

HOUSE & GARDEN

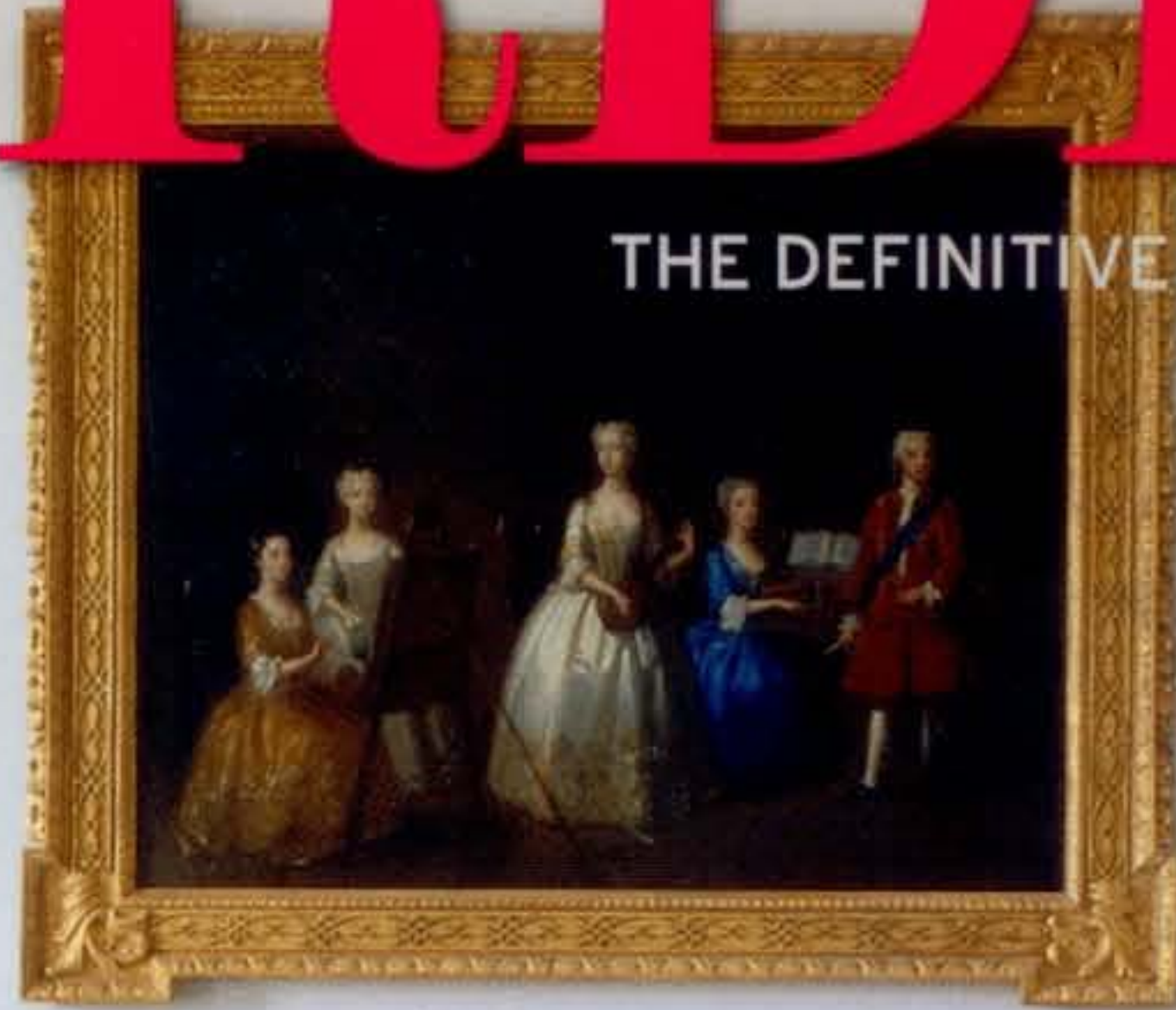
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LINES *of* BEAUTY

*Architraves, picture rails, doors, skirting boards...
A collaboration between an architectural historian
and collector, and a manufacturer of architectural joinery
has filled an important gap for anyone undertaking the
authentic restoration of a period interior*

