

The Advent Calendar Cabinet
By Hendzel + Hunt

Beyond its purely utilitarian purpose of storage, whether of domestic, mundane objects, or of prized personal possessions, the cabinet was also endowed with special meanings. The ritualistic, magical aspect of the cabinet was also linked with the idea of secrecy...

Monique Riccardi-Cubitt, *The Art of the Cabinet*

In celebration of the first Selfridges & Co anniversary of the largest women's shoe department in the world, Hendzel + Hunt were commissioned to create a bespoke Advent Calendar Cabinet to showcase a collection of custom made miniature shoes. Hidden beneath a mosaic of stained boards are 24 concealed drawers and compartments each opening to reveal both an exclusive miniature and the clue to accessing the next door. Entirely hand-made from reclaimed materials, including the wooden lock systems, the Advent Calendar Cabinet is a modern echo of the great epoch of the historic Cabinet.

The tradition of the Cabinet was at its height between the 15th and 18th centuries. During this period the term cabinet referred to a small private retreating room, generally containing a collection of curiosities and works of art. These rooms later evolved to become items of furniture, often custom made and built with exquisite materials. Cabinets are designed to protect their owner's secrets and precious belongings they contain small personal objects and collection imbued with deep emotional meaning. This mystical quality of protection and secrecy is only enhanced when the objects concerned are concealed deep within the cabinet's innermost secret compartments.

Hendzel + Hunt have stayed true to the traditions of the Cabinet but have emphasized the interactive qualities; making an engaging and contemporary piece of furniture filled with wonder and surprise. To open the Advent Cabinet for the first time is to embark on a visual and tactile journey. The user is invited to open the locks sequentially, at each step discovering another mechanical system and a key to the next compartment.

On the 24th day, the last compartment reveals a booklet holding the instructions to access the ultimate code that will open the central combination lock. The book reveals that the façade is actually a puzzle. The key elements to

the final code are in fact right there, in front of the user's eyes.

After turning around the top drawers, the pixilated surface of the cabinet, until now appearing to be simple ornament, reveals a digital code that must be read by a Smartphone. The user is redirected to a short film disclosing a series of numbers that must be dialed to unlock the central combination. From that point, the puzzle is solved. The cabinet finally opens its doors to uncover its internal structure; it is a cabinet within a cabinet, another space to store even more precious items or a greater secret; it is the supreme heart of the piece that celebrates a playful journey into the world of the covert.

In much the same way as traditional cabinet, the success of the Advent Calendar Cabinet also lies in the precious beauty of the custom made miniature shoes that it contains.

Overall, more than simply being a piece of furniture designed to store a collection of items, the Advent Calendar Cabinet by Hendzel + Hunt is a unique experience. It is a piece of design that carries a story, that speaks about a journey, that endlessly surprises and that successfully engages with the user's curiosity. It is a piece that proves that emotional functionality holds a place as important as practicality.

For more information or images of The Advent Calendar Cabinet contact Nicola in the studio

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