

NOVEMBER 2014 £4.90

# THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

THE WORLD OF INTERIORS NOVEMBER 2014

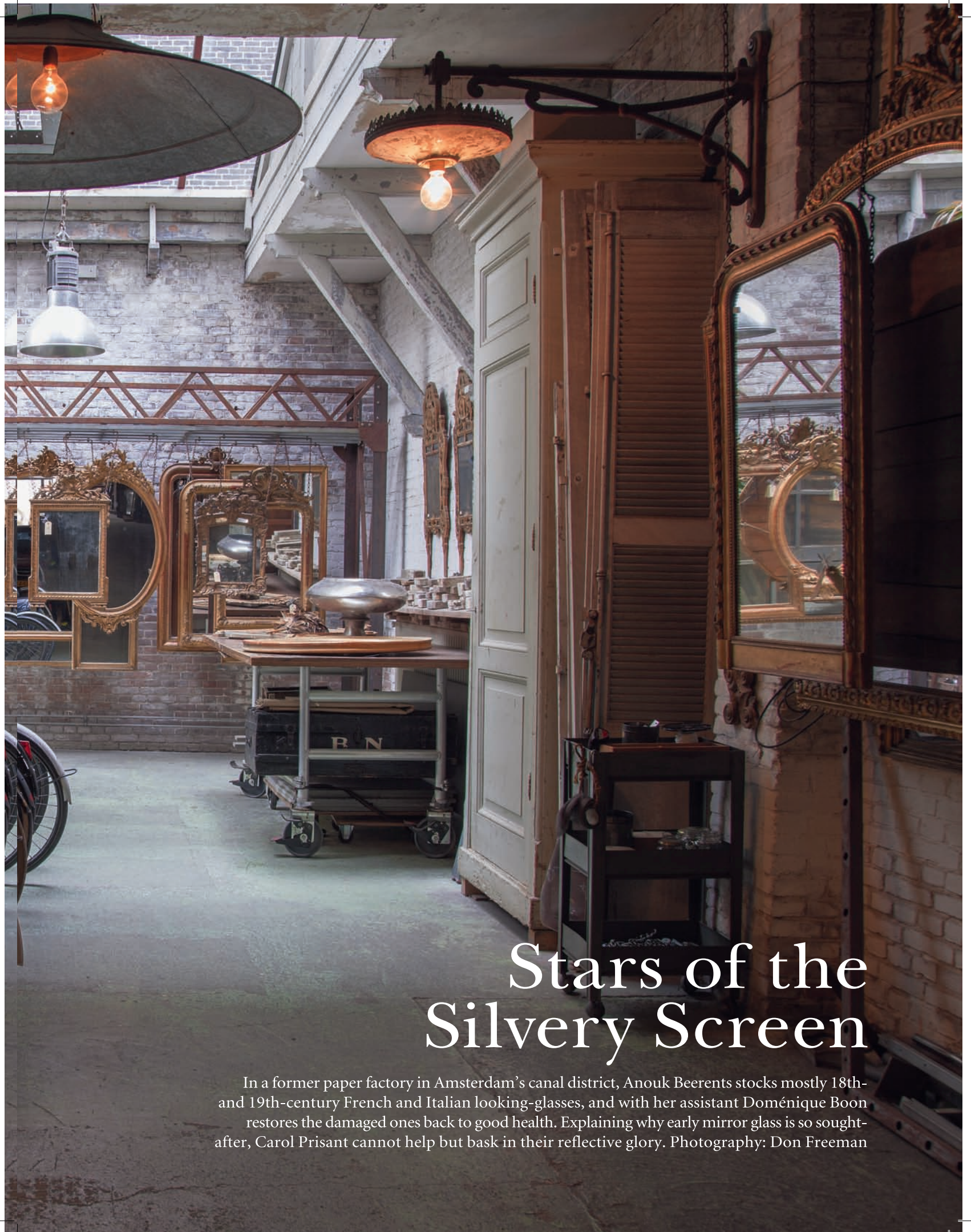




Hans Kodde, Anouk's architect husband, devised the suspension tracking system for her stock, which facilitates browsing. His offices are upstairs, and the bikes belong to his employees