TEXT **HATTA BYNG** | PHOTOGRAPHS **ANDREW MONTGOMERY**

Architectural details first caught Charles Brooking's eye when he was three years old – he particularly admired the Edwardian mouldings on the dressing table in his nursery. When, aged four, he came home with a revolving chimney cowl full of old tar, 'it caused a huge family rumpus,' he recalls. Aged eight, he persuaded his mother to rescue a complete sash

window from a building site to add to his growing collection of door handles and gate numbers. Horrified by his son's eccentricity, Charles's businessman father sent him to an educational psychologist, and a short-lived interest in fossils followed. But by the time he reached the age of 13, in 1966, Charles had established the idea of a museum of architectural detailing, and by

1986, his father, who had by then aided and abetted him on numerous 'rescues' from demolition sites, realised the importance of his son's collection and a trust was formed to safeguard its future. Dan Cruickshank, Gavin Stamp and Lucinda Lambton are its vice-patrons, and Sir William McAlpine is chairman of the trustees. Charles's collection, housed by Greenwich



OPPOSITE An Atkey reproduction in tulipwood (top) of an original Victorian picture rail (foreground). THIS PAGE Bruce Hodgson (left), managing director of Artichoke, and architectural historian Charles Brooking are pictured amid Charles's 'home study' collection at his house in Surrey



THIS PAGE ALL PICTURES Charles's collection of nearly four centuries' worth of architectural detailing includes over 20,000 sash pulleys, plus sections of period staircases and an accumulation of venerable windows

Atkey is a fantastic idea, supplying appropriate architectural

University for the past 20 years, with a small 'home study' collection at his house in Surrey, is unparalleled. Windows and doors from 1600 to 1960 are his particular interest – he has over 20,000 sash pulleys, for instance. But he also collects staircases – removing them from demolition sites in 120cm sections, including handrails and balustrades, to show their construction – and a host of other artefacts that are vital as a record of the history of British architectural detail. 'The collection includes the good, the bad and the ugly,' points out Charles, who is careful not to let his personal taste get in the way.

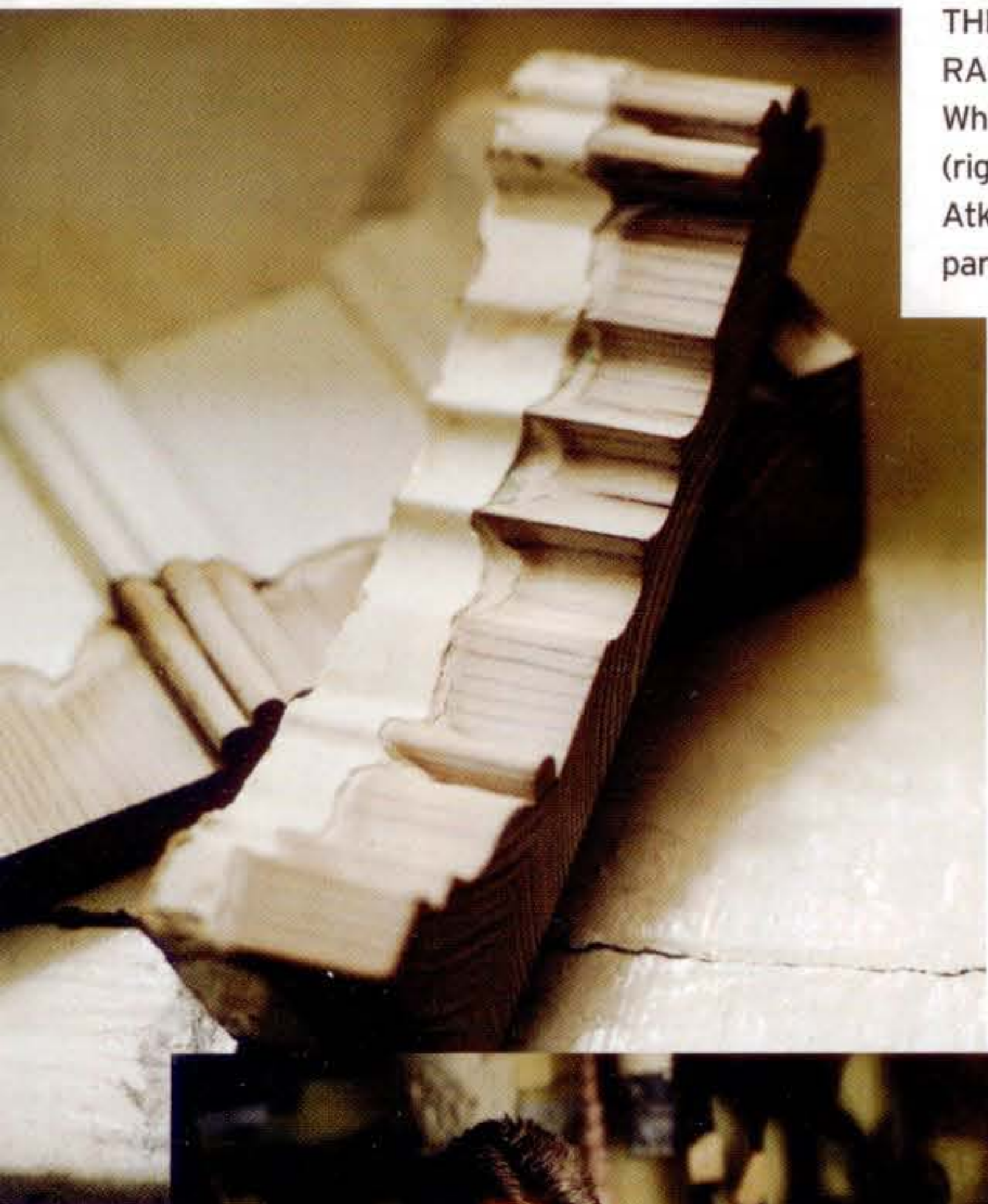
'It was a flash of inspiration from a man at the Georgian Group that brought the Brooking Collection to my attention,' says Michael Costello, managing director of Atkey, which specialises in architectural joinery. Atkey was

