

\$130m mansion yields a rich treasure trove

Real estate A garage sale won't cut it for this stately home's contents.

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It's a problem few of us will need to deal with: We've sold the house, now we have to sell the lights, too. But in the world of mega mansions, downsizing presents unique challenges.

For Melbourne University chancellor Jane Hansen and her husband Paul Little, the sale of Coonac, the gracious Italianate mansion in Toorak that has been their home for 24 years, has brought hundreds of items to market looking for a new home.

Along with 58 chairs, tables, stands and consoles, 11 mirrors, four rugs seeking very large rooms and two hardwood tennis umpires' chairs are 11 chandeliers. The lights were carefully sourced by the couple over a long period, Hansen said, to replace the "bulbs on electrical wires" that greeted them when they moved in. The top chandelier, an antique French gilt bronze affair, has an estimate of \$8000 to \$12,000.

The items are for sale through auctioneer Leonard Joel's online sale, "Coonac", Toorak – Selected Fine Art, Furniture and Objects, in which bidding for successive lots begins closing from 10am on April 20.

Built in 1867 and resting on 1.08 manicured hectares in Clendon Road, Coonac's next chapter will be written by healthcare businessman Dennis Bastas and his wife Georgina, who reportedly paid more than \$130 million for the property last year.

Former investment banker Hansen and Little – he made his fortune building Toll Holdings – are parting with 274 items, including artworks, silverware, porcelain and other objects that defined the couple's aesthetic during their time in the historic home. Viewings for the auction have been strictly by appointment at Coonac, and are booked out, according to Leonard Joel chairman John Albrecht.

Hansen admits to being "heart-broken" about leaving Coonac and a glance at Leonard Joel's website reveals the range of objects going with it. A grand piano by Steinway & Sons, purchased new by Hansen and Little about 25 years ago, so far leads the bidding.

The Steinway carries a pre-sale estimate of \$40,000 to \$50,000 but had already attracted a bid of \$120,000 at



the time of writing. Family members have "tinkled" on the Steinway, Hansen said. But she doesn't play, and the piano is virtually as new.

"We've had guests and places that we support, university and lots of young people coming in playing for events, and they're absolutely thrilled when they get the chance to play on a beautiful Steinway that isn't used very much," Hansen said.

Speaking of music, the Greek mythological figure of Orpheus could charm even rocks and trees with his music and poetry. The auction includes a sensuous marble Orpheus standing 213 centimetres tall.

It was carved in 1885 by William Wetmore Story and carries an estimate of \$200,000 to \$260,000 – the highest in the sale.

Hansen bought Orpheus in 2018 at a Sotheby's auction of artworks from the

collection of Sydney businessman John Schaeffer, who died in 2020.

Orpheus, weighing 800 kilograms, was brought inside the house at Coonac via a wooden ramp that a team of installers built from the garden to the front door.

Orpheus has graced the entrance hall ever since, and was only moved outside to be photographed for the auction catalogue.

The sculpture is in perfect condition and has a "great history behind it," Hansen said.

Story (1819-1895) abandoned the law and moved to Rome to dedicate himself to art. He became a well regarded neoclassical sculptor, and his marble renditions of Medea and Cleopatra are on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Apart from Orpheus, a stunning 17th or 18th century tapestry located in an



A marble statue of Orpheus by William Wetmore Story; a Steinway and Sons grand piano; one of two hardwood tennis court umpire's chairs; and an antique French gilt bronze chandelier.



Numerous bronze greyhounds, gods and historical characters carry estimates between about \$200 and \$4000.

Vases, rugs, carpets, tableware and antique books jostle with an antique Singer sewing machine, picnic sets, a reverie harp and even a picture of Marilyn Monroe by American photographer George Barris.

A six-metre antique dining table with seven removable leaves and matching George IV velvet chairs is not in the auction, and Hansen couldn't be happier.

"I'm thrilled to say it's being donated to a fitting home at the State Library of Victoria," she said.

"It represents a joyful moment amid the very stressful process of leaving a much beloved home."

Hansen and Little's next historic home will be Goodrest in South Yarra. The couple paid a reported \$19.25 million for Goodrest in 2018 and are undertaking meticulous renovations.

"It's been a great joy to do that," Hansen said. "That's a wonderful use of money for future generations."

arched gallery overlooking the entrance hall welcomed Hansen and Little each time they arrived home to Coonac. In the tapestry, figures disport themselves near a pool not unlike the one at Coonac.

The tapestry measures 329 x 369 centimetres with an estimate of \$20,000 to \$30,000.

Elsewhere in the auction are 38 pieces of fine art including a watercolour by the famous Australian modernist, Vida Lahey, titled *A still life of white roses and fuchsias in a glass vase* (estimate \$18,000 to \$20,000).

Hansen and Little bought the painting from the auction of the CBUS Collection of Australian Art in 2022.

From the same CBUS auction they bought Sali Herman's oil painting, *A woman in the doorway of no. 171, 1949*. It now carries an estimate of \$15,000 to \$20,000.

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