



LEFT: Andrew Simpson stands next to a poster showing Catherine Zeta Jones in *The Mask of Zorro* wearing a dress which he has in his collection.

PICTURES: IAN CLELAND

He's got a dress worn by Catherine Zeta Jones, a rope from which Pierce Brosnan's stunt double dangled and a spell book from a Harry Potter Movie. And, as Tony Greenway discovers, movie memorabilia collector Andrew Simpson has even got his own Jurassic Park . . .

Memorabilia has reel appeal

Andrew Simpson is studying a dress once worn by Catherine Zeta Jones. "It's a fabulous thing, isn't it?" he says, holding up the hem. "The detail is amazing." He's right, too. It is beautiful. In fact, there's only one thing wrong with this dress as far as I can see: Catherine Zeta Jones is no longer in it.

But then this is a movie costume from *The Mask of Zorro*, the 1998 swashbuckling adventure also starring Antonio Banderas and Anthony Hopkins. "The dress was donated personally by Catherine and Sony Pictures for auction," says Andrew. "When I got it I put it up for sale and, originally, the price-tag was £3,500. But this is the problem with my job. I get so attached to some of the things I buy that I have a hard time parting with them."

He pauses and laughs. "I'm not going to WEAR it, obviously. . ."

York-based Andrew is a film memorabilia dealer and the creator and director of *MovieMania*, a web-based collectables business specialising in props from the silver screen. Andrew's world is a movie fan's paradise.

And so, right now, is his house. When we meet, he has a selection of Hollywood movie props spread out on a table in his sitting room: A skull used in *Terminator 3* (£245); a rubber bat from last year's blockbuster, *Batman Begins* (£175); a spell-book from the Harry Potter films (£495); a telephone from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (£445); a dinner knife from the dining scenes of *Titanic* (£230), and a walkie-talkie used by Michael J Fox in the *Back to the Future* series (£650).

In a glass case is a section of bungee rope that dangled Pierce Brosnan (or his double at any rate) over a dam in the 007 movie, *GoldenEye* (£495); and some original art department storyboards detailing an action sequence from another James Bond film, *The*

World is Not Enough (£495). One of Andrew's current favourite items is a fabulous prosthetic ape mask, created for the beginning of Stanley Kubrick's classic 1969 sci-fi blockbuster, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which retails at £860. He even has a piece of the original Hollywood sign, which was taken down and replaced in 1978.

So where on earth does he find these things? Well, it's all down to who – and what – you know. Andrew obtains most of his props and artefacts through his hard-won contacts at film studios, art departments, film conventions and memorabilia fairs, plus he buys movie collectables at auction. And experience tells him what will sell, and what won't. "I've made mistakes in the past," he says. "Vintage posters are tricky things, I've learned. Some can go for thousands . . . others won't sell at all. It's difficult to know what will strike a chord and what won't."

Andrew's main problem, however, is "provenance". He has to go all out to prove that a prop is authentic – otherwise he won't sell it. "The number one question I'm asked is: 'Did it really appear in the film?' And that's a valid query because I'd ask it myself. In this business, provenance is vitally important. So the majority of my work isn't about finding the props – it's about proving they're genuine."

