



Edward and Sarah Neish at the entrance of Jardinique, a specialist garden antiques business based in Alton, Hampshire

Garden treasures

Run by a husband and wife team, Jardinique in Hampshire is one of the UK's finest destinations for unique outdoor antiques. We go behind the scenes

Words Karen Bray | Photographs Polly Eltes

Set in a series of converted Victorian barns against picturesque parkland that was once part of the Chawton Park Estate, home to Jane Austen, Jardinique couldn't be more perfectly situated. The specialist garden antiques business sells a mixture of outdoor items in its showrooms and large display yard, from statuary, urns and planters to fountains, sundials and furniture, alongside reclaimed former agricultural items such as troughs and staddle stones.

Husband and wife team Edward and Sarah Neish set up Jardinique almost 25 years ago, moving to their current premises in Alton, Hampshire, in 2000. 'We were both qualified chartered surveyors working in the field of rural estate management, but wanted to establish a business of our own,' says Edward. 'I had been trying to source an antique or vintage garden-related anniversary present for Sarah, but this proved much more difficult than anticipated. So, we decided to combine two of our passions – antiques and gardening – to fill a gap in the market, and Jardinique was born.'

'We have always specialised in garden antiques and reclaimed items, because that is where our passion lies,' adds Sarah. 'We want to share our experience and expertise on makers, materials and value, seeking out what people want for the home or garden. We stock anything that could adorn a garden apart from the actual plants.'

Pieces are sourced mainly from the UK, though some are from Europe. 'We buy from auction, the trade (particularly at antiques fairs) and also from private clients,' explains Edward. 'However, over the quarter of a century we have been in business it is getting more and more difficult to find genuine antique and reclaimed garden items. The only explanation for this being that since the late 1990s a large amount of antique garden items have been exported from this country, particularly to the USA, forever lost from Britain.'

Garden antiques and reclamation appeal to the couple for a number of reasons. 'The quality of manufacturing in earlier eras surpasses what is available now at comparable prices,' says Edward. 'Furthermore the weathering and patina developed over time is where much of the value lies. No matter how much you cover items in muck or yoghurt, the genuine results of time spent out in the British climate are always the best.'

With such a wide range of stock to choose from at Jardinique, there really is something to suit everyone's taste, pocket, and size and style

of property. 'Though one of our more expensive items, Edward's personal favourite at the moment is a stoneware lion stamped CROGGAN LAMBETH 1824, which provides us with exactly who, where and when it was made,' explains Sarah. 'This is not only a beautiful piece in wonderful condition, but it still retains the exquisite detail that was initially bestowed on it when it was made nearly 200 years ago. My current favourite is an Archibald Kenrick cast-iron boot scraper, stamped with the maker's name – it is small but beautifully made.'

The Neishes have discovered a wide range of interesting items over the years but the most unusual was a French noonday cannon they bought at an antiques fair. 'The seller clearly didn't know the purpose of the item,' says Sarah. 'It was a small bronze cannon on a calibrated frame incorporating a magnifying glass attached to a marble base engraved with the Roman numerals representing hours. The cannon was designed to fire at noon when the sunlight through the magnifying glass ignited the gunpowder with which it had been earlier charged. It was with great excitement together with much trial and error that we were able to get it working as intended with a loud crack. I always felt it could have been used in an Agatha Christie story or an episode of *Midsomer Murders!*'

Originally Jardinique relied solely on passing trade, but over the years there has been greater emphasis placed on online sales. 'We offer one of the most extensive ranges of consistently good quality garden antiques in the country, backed up with 25 years of expertise. We hope this will ensure the business continues for many years to come.'

Old Park Farm, Abbey Road, Beech, Alton GU34 4AP. Tel: 01420 560055; jardinique.co.uk

Edward and Sarah's tips for sourcing garden antiques

- Look for manufacturers' stamps or marks.
- Be wary of copies in cast iron and lead that purport to be older than they really are.
- Condition is paramount – be particularly wary of damage that is not apparent from a cursory glance.
- If possible view in person as the scale of an item may be difficult to ascertain from a photograph.
- Buy what you really like. From personal experience we have rarely regretted paying too much for something we love.
- If in doubt about anything, do not hesitate to ask the owner for advice. ➤



Clockwise from top left: A view of the Jardinique yard; Edward's favourite item in the yard at the moment is this Croggan Coadestone lion stamped with the maker and date: CROGGAN LAMBETH 1824; a Blashfield stoneware fountain in the form of Triton, circa 1870; an alternative view of the Jardinique yard through railings; detail of an early-20th-century cast-iron urn; a substantial stoneware tazza or fountain basin by JM Blashfield, circa 1865; a selection of steel obelisks and galvanised watering cans; one of the couple's most unusual finds is this 19th-century French noonday cannon sundial





Clockwise from top left:
Another view of the yard including chimney pots;
a weathered 19th-century marble bust of a gentleman;
selection of staddle stones that would look perfectly at home in a country garden;
a carved late-19th-century Scottish terracotta urn; a
19th-century sandstone sundial surrounded by a
curved wrought-iron tree seat;
the back of a 20th-century composition stone cherub;
selection of copper planters;
a 20th-century cast-iron fountain in full working order