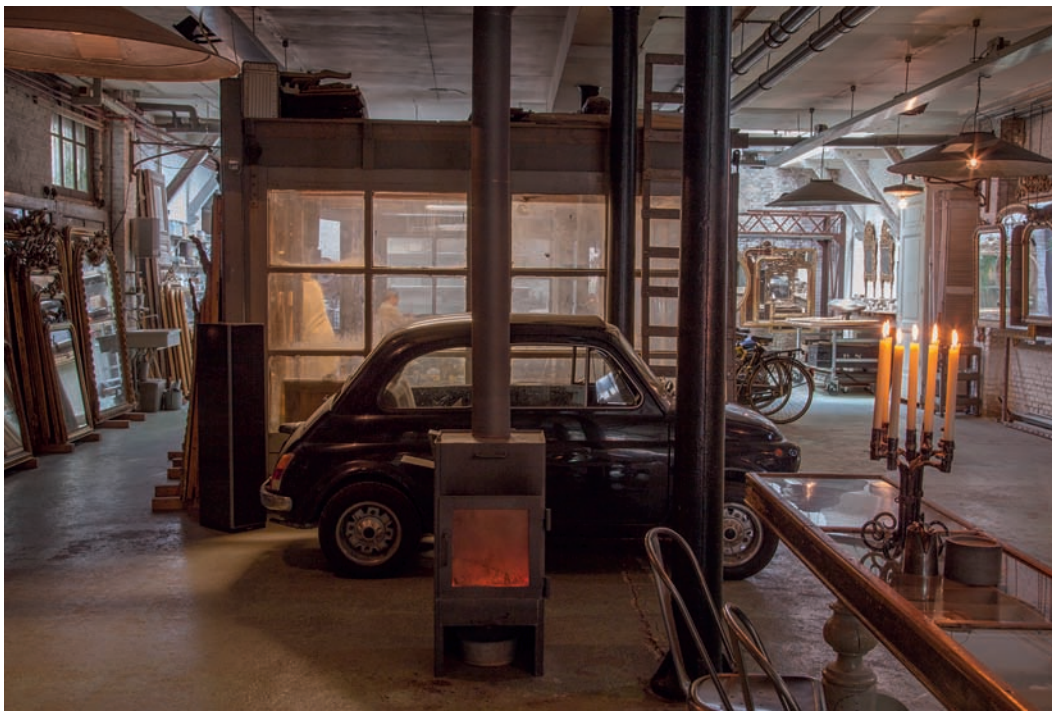




# Stars of the Silvery Screen

In a former paper factory in Amsterdam's canal district, Anouk Beerents stocks mostly 18th- and 19th-century French and Italian looking-glasses, and with her assistant Doménique Boon restores the damaged ones back to good health. Explaining why early mirror glass is so sought-after, Carol Prisant cannot help but bask in their reflective glory. Photography: Don Freeman





This page, clockwise from top: just behind the small stove that heats Anouk's studio in winter is the Fiat 500 in which her infant daughters used to nap; paperwork is tackled in one of the cubicles constructed from a trove of old glazed doors. The timeworn ladder has a handy rail; in the office, an old library reading table, a rotary-dial telephone and two thoroughly contemporary desk chairs span the decades; in a passage, some of the 300 mirrors in stock await a more permanent home





This page, clockwise from top: a candlelit shaving mirror is doubly reflected in an Italianate looking-glass hung on recycled shutters. Skylights ensure that the plants stay healthy; restoration proceeds slowly on the gesso-and-gilt grapevines surmounting an oval frame; Doménique Boon, in the foreground, and Anouk share the repair of old frames, which calls for an exacting and challenging set of skills; the colleagues benefit from a glazed roof as they mend, patinate and gild







## IT'S KIND OF A JOKE in the antiques business.

Your verging-on-desperate dealer is trying to flog some third-rate painting, and after praising its virtues and lowering its price, he makes one final attempt to clinch the sale with the Closer of Last Resort: 'The frame alone,' he says solemnly... 'the frame alone is worth the price.'

Well, it's mirrors, not paintings, that are sold at Anouk Beerents's Amsterdam studio, and yes, their frames are valuable, but it's not about the giltwood here. It's the glass, the glass alone, all mottled and wavy and dark, that often outshines the frame. Rather the way it used to be in 1683, in fact, when a Venetian mirror could be valued at three times the price of a Rubens. And when, shortly thereafter, the 357 plates of mirrored glass at Versailles cost Louis XIV the equivalent of €2 million.

These days, however, owing to our own increasing fondness for chucking out the old for the new, early old glass is the devil to find. Its rarity accounts for Manhattan workshops charging major prices merely to imitate antique glass. (If the job is done right, you can barely check out your hair.)

