

# PRIVATE AIR

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## LUXURY HOMES

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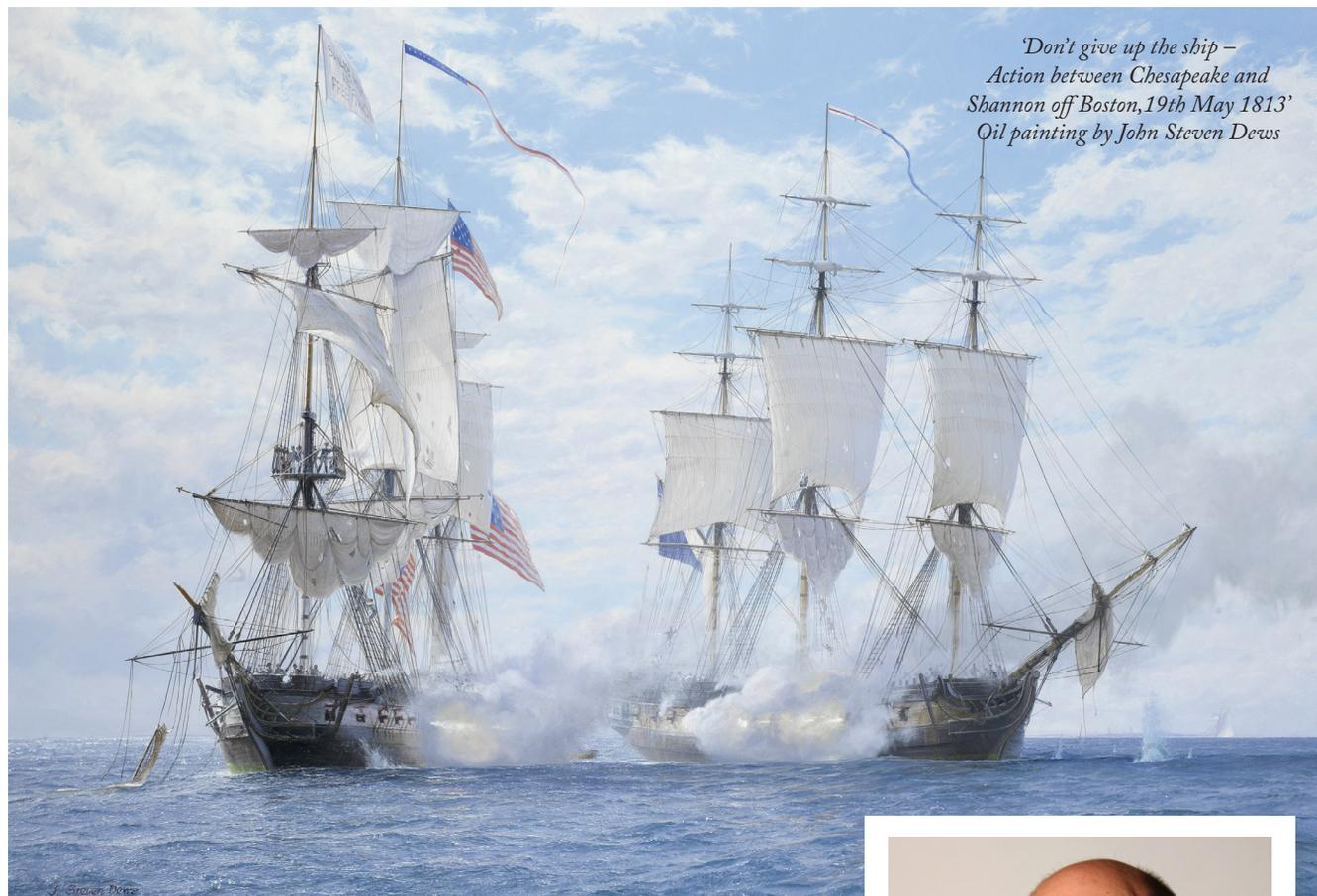
A GATSBYESQUE HAVEN  
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REMEMBERING  
PAOLO SOLERI

LUXURY LIVING AT SEA





*Don't give up the ship –  
Action between Chesapeake and  
Shannon off Boston, 19th May 1813'  
Oil painting by John Steven Dews*

Photography/Images Courtesy of Bonhams



# Bonhams' Marine Sales

We talk to collector specialist Lionel Willis.