the brainchild of Bruce Hodgson of Artichoke, a company that makes extremely smart bespoke kitchens and fitted furniture. Having worked on many renovation projects, Bruce saw not only how difficult it was for clients to be sure about which doors, skirtings and architraves were correct for the period of their house, but also that there was no obvious place to buy them.

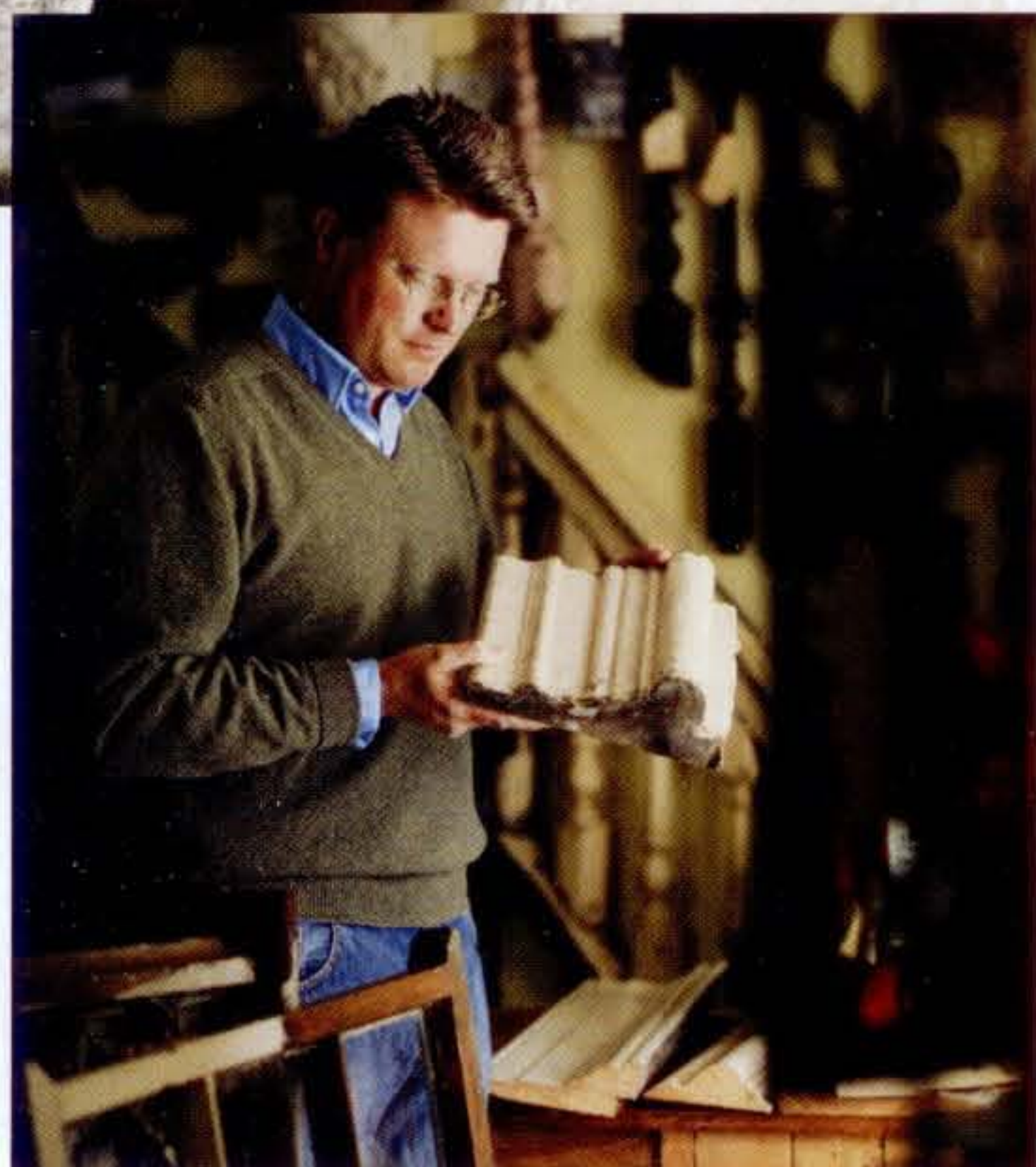
The first idea was to glean correct detailing from pattern books, but a trawl through relevant libraries produced only two books with drawings in sufficient detail for Atkey to replicate the designs. Bruce and Michael then decided to identify buildings with mouldings that they could copy, but they found that the paint build-up – often 8mm thick – meant that they could not get the level of detail they needed. Finding Charles and his collection produced the answer. 'He was a