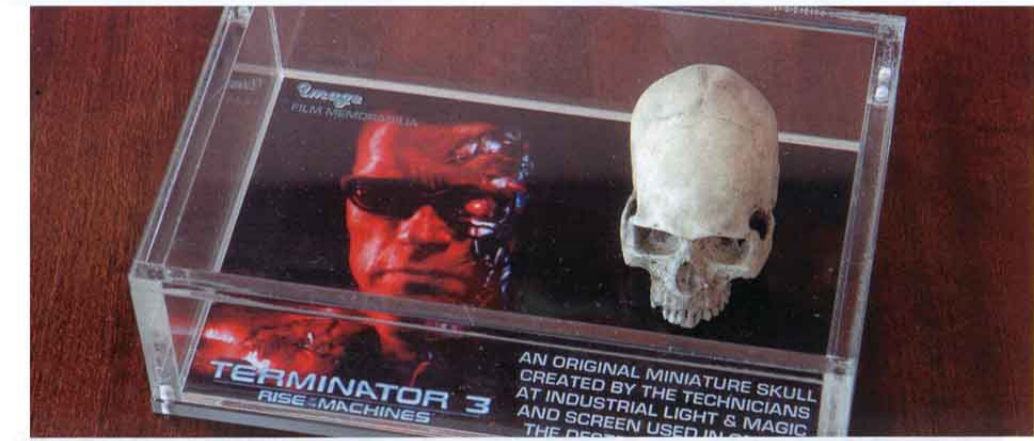
"There are a lot of dealers who simply print out their own certificates of authenticity, but I wanted to go one step further than that. So I'll try and get the art director of the film to sign a letter of authenticity, too, or I'll secure a letter from the movie studios."

This research can take months, but Andrew has no time for people who offer "authentic" film props knowing they aren't the real deal. "It's fraudulent," he says. "And immoral." He also buys from established auction houses like Bonhams and Sotheby's and Christie's "and they do all the authenticating work so I don't have to!" This hard graft pays off. One of the more expensive props Andrew has sold was the cane used by Richard Attenborough in *The*

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Andrew's collection includes this bungee cord section used by stuntman Wayne Michaels in the Bond movie *GoldenEye*



ABOVE: A miniature skull used in the destruction scenes in *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*. RIGHT: Andrew has his own Jurassic Park in the back garden

Steven Spielberg dinosaur epic, *Jurassic Park* (which is, coincidentally, Andrew's all-time favourite movie). That fetched \$5000 at auction.

Andrew, 21, started collecting in his teens. "It began as a hobby," he says. "My first-ever movie item was an Alfred Hitchcock autograph. Then I got a prop from *The Terminator* and it grew from there. It's so important to find something you like to do – and I've always had a passion for film."

Which is something of an understatement. As a teenager, Andrew built a full-scale replica of the *Jurassic Park* set (minus the genetically-enhanced dinosaurs) in his back garden, and turned his dad's shed into a cinema with screen, carpets, and aisle lights (now used as a storage area). In 1999, Channel 4's *The Big Breakfast* swore his mother to secrecy and sent Richard Bacon to Andrew's house with a camera crew. "There was a knock on my bedroom door and a film crew came in, a bright light was shone in my face and Richard Bacon said: 'You're live on Channel 4!'" remembers Andrew. "It was amazing – but nerve-wracking. We went outside to show Richard the *Jurassic Park* set, and mum was watching the pictures on TV. . . which were coming from our garden."

Creating *MovieMania* in 2002 means Andrew can make a business from his hobby. For a year, he was located in the Antiques Centre in Stonegate, in York, but is now

operating from his home in the east of the city. He still keeps his autographs at the Antiques Centre, however: One of Alfred Hitchcock is for sale at £850, while an Audrey Hepburn signature will set you back £545.

For all his experience, Andrew still feels uneasy at auctions – and for good reason. "It's so easy to make a bid," he smiles. "All you have to do is raise your paddle. You can get quite daunted by auctions when you first start going to them, because your heart can rule your head. Part of me – the business side – thinks: 'Stick to your budget, make a profit'. The other part of me – the film fan – is thinking: 'Ooh, a prop from *ET*! That would look good in my personal collection!' So it's still a battle."

Andrew also provides a prop-hunting service. "I never guarantee that I'll find something I'm asked to get," he says, "but I'm fortunate because of my contacts to be in with a good chance."

"Except some people want things that I couldn't possibly get – like the leather jacket worn by John Travolta in *Grease*. That's in *Planet Hollywood* in London. Then there's Marilyn Monroe's dress from *Bus Stop*. I think that was sold for £11.5 million at Christie's."

"You have to be realistic."

■ Contact www.moviemanianonline.co.uk