*Written By: Will Nobles*

For any romantic, the nautical world is one of boundless allure and adventure, so it's little wonder it has inspired the creation of some great works of art – and inspired many art lovers to collect them.

Painters such as Joseph Mallord William Turner and Emil Nolde are famous for capturing the sea in all its brooding glory, with works such as *Dutch Boats in a Gale* and *The Sea B* – and collectors from all over the world flock to purchase maritime works of art. However, a maritime auction is about more than just nautical art; strange and evocative sea-related paraphernalia like ship surgical instruments, whales' teeth, scrimshaw and bone models are also highly collectable. These objects have tales to tell, and can bring a gathering to life with a history from which you can almost taste the tang of salt.

Renowned auctioneers Bonhams has been selling nautical paintings and valuable maritime objects for more than 30 years. They are one of the top three auction houses in the UK, and have operations worldwide, including in New York, where their second maritime branch is based. Bonhams' maritime pieces are coveted everywhere, especially in the

UK and the United States, and four dedicated sales are held every year.

Lionel Willis, one of Bonhams' collector specialists in London, has a deeply-held lifelong interest in the maritime, and the artworks that spring from it. He has been a yachtsman since childhood, has illustrated marine books, and has worked at Greenwich's National Maritime Museum.

And he reveals that right now, contemporary works on yachting history – “those of John Steven Dews for instance, and classic square rigger portraits by Montague Dawson” – are extremely sought-after. Works by both artists hark back to the golden age of nautical art. In canvases like Dews' depiction of the American frigate *Chesapeake*, there are shades of Édouard Manet, Fitz Henry Lane and Alexey Bogolyubov, and while often dismissed as ‘old fashioned’ they can command extravagant price tags.

## ART

Highlights from Bonhams' recent marine sales in London and New York include a large scale Cornish yachting panorama by Charles Pears, which sold for an extraordinary \$47,830 USD, and a Montague Dawson painting of the handsome commercial sailing ship Young Australia, which went for \$38,260.

Invariably, contemporary canvases are painted from photographs taken on voyages. However, Willis reveals that many of the older paintings were created from genuine, firsthand perspective. "In fact," he enthuses, "some well-known 19th century artists were ex-mariners; Charles Brooking for instance. Others like William Wyllie set up studios on board barges or sailing ships to work out on the water."

Another recent Bonhams sale was, rather poignantly, an unstamped ticket for the launching of R.M.S Titanic from Belfast in 1911. Pieces like this are intriguing in a whole different way to a painting. With the ticket comes a host of questions: Who did the ticket belong to? Why didn't they attend? Clearly this item created a great deal of fascination among its bidders, as it was eventually sold for \$56,250. It is increasingly rare that the likes of a Turner or Nolde turns up at auction. However, the mounting infatuation with the maritime is reflected in the prices that some collectors are willing to relinquish.

The most expensive item Willis has seen sold to date was a scrimshaw whale's tooth, engraved by Thomas Burdett. A few years back it fetched a record price of \$220,000. However, it is not always the most exorbitant items that pique Willis' affection. He will never forget, for instance, the time he sold a pair of dentures worn in the navy by the late Winston Churchill. And from the many lots of sale at the most recent London auction, Willis cites a fondness for a small model 50-gun ship, carved from bone by a 19th century French prisoner of war. It is, says Willis, an example of exquisite workmanship.

Of his all-time favorite lots, Willis cites a lime-wood model of a ship's figurehead, found at a garage sale. This was later identified as the master carver's model for the HMS Queen Charlotte, flagship at the Battle of the Glorious First of June, in 1794. [He also professes a fondness for "a British slaver's logbook from one of the last vessels to legitimately engage in the trade before it was abolished."

The lots for the next auction, on October 2, have yet to be confirmed. But there's no doubt there will be many alluring and adventurous maritime lots to keep Willis – and, indeed, all romantics – excited.

The next maritime auction in New York will take place on June 5. Visit [Bonhams.com](http://Bonhams.com) for details.



*"Little Admiral"*



*"50 Gun Ship"*