But 35 years ago, shopping for an antique mirror for herself, Anouk came across two she really liked, and figuring she could always find a place for one more – who can't? – she bought them both, eventually selling one to a friend. Next thing she knew, people were asking her to find them antique mirrors too. And *next* thing she knew, her thriving business needed to move out of the family digs to a far more commercial space: like Amsterdam's red light district. (No dubious ribaldry here, dear reader, regarding mirrors and ceilings and such.)

Her studio did so well that she needed more space yet again. And that's how we happen to find her now, comfortably ensconced in this abundantly sky-lighted building on the Prinsengracht canal – a former paper factory in a one-time manufacturing district. It's surrounded today by hotels.

The premises are so capacious, however, that Anouk can park her Fiat 500 – and yours – inside. (When her daughters were small, they napped in the car.) Her architect husband, Hans Kodde, has his offices upstairs, and it was Hans, by the way, who devised that ingenious method for displaying her stock: parallel rows of ceiling tracks that let the mirrors slide past each other like silvery layers of curtain. 'My husband is nice as well,' adds a smiling Anouk, 'and that's important.'

The dealer's purchase of some 40 glazed doors even before taking this space was a piece of serendipity that allowed for in-

stant partitioning of its roomy expanse. A glassed-in central cubicle is where Anouk and her longtime assistant Doménique Boon restore the occasional imperfect frame. 'I avoid buying anything too damaged,' she explains, 'and we make it a point to touch as little as possible.'

Doménique is in charge of the fiddly work, while Anouk, claiming she's far too impatient for anything except gilding and patination, clearly sells short her attention span. Laying gold leaf is meticulous work. Tedious, too, and probably one of the few crafts in which it's possible to inhale as much material as one lays. Then there are the painstaking hand-and-eye skills crucial for matching paint to patina-cum-dirt. The two women manage it all in a workshop where, in winter, a single woodstove heats the whole space. That's when they bring out the thick wool socks and the multiple layers – although, it seems, the classical music that accompanies their labours helps to take their minds off the temperature. 'I'm convinced,' says Anouk, 'that those 300 mirrors along the walls account for the superb acoustics here.'

But Anouk, one longs to mention, mirrors are so, well... *breakable*. She grew up in a house full of mirrors, however: her parents were in the fashion world, and besides, she, um, reflects: 'While the objects themselves are quite fine-looking, they also make rooms seem so much more vivid.'

But Anouk, mirrors are so, well... *breakable*.

And that's precisely why many antique dealers are loath to handle them. And that's when they call in Anouk. And so do we. To tell us a few of her looking-glass tales. But don't be afraid, nothing breaks.

There were those visitors from New York, for instance. The couple who arrived, made their selection, then excitedly pressed for immediate delivery. Now, generally speaking, preparing large plate glass for international shipping calls for super-special handling: you know, professional craters and movers at the least. But after Anouk explained the whole thing, the clients were dismayed. Insistent. Upset. They wanted their mirrors that night. At the airport. Revealing depths of the patience she claims not to have, Anouk packed them into her estate car, drove miles out to Schiphol, glided onto the tarmac, up to their private jet and, helped by their staff, loaded them in before finding her way home.

So then there's the German hotelier. One pleasant afternoon, when Anouk and Hans were hosting the annual employee luncheon, an unfamiliar male voice phoned to announce that Herr X was here in Amsterdam and wished to drop by. Explaining she was tied up just now, Anouk suggested another day, but her caller persisted: 'I can do this really fast, I promise. Really fast. It won't take long at all.' Now antique dealers don't have dental insurance or pension plans, so she reluctantly agreed to wait, to let him in at eight o'clock.

Herr X had said he'd be fast, and he was. In fact, she's never seen anything like it before or since. Without preamble, he sped through the darkened studio, buying 40 antique mirrors at one (non-fell) swoop. Then he vanished into the night. Anouk was both dumbstruck and thrilled.

Since she's open only by appointment, don't risk finding her there by chance. You should definitely email or call. Patience is a virtue, after all. Reflect on that ■

To contact Anouk Beerents, ring 00 31 20 622 8598, or visit [anoukbeerents.nl](http://anoukbeerents.nl)



Opposite: wicker carts on castors are ideal for shifting fragile stock from A to B—round-shouldered examples are

generally 19th-century. This page: a handsome 18th-century bevelled-edge looking-glass reflects a cluster of mirrors facing

