

THE Arts

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From Ashes, Reviving a Place of Wild Dreams



Inside Deyrolle, part taxidermy shop, part museum, in Paris, before the fire, above, and shortly after in February, right.

By ELAINE SCIOLINO

PARIS — When a fire ripped through Deyrolle, the beloved taxidermy establishment here, early one morning last February, it was as if a dagger had been plunged into the heart of Paris.

Deyrolle has always been more than a shop on the classy Rue du Bac. Founded 177 years ago by Jean-Baptiste Deyrolle, a well-known entomologist, Deyrolle has been a natural history emporium with the look and feel of a museum, except that just about everything was for sale.

Deyrolle's stuffed menagerie — from black crows to big-game animals — its cases of butterflies and beetles, its signature pedagogic posters and century-old prints have made it a place of pilgrimage.

So after a short circuit triggered a fire in the shop, Paris seemed to come together in an unusual display of solidarity.

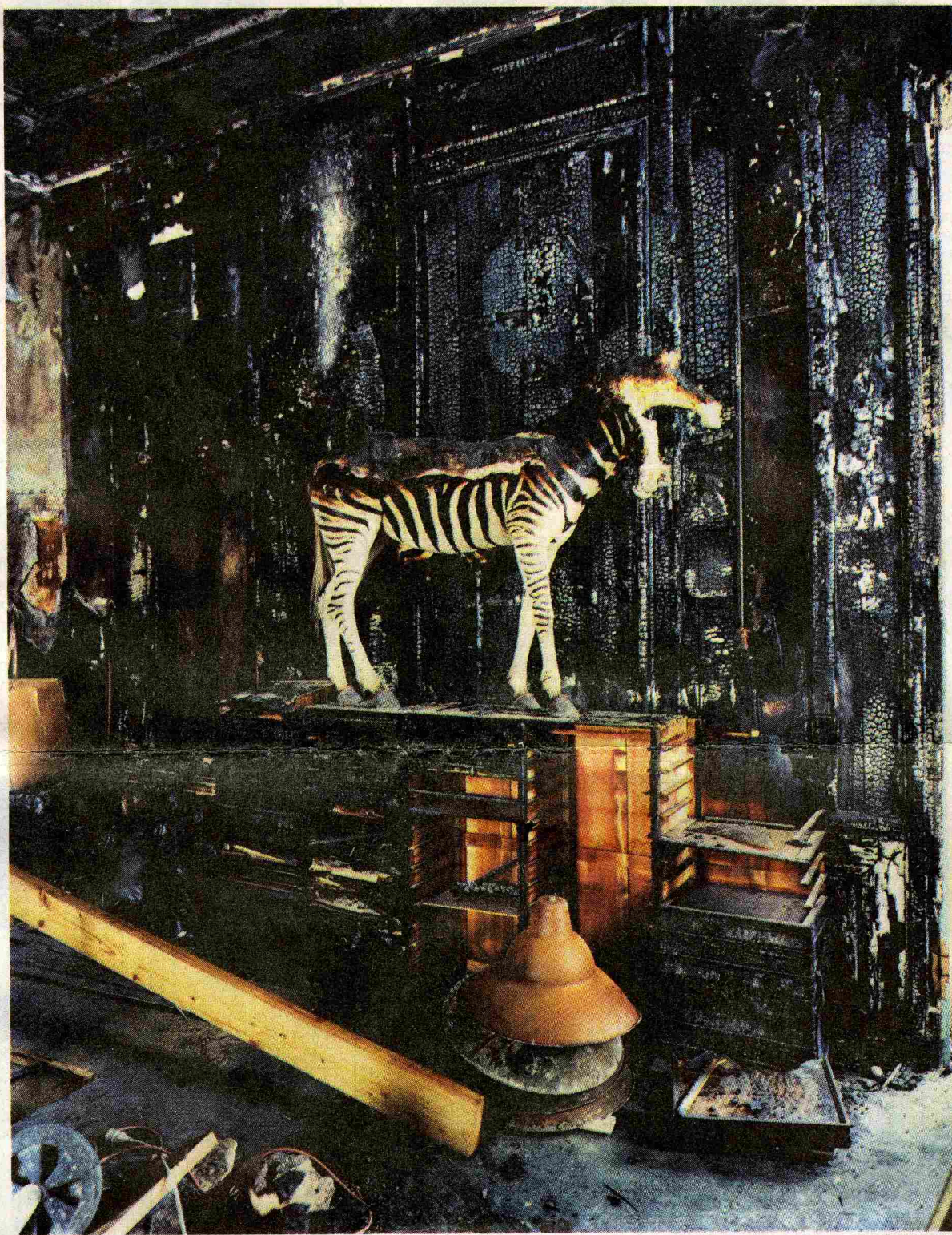
French soldiers on a routine patrol smelled the smoke and tried to secure the building. They were joined by dozens of firefighters and hundreds of police officers in battling the blaze. The French Army opened one of its nearby military depots as a warehouse for the burned animals and objects.

Michel Dumont, then the mayor of the Seventh Arrondissement, where Deyrolle is, rushed to the scene and lamented the store's demise, saying, "It's a catastrophe, the end of an institution."

Ninety percent of the shop's stock, including most of the animals, a celebrated fossil collection, an antique skeleton of a Nile perch and a 19th-century diorama of more than 100 birds, was lost. The dark-wood cabinets that housed birds, butterflies and beetles went up in flames.

But the 18th-century building remained in-

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tact. Prince Louis Albert de Broglie, a former banker who created a national conservatory with 650 varieties of tomatoes at his chateau, had bought the financially troubled Deyrolle in 2001 and eventually restored it to solvency. He vowed to rebuild.

