

travel posters

The vivid images used to advertise holidays in the 1920s and 1930s still have the power to transport, says Simon de Burton.

If ever George Koenigsaecker tires of the breathtaking views of the Mississippi river meandering beneath his hilltop Iowa home, he needs only to step into his own drawing room to enjoy a realistic glimpse of a Hawaiian island, the Norwegian fjords or even the Amazon jungle.

Koenigsaecker is just one of an ever-growing number of armchair travellers to have fallen beneath the spell of the first-class travel posters created during the early decades of the 20th century to entice the adventurous into a world that was gradually being made smaller by trains, planes and automobiles. At the time, such ephemera seemed like a cheap and cheerful way to promote the services of shipping companies, airlines and railways and was designed to be entirely disposable – but in recent years surviving examples have become highly collectable.

"I began collecting about 10 years ago simply because I saw a poster I liked the look of," says Koenigsaecker, a private equity investor. "Now I have more than 20 on display around my home and others that I keep rolled up in tubes. They combine so many elements – nostalgia, superb artwork, dramatic depth of colour and an insight into the travel history of the 1920s and 1930s. I find it



MONACO

"Italian railway posters are rarer because ENIT didn't keep an archive and many posters were destroyed in the war."

remarkable, for example, that even at the height of the Great Depression there were still cruise ships sailing from New York to Europe, or that you could go to Hawaii from North America by flying boat."

Values of travel posters have been steadily rising since the subject began to attract serious collectors after New York's Swann Galleries staged the first dedicated poster auctions in 1979. The best examples by leading artists such as Frenchmen Roger Broders and Adolphe Mouron Cassandre, Britain's Norman Wilkinson and Frank Mason, or Irishman Paul Henry can reach over £13,000.

Nicolette Tomkinson of Christie's in South Kensington, London, which began selling travel posters in 1982, says the golden age of Britain's railways during the 1920s and 1930s resulted

Clockwise from top: Mouron's *Nord Express*, 1927 (£8,000-£12,000; Christie's). D'Alesi's *Venise*, 1899, \$4,500, International Poster Gallery. Clérissi's *Monaco*, c1930s, £1,400, Poster Classics.

in some of the best images but, by the very nature of their role as short-lived advertisements, relatively few have survived: "Sometimes travel posters are numbered, but in most cases we never really know what the print runs were. What is certain is that only a small fraction of those produced actually survived, because they were either pasted over or torn down. A number of collections were saved, however, by people who had connections to the printers, the artists or the railway companies."

One notable cache of posters advertising Britain's rail networks recently emerged, surprisingly, in Australia. The owner's father, a teacher, had written to the various train companies during the 1920s asking for examples of their travel posters to use in his geography lessons; he received more than 200 which Christie's has gradually dispersed for a total of around £200,000.

Although posters promoting trips to once-popular British holiday resorts ranging from Skegness to St Andrews sell well, it is those depicting more glamorous Continental destinations such as Monaco, Sainte-Maxime, Paris or Rome that many collectors find the most uplifting.

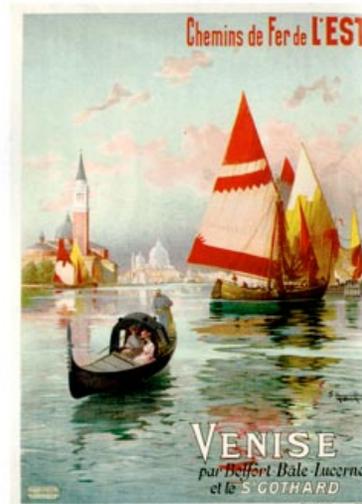
Bruce Skilbeck runs Poster Classics near Annecy, France, and specialises in travel posters from France and Italy. The former produced many notable

works commissioned by PLM (Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée) Railways from leading artists such as Roger Broders, Alfonse Mucha, Geo Dorival and Julien Lacaze. "When PLM was formed it united many different train companies, which went to different destinations, meaning a huge number of posters were created," says Skilbeck. "Many of these were archived and a great deal came to the open market about 10 to 15 years ago so there is quite a wide selection available. An average example costs £600 to £800, an above average one £1,300 to £1,500, and you'll pay anything from £3,000 to £10,000 for a

top-quality piece by someone such as Roger Broders. Italian railway posters are rarer and often more expensive because ENIT, the national railway, didn't keep an archive, and many posters were destroyed



SOUTHERN RAILWAY - CHEMINS DE FER BELGES
LONDRES BRUXELLES RIGA
PARIS LIEGE BERLIN VARSOVIE
COMPAGNIE DES WAGONS - LITS



during the war. And whereas the French are not especially interested in collecting their own travel posters, the Italians are."

