

Lost and Found

Hundreds of rare ski posters, long forgotten in a Scottish attic, are now restored and for sale.

BY EVERETT POTTER

When Robert Walker Johnston died in 2003, he left a large house in Paisley, Scotland as well as its contents to his son, Russell, a London lawyer.

“My father was a great collector of paper,” recalls Russell. “The house was filled with books, mostly first editions. He used to drive my mother crazy with all the books around.”

As Russell was going through his father’s house, he eventually got around to the attic. It was there that he discovered his father’s greatest secret. Meticulously stored, often in their original mailing tubes, were original vintage ski posters. Hundreds and hundreds of ski posters. As Johnston began the slow process of carefully removing them from their tubes and unrolling them, it dawned on him what he

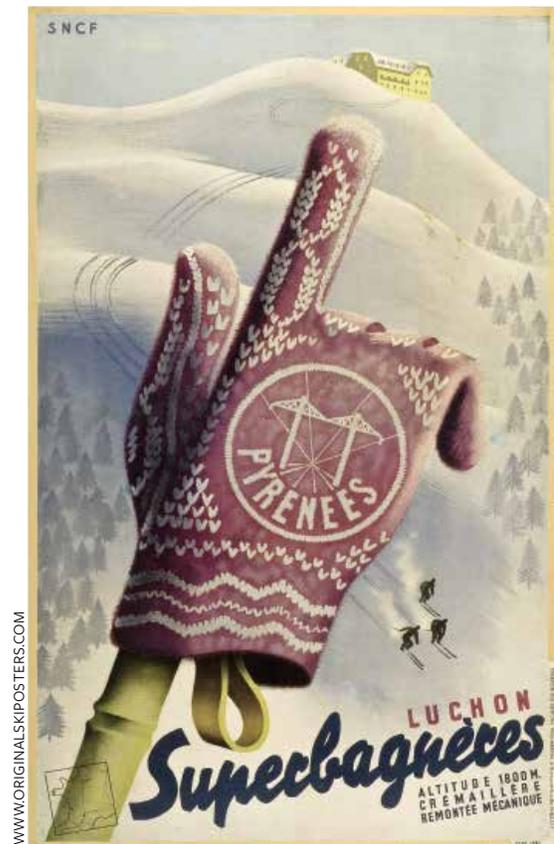
had found...a remarkable collection of nearly 1,000 vintage ski posters, many of them in pristine condition.

“It was very fortunate,” said Johnston, with classic Scottish understatement. “I could never have afforded to buy them. I was unaware of any of this in the attic, and my father never spoke about the collection. I honestly think he forgot about them.”

Once Johnston realized what he



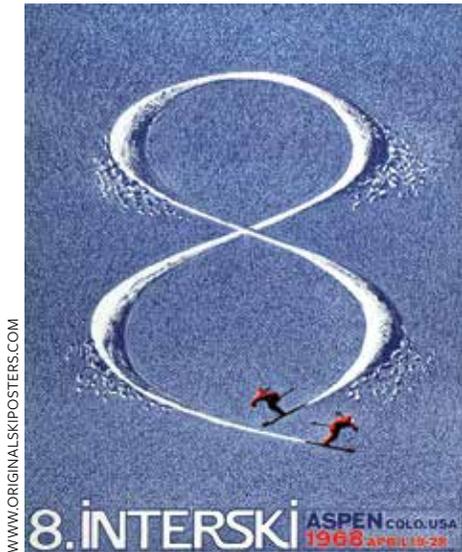
This legendary 1938 poster for New York’s Lake Placid Club, by artist Amy Jones, is priced at \$5,812.



A rare Ronald Hugon poster for Superbagnères, a resort in the French Pyrenees, sells for \$3,212.

(continued on page 20)

(continued from page 19)



This poster, an anonymous and scarce work, commemorates the 8th International Ski Congress (Interski), held in Aspen in 1968; it sells for \$1,682.

was sitting on, he says, “I began to visit the odd auction and started attending the annual January ski poster auction at Christie’s in London.”

Johnston learned about the artists who had created the posters. He also learned about poster condition and why it matters to collectors. While many of his father’s posters were in good condition, some were decidedly not and he sent them out for repair. Over time, he learned how his father had assembled his remarkable collection.

