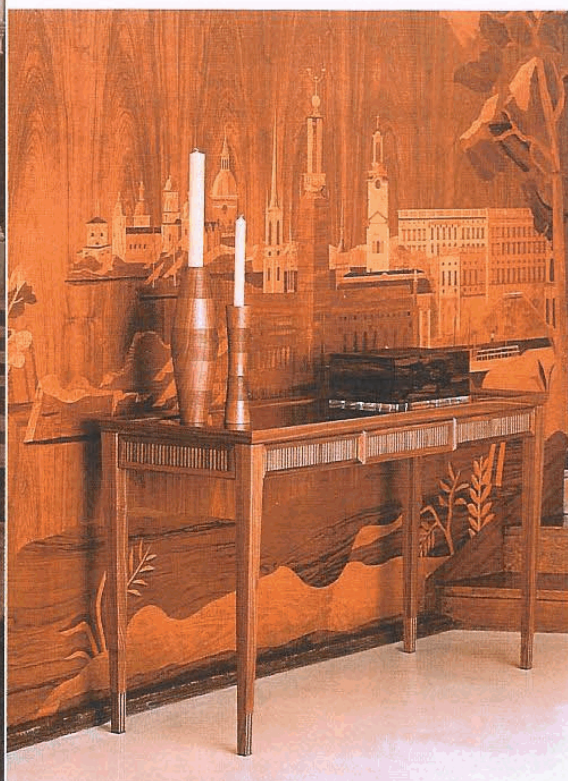
The Museum's idiosyncratic and chaotic style, which reflects the one-off English eccentricity of its creator, is a large part of its attraction. Certainly the collection suits the rooms in which it's housed: claustrophobic planning, complicated floor-levels, ingenious top-lighting and hundreds of mirrors to suggest receding planes and to blur divisions. Hanging neo-Gothic arches seem to raise ceilings from walls.

Viscount Linley is a great fan of the British style generally and draws much of his inspiration from simply walking around the streets of London and looking for the kinds of details that are frequently overlooked by the hurried world. "I try and keep my eyes open when walking about," he explains. "My father >

FEATURE LINLEY ON SOANE



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> (Lord Snowdon) once did a photographic book about London called “London Sight Unseen: A Personal View of London”, drawing on its varied architectural styles, but it was the tiny little artists’ studios and things tucked away that I found most interesting.” He concedes that he is basically a furniture designer who is a frustrated architect. “But then I think most architects are also frustrated furniture designers,” he muses. “To my mind, the two worlds are that closely linked and work together.”

Linley might have the bluest of blood but where his business is concerned, it is infused with practical and artistic considerations. He has no wounds to his hands characteristic of cabinetmakers. “I stopped making furniture for the shop in 1985 when a customer said ‘We’ll only buy it, if you make it,’ because then what is and what’s not a Linley would become a perennial problem,” he explains.

Today he is occupied designing, negotiating commissions and overseeing the running of his company. Its workshop and offices are at his shop in Pimlico where photographs taken by Lord Snowdon line the walls. Clearly following his father, Linley’s heart leans more to the arty than the horsey natures associated with many aristocratic houses. His offices are friendly places where people collaborate as equals and probably enjoy hanging out over the road in the pub after work.

As well as working on his own ranges, Linley has been involved in several collaborations with prominent hotel groups and developers in the capital. He has worked with The Savoy Group, Berkeley Homes and, latterly, the much discussed The Knightsbridge, a development with penthouses costing up to £12m. Linley designed a console and drum tables for the foyer. “I enjoy collaborations,” he says. “It’s very good to be seen to be going out there and getting work like this. It’s a good talking point for us.”

If much of his furniture is in a fairly traditional, classical English style with inlay and decoration, some of his furnishings are slick and modern. “I do like modern furniture and architecture. I am equally interested in both,” Linley says. “I do think it’s fascinating to see buildings that I watched going up in my youth, coming into their own now and becoming fashionable.”

It is appropriate that Linley has worked with developers on apartment schemes, bearing in mind his belief in the close relationship



Clockwise from left: Palladian de and Salon console table – both by David Linley.

between furniture and architecture that is also why the Sir John Soane Museum is his favourite London building. “We photograph collections of furniture in the museum interior and I’m interested of the periods it covers,” he says.

As a scholar of design who is passionate about preserving supporting good craftsmanship, Linley is also keen to promote that the Sir John Soane Museum recently acquired the house next to use as an educational study area. “It’s going to be great for enthusiasts. “The whole place is undergoing a renaissance of it right now.” Perhaps this wonderful and eccentric museum will be regarded as one of London’s best kept secrets for much longer.

**Catherine Moyer** is a freelance journalist who writes for a variety of titles, including the Financial Times, Daily Telegraph and the V. Sunday.

**Contacts**

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 Sir John Soane Museum: 020 7405 2107 and [www.soane.org](http://www.soane.org)  
 Opening hours: Tuesday-Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m. & 6-9 p.m. on the first Tuesday of the month. Entrance free. Nearest tube: Holborn.