But the beauty of travel posters is that they are not categorised merely by country, but also by modes of transport and activities, meaning there are images that hold appeal to fans of cars, trains and aeroplanes, others that attract those drawn to the glamour of steam-driven liners and still others that are bought by habitués of top ski resorts such as St Moritz and Gstaad.

One such collector of ski-themed travel posters is Joanna Yellowlees-Bound who

owns Erna Low, an independent ski holiday company that was founded in London 77 years ago by a female Austrian graduate of the same name. "My interest in travel posters related to skiing came through my job," says Yellowlees-Bound. "Erna Low used to collect anything to do with the history of the sport and, because I have a passion for skiing, I decided to do the same by buying ski posters. I bought my first one about 15 years ago, at which time they could be picked up at auction for around £150 – those same posters are now worth £1,000 or more. I find them very evocative of the sport I love and the colours are extraordinarily bold and warm."

Indeed, it is that strength of colour that makes travel posters so appealing to so many. It is the result of a special, multicoloured stone lithography technique that was pioneered by artist Jules Cheret in the 1870s. If you are in the market for a poster, ensure that the colours are as vibrant as possible.

"Just like any other work of art, condition is very important," says Bruce Skilbeck. "The colours in a poster that has been kept rolled and out of sunlight for the best part of 100 years will look totally different to those of a poster that has been hanging on the wall. Unless the poster is very rare, values are also reduced if margins are missing, if there are folds or if there have been restorations. But different collectors look for different things. An Italian is likely to be more accepting of a poster with tears and creases. American collectors, however, want their vintage travel posters to look virtually brand-new." ♦

ski posters

Mountains have a powerful hold on the human spirit, and the invention of ski tourism artists a new medium in which to explore the potent allure of snow, altitude and speed.

a century ago gave
By Ned Denny



MOUNTAINS that have been cultivated for skiing are a uniquely strange environment. The distant jagged peaks, radiant snowy whiteness and eggshell-blue sky all speak of the sublime, and yet the skier's immediate surroundings are deeply domesticated. Every sharp edge, every reminder of death, has been ironed out from the piste down which he or she flies. The slopes are, in fact, as neatly carpeted and meticulously cared for as any suburban lounge.

Skiing, too, is strange. Seen from one perspective, it represents man at his most

and so the artists emphasised the calm beauty of the mountains and the serene expressions on the skiers' faces.

Later, as skiing began to develop as a competitive sport, the designs became racier and progressively more modernistic – the mountains depicted as clean lines against the sky, the skiers simplified into bright arrows of concentrated energy. Artists also found countless different ways to depict what is essentially a single subject. In one, the mountains are stark, blood-red forms that seem to be rising from the centre of the earth; in another, they're as clean and

often outstanding designs. A beautiful 1924 design advertising Chamonix – an orange-clad skier against a background of ghostly-pale mountains and a deep blue sky – sold at the Ski Sale at Christie's South Kensington last year for £1,380.

But perhaps the best method of all is to collect the work of a specific designer. A handful stand out as being particularly prolific, skilled or innovative, and a serious collector would probably want to focus on one or more of these. Possibly the most distinguished of all was the Art Deco designer Roger Broders (1883-1953), who produced sophisticated,

£2,000-£3,000, which will be coming up at its next ski sale on February 22.

The slightly later work of Bernard Villemont (1911-1989) is also highly sought after. Freer and more flowing, his designs emphasise the speed and grace of skiing itself. The luminous "Sports d'Hiver, France" (1954), which sold last year for £690, is a superb example of his work. A poster advertising the resort of Abelboden (1947) by another popular designer, the Swiss Herbert Leupin, depicts the mountain as a beaming, bearded snowman dotted with skiers and cradling a village in his left arm.