natural partner. We may have a commercial outlook, but emotionally we have a huge empathy with what he is doing,' says Michael.

Once they had established the five periods that they wanted to cover – from 1700 through to 1936 – Michael spent days with Charles at his home, 'opening sheds and pulling things out'. Charles conducts two or three 'rescues' a week, so a vast number of finds are still waiting to be catalogued and displayed in an accessible way, but every piece has the name of the building in which it was found, its date, and sometimes even the room, scribbled on the back of it. Having identified the mouldings Atkey needed, Michael cut small sections and partially stripped the paint – some with 300 years' worth of layers – to reveal the detail. Artichoke's draughtsmen then painstakingly



THIS PAGE 'Regency Period Architrave RAR0025' (left) came from the Admiralty in Whitehall. Architraves spanning 1700-1936 (right) were selected by Michael Costello, Atkey's managing director (below left), to form part of the company's catalogue of mouldings



joinery and bringing attention to a highly important archive

translated these sections on to CAD. 'Accuracy and authenticity were vital,' says Michael.

Much discussion went into the choice of material; in the past Baltic pine was used, but it is now very difficult to get the same quality of softwood that the Georgians used in commercial quantities. Furthermore, in conservation circles, many place importance on 'readability' for future generations rather than on perfect recreations; Atkey felt using a material that differentiated any new mouldings was therefore a more honest approach. Tulipwood, which is often used in cabinetmaking, was chosen.

Each item is catalogued on Atkey's user-friendly website – you can search by period or product – and, most important, has its provenance carefully shown. For example, click on 'Regency Period Architrave RAR0025', one of

Michael's favourites, and you will see it came from the Admiralty Building in Whitehall and is dated 1809–10. 'Churchill would have walked past it every day,' he remarks. Charles, who is often called in as a consultant for restoration projects, was asked to advise on several government buildings in Whitehall, and was allowed to take leftover pieces at the end of the work.

Other items have more ordinary origins. Every one is made to order in Artichoke's workshop, near Bristol, by highly skilled cabinet-makers. Doors start at £350, while mouldings range in price from £5.90 to £43.50 a metre, depending on quantity and specification. Atkey also offers a surveying and specifying service, and Charles can be consulted if more detailed knowledge is needed.

Atkey is a fantastic idea, not only because it is

filling a gap in the market by supplying beautifully made, appropriate architectural joinery for those trying to restore period houses, but also because it is bringing greater attention to Charles's highly important archive, and using it in the way he so wants it to be used. Michael is now part of the Brooking Architectural Museum Trust's development group – raising funds to acquire a good home for Charles's finds, and to catalogue, display and preserve them for future generations, is a pressing concern □

Atkey & Company: 01934-863899; www.atkeyandco.com. Artichoke: www.artichoke-ltd.com. The Brooking Architectural Museum Trust: e-mail: brooking.trust@btinternet.com. To make a donation online through the Charities Aid Foundation, visit www.cafonline.org/charityprofile/brookingtrust