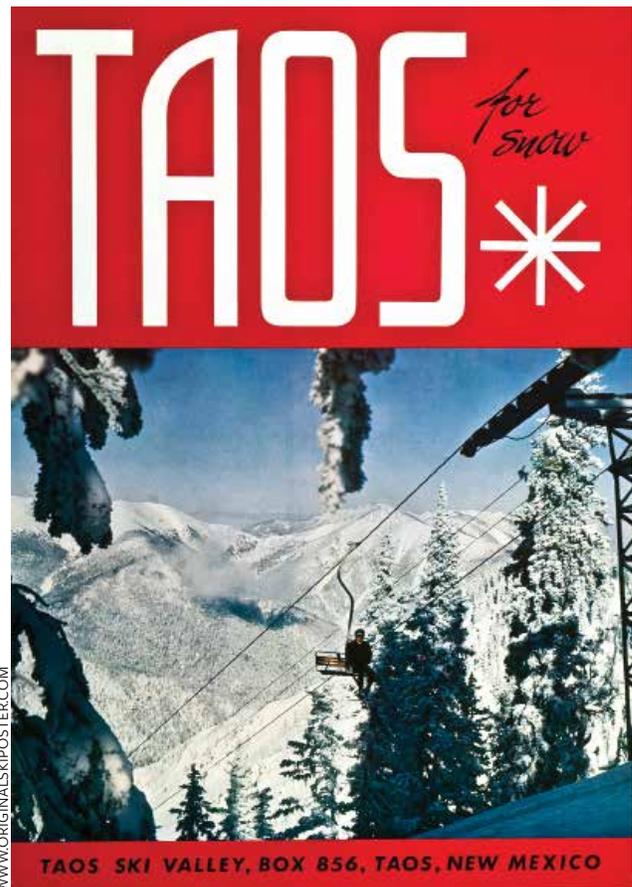
Robert Walker Johnston was born in Glasgow in 1930 and joined the Royal Air Force at age 17 in 1947, training as a navigator. He was stationed in Vienna, and flew for the RAF on British Lancasters. Then he was loaned out to the U.S. Air Force, to serve as a crewman on Flying Fortresses. He also had ample opportunity to travel around post-war Europe, visiting Germany, Italy, Switzerland and France.

“When he traveled, he was ripping ski posters off walls,” laughs Russell Johnston. His father became increasingly serious about his collection, and began to seek out the artists who had designed these posters as well as the printers who produced them.

“He maintained those relationships through the mid 1960s,” Johnston says, even as his father went on to become a professional soccer player in Scotland and Canada, and later worked for Lockheed and finally Chivas Regal. “They would send him proofs of the posters, or extra copies.”

Robert Walker Johnston’s passion was for skiing and mountaineering posters, and the collection is astonishing, with major works by legendary poster artists such as Ludwig Hohlwein, Emil Cardinaux and Roger Broders.

Yet it’s not the major works, which can turn up at Swann Gal-



Left: The collection includes Soviet ski posters rarely if ever seen in the West, including this depiction of an anonymous racer in the 1952 Third Masters Tournament (\$13,460). Above: A 1965 Taos photo poster (\$1,147).



Above: A Northland poster by Pierre Kramer may be one-of-a-kind (\$14,530). Right: This unique poster by Martin Peikart shows a woman napping on a chalet roof in Switzerland (\$10,400).



leries and Christie's from time to time, which are of the greatest interest. Instead it's the true rarities, the anonymous early posters for resorts all over the world, the less celebrated works by famous graphic artists, and posters that are so scarce that only a single copy or two is known to previously exist.

The Johnston collection includes such incredible rarities as Amy Jones' legendary poster for "Lake Placid Club" from 1938, which is available for 3,800 GBP (\$5,812 with U.S. dollar at \$1.53). Artist Ronald Hugon's "Pyrenees: Superbagneres Luchon," is also a find and priced at 2,100 GBP (\$3,212). One of the true discoveries in the collection is a cache of Soviet era ski posters rarely if ever seen in the West. They include an anonymous poster depicting a ski racer for "Third Masters Tournament" from 1952. It's priced at 8,800 GBP (\$13,460) but when it sold at Christie's in 2008—in what

must have been a very heated sale—it went for an astonishing 36,000 GBP (\$55,062), making it the most expensive ski poster ever sold.

While European and U.S. resorts are well represented, there are also posters advertising resorts in India, Japan, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Japan. Indeed, "Mt Fuji View Hotel: Lake Kawaguchi" is from 1935, a prewar poster celebrating ice skating and skiing. At 5,800 GBP (\$8,871), its price is probably in keeping with its scarcity.