A more original approach would be to focus on one of the quirks of the genre, such as posters depicting skiing animals. There are numerous examples, all from Switzerland – a weird poster advertising St Moritz by Alex Walter Diggelmann shows a skiing rabbit (£1,995), an anonymous design for Le Valais has a skiing fox (£437), and another – for the resort of Stoos – shows a skiing penguin (£862).

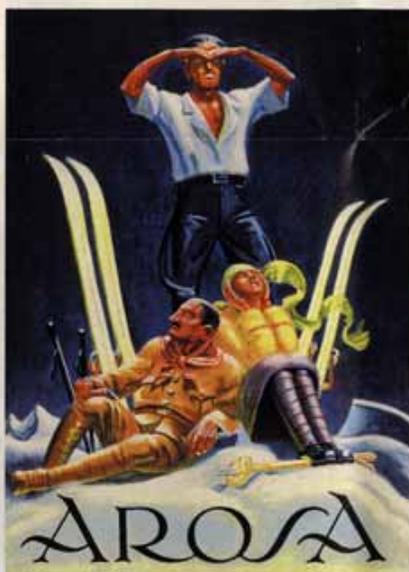
Very early posters are another interesting area for the collector. An Art Nouveau-influenced design of two elegant women skiing arm-in-arm and dating from 1911 sold for £4,370. A charming lithograph by the Swiss designer Albert Muret and dating from 1913 (£1,000-£1,500) depicts a line of what look like black-clad friars skiing down from a distant monastery.

The chief sources of posters are ski and sporting memorabilia auctions, but websites such as Art-and-posters.com, Vintagepostersonline.com and Posterclassics.com also offer a steady choice at a range of prices. There does not yet exist a definitive reference book on the subject, so research is best done by looking up the artist in a general reference work.

Skiing encapsulates all the ambiguities of our relationship to the natural world: when man takes to the wilderness en masse, what of the wilderness remains? Looking at a ski poster, however, you can

participate in the dream of moving swiftly through the peaks without actually inflicting your presence on the mountain. And with the value of posters rising by 50 per cent in the past five years, it's an offer the enthusiast can hardly afford to refuse. ♦

In one poster the mountains are stark, blood-red forms that seem to be rising from the centre of the earth; in another, they're as clean and soft as freshly-laundered towels.



preposterous. Clad in lurid colours, the creature with more time than sense slides repeatedly and pointlessly downhill. Seen from another, it represents man at his most elegant – only in such activities does our slow and unwieldy body come anywhere near the kind of grace exhibited in the animal kingdom.

The multitude of posters depicting skiers and mountains are, above all, celebratory, enshrining TS Eliot's words in *The Wasteland*: "In the mountains, there you feel free." The very first ski posters appeared in France – normally on railway billboards – around the beginning of the last century. Skiing at that time was perceived (much as the various "extreme" sports are today) as somewhat foolhardy,

soft as freshly-laundered towels. In some designs the skiers dominate the scene, and in others they're dwarfed by the empty majesty of their surroundings.

Although a single, carefully chosen poster would probably be the perfect present for a ski enthusiast, there are various approaches available to the aspiring collector. The most obvious is to collect posters from a certain country, the work of each nation having its own characteristics. The most prolific producers of ski posters were the French and the Swiss; posters from lesser-known skiing nations such as Italy or Finland are less common. Another option is to collect by resort, the most famous – Davos, St Moritz, Wengen, Chamonix – having produced unique and

stripped down designs for the Paris-Lyon-Mediterranean Railway (one of the main ski poster commissioners) throughout the 1930s.

One of the defining characteristics of Broders' work is his avoidance of primary colours – in a poster such as "Glacier de Bionnassay" (about £800 to £1,200), the mountains and sky are a bewitching blend of violet, grey, sea-green and peach. Another work, the charming "Les Sports d'Hivers, St Pierre de Chartreuse" (1930) was sold last year for £5,520 and Christie's South Kensington has another example of the same poster, estimated at

Top: detail from "Pontresina", £700-£900, by Alex Walter Diggelmann. Above, left to right: Bernard Villemont's "Sports d'Hiver, France"; Karl Bickel's "Arosa"; Roger Broders' "St Pierre de Chartreuse". Below: a Diggelmann rabbit.