The business had been underinsured. Mr. de Broglie (whose princely title dates to the Holy Roman Empire) abandoned his pride and pleaded for help in raising the more than \$1.25 million he would need. He created an organization, Friends of Deyrolle, and welcomed donations of stuffed animals and other objects from museums and private collectors.

"Deyrolle was the place in Paris you'd first come as a child, then later bring your friends, then your fiancée, then your own children and your grandchildren," Mr. de Broglie (pronounced duh-BROY) said. "How could people close their eyes and let it disappear? It would have been impossible."

Christine Albanel, the minister of culture, sent out an all-points bulletin to the provincial museums of France for the donation of classic wooden display cases.

Hermès reissued its "Plumes" scarf in a limited edition to raise money.

Gallimard, the publishing house, joined in the fund-raising by releasing a slim history of Deyrolle with a preface by the French novelist Pierre Assouline.

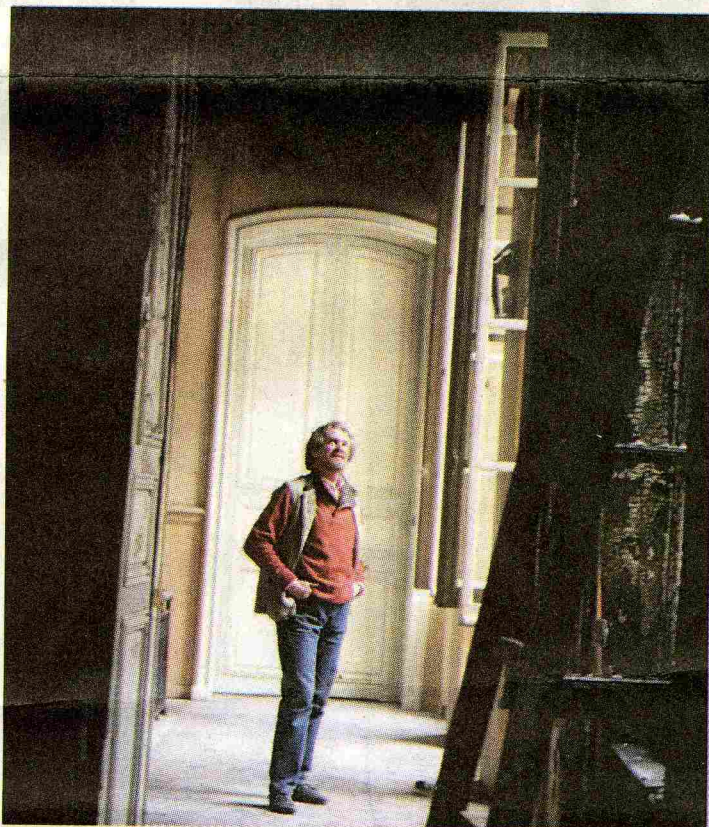
One French woman donated 50 boxes of butterflies. A Frenchman gave back the head of a bull he had bought at Deyrolle a few months before.

Artists and photographers who had drawn inspiration from one of the most celebrated taxidermy sites in the world donated their works. Christie's Europe offered to sell those items as a fund-raising auction, waiving its commission along the way.

ONLINE: 'A PLACE OF DREAMS'

A slide show of images of Deyrolle, before and after the fire, and of pieces included in the fund-raiser auction:

nytimes.com/design



SANDRINE DE NICOLAY

Prince Louis Albert de Broglie at the Deyrolle after the fire.

Since the fire, Mr. de Broglie has reopened some of the rooms in the multistoried, 4,300-square-foot space. The back corridors still smell of smoke, but new animals are slowly moving in: a giraffe, a lion, an ostrich, a camel, a zebra, a tiger, a peacock, among many others.

The ground floor is being used to display a retail line of designer garden tools and accessories called le Prince Jardinier (the Gardener Prince), which Mr. de Broglie created.

On Thursday evening the recently renovated Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature in the Marais hosted the Christie's auction.

"When I heard about the fire, I was deeply moved," said Claude d'Anthenaise, the museum's director, who first visited Deyrolle as a child. "Deyrolle is part of French heritage. There is a great affinity with our museum. Our two houses are inhabited by people who have a love affair with nature."

The sale included photographs by the French artists Bettina Rheims and Yann Arthus-Bertrand, the American photographer Nan Goldin, the American installation artist Mark Dion and the French sculptor Claude Lalanne.

Mr. de Broglie took the gavel himself to sell the last item, a collage made by a child that symbolized Deyrolle past and future. François Curiel, chairman of Christie's Europe and the main auctioneer, bought it for \$1,250,

then gave it back so that it could be sold again.

The auction earned \$330,000, with highlights including "Skull," a sculpture made with synthetic materials and a stuffed ferret, by the Belgian artist Jan Fabre, which went for nearly \$32,000, and "Burnt Trophies," an installation with stuffed birds and hunting trophies, by Mr. Dion, which netted \$33,000. Most of the money will be used to restore an antique wooden cabinet that stored butterflies.

"I'm here to support a friend," said Cyrille Mansour, who bought a drawing for \$4,500. "In this sale it's the friendship, the human aspect that interested me more than the works in question. There are collectors here who really love the place. Nobody is here to speculate on the art."

At a dinner at the residence of the United States ambassador, Craig R. Stapleton, on Wednesday evening, which included curators from a score of American museums, there were stories of hiding Deyrolle butterflies and beetles in suitcases to elude nosy American customs' inspectors and speculation about the store's future.

"I bought my first horned beetle there in 1968," said Bruce Guenther, chief curator at the Portland Art Museum in Oregon. "I have my own drawer of bugs and butterflies from Deyrolle. Whenever I came to Paris with friends, I'd take them there. It was a place of dreams."