Johnston also has quite a stash of photographic posters from the 1950s and early 1960s. Prosaic and less prized when they were created, they are now in some demand simply because few of them still exist. They include "Taos for Snow," a 1965 anonymous photographic poster for 750 GBP (\$1,147), as well as Paul Ryan's close-up of a skier in a USA racing helmet for the 1968 Winter Games in Grenoble for 480



Paul Ryan's photo of a skier in a U.S. racing helmet, advertising the 1968 Winter Olympics, are now in some demand because few copies exist (\$735).

(continued on page 22)

(continued from page 21)

GBP (\$735). A poster commemorating “Aspen 8 Interski” from 1968, an anonymous and scarce work, is priced at 1,100 GBP (\$1,682).

Johnston’s personal favorites include rarities by the artist Martin Peikart, including one for the resort of Mürren for 5,900 GBP (\$9,025) and another for “Montreux-Oberland Bernois: MOB,” featuring a female skier napping on the roof of a rustic chalet, an odd image and a true find even at 6,800 GBP (\$10,400). He also has several posters by artists Pierre Kramer, including an advertisement for Northland skis, which Johnston says may well be the only one in existence. He’s asking 9,500 GBP (\$14,530) for it.

Johnston had the first 100 posters cleaned and repaired in 2007. That’s about the time he created his site, originalskiposters.com.

“I started buying ski posters as well,” Johnston says. “People would see the images on the site, inquire

about the price, and then tell me they had an identical poster that they wanted to sell.”

Johnston, who learned to ski in Scotland in 1975, now skis in Verbier every winter with friends, and also skis in the Italian Dolomites and Austria. It was a different story with Robert Walker Johnston.

“Never in his life did he get on a pair of skis,” admits Johnston. “I don’t think he liked the the idea of skis moving under him.” ❄️

This 1935 prewar poster celebrates skating and skiing at Mt. Fuji in Japan. Its \$8,871 price reflects its scarcity.



WWW.ORIGINALSKIPOSTERS.COM

JUST THE FACTS

Original posters from the Robert Walker Johnston archive are available for purchase at www.originalskiposters.com. Johnston also offers giclée prints of many images—high-quality reproductions at a fraction of the price. The posters are also available from www.antiqueskishop.com, Europe’s only online vintage ski equipment site.

2015 CORPORATE SPONSORS

ISHA deeply appreciates your generous support

WORLD CUP (\$1,000)

Alyeska Resort
BEWI Productions
Bogner of America
Darn Tough Vermont
Descente North America, Inc.
Dynastar | Lange | Look
Elan | Alpina Sports
Gordini USA Inc. | Kombi LTD
Gorsuch
HEAD Wintersports
Intuition Sports, Inc.
K2 Sports
Marker-Völkl USA
National Ski Areas Association (NSAA)
Polarmax
Rossignol
SnowSports Industries America (SIA)
Ski Racing
Snowsports Merchandising Corp.
Sun Valley Resort
Terramar Sports
Vintage Ski World
Whistler Blackcomb
World Cup Supply, Inc.

GOLD (\$700)

KJUS North America, Inc.
Line Skis
Mammoth Mountain
Obermeyer
Race Place/BEAST Tuning Tools
Snowflake Nordic/George Hovland
The Ski Company/Vicki and Gary Profetta

SILVER (\$500)

Alta Ski Area
Dalbello Sports
Dale of Norway
Deer Valley Resort
Ecosign Mountain Resort Planners
Eldora Mountain Resort
Hickory & Tweed Ski Shop
Hotronic USA, Inc.
MasterFit Enterprises
Metropolitan Ski Council of New York
Mountain Force NA
NILS, Inc.
Omni Promotional
Patagonia
Prance Corp.
Reliable Racing
Russell Mace Vacation Homes



SILVER (\$500) continued

Schoeller Textile USA
Scott Sports
Seirus Innovations
SKI | Skiing | Warren Miller Entertainment
Ski Utah
SmartWool
Smith Optics
Sports Specialists, LTD
Swany USA
Thinsulate/3M
Thule, Inc.
Vertical Source, Inc.

For information, contact:

Andy Simonds

andy@skiinghistory.org (978.973.1451)

Dick Cutler

dickcutler@aol.com (203.354.2217)