

Line	Floor	Description	Price
		Office	44.30
1	Ground	Kitchen	21.80
2	Ground	Office	63.50
3	First	Office	53.20
		N/A	N/A

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Make a scrawl your signature investment

By **Jasmine Birtles**

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Autograph hunting may be dismissed as a child's hobby but there is big money to be made if you get the right signature.

"Autographs have always been a good investment for those who collect important names in history like Churchill or John F Kennedy," says Sheldon Tarakan, an American autograph dealer and president of the Universal Autograph Collectors' Club. "Truly great names like Einstein, Mozart, Brahms, Gershwin, Cole Porter and so on increase in value each year and hold their value even in economic downturns."

Adam Andrusier has collected signatures since he was 12. He says the content of a manuscript or letter signed by a famous person affects the price. "If it just says 'I'm coming round for tea', you're not going to get so much for it even if it's from an important historical figure. But if it's a composer [discussing] his latest symphony, it can be worth a lot."

Hinda Rose of dealer Maggs Brothers in London says it has a letter of Tolkein's in its latest catalogue. Addressed "My dear Jennifer" and signed "Uncle Ronald", this discusses misprints in *The Hobbit*. It is on sale for £9,500.

"At the moment, classical music composers are doing well," adds Mr Andrusier. "Old letters and documents from important composers are particularly popular." He has a special interest in jazz musicians and says many people are keen on their autographs. "It's rare to get them because the famous ones didn't usually send signed photographs out. You had to go up to them in the club to get their signatures."

Rarity adds value. Diana, Princess of Wales, and former US presidents like JF Kennedy and Ronald Reagan used an "autopen", which reproduced their signature millions of times. "Anything that's been signed by an autopen or a secretary is not going to be worth much, if anything," says Mr Andrusier.

In the short term, signatures can be affected by fashion. At the height of their fame, a Spice Girls autograph fetched between £200 and £300. Now they're worth a fraction of that.

Certain old-time Hollywood stars, though, have retained their autograph value. "The most collected female star is Marilyn Monroe, and among the men, Humphrey Bogart is probably the biggest," says Ms Rose.

One way new collectors can get started is to gather their own autographs by hanging around TV centres, backstage at concerts or at stage doors in West End theatres. You can also write to a celebrity asking for an autograph, though you can't be sure it's genuine. Buying off the internet is even less certain unless you use an established dealer.

The annual trade show Autographica is a good place to pick up signatures. Garry King, the show organiser, says visitors can buy from over 40 dealers and obtain autographs from celebrities themselves. "This year we've got two of the 12 men who have walked on the moon coming."

He says serious dealers and collectors will travel miles for a genuine autograph. "One dealer I know will fly to Los Angeles or New York to get the signatures personally."

This kind of authenticity is increasingly necessary, he says, as it is so much easier to sell forgeries on the internet.

Experts also warn against buying anything that is over-hyped. "There are fads and fashions in autographs," says Mr Andrusier, "and they're unlikely to hold their value."

WHEN THE PEN IS MIGHTY

Prices: from £80 for a signed photograph of Harrison Ford to millions for a Leonardo da Vinci signed manuscript.

More Information:

www.padaweb.org - the Professional Autograph Dealer Association lists its registered members in the UK and offers

general advice on collecting.

www.uacc.org - the Universal Autograph Collectors' Club provides celebrity addresses and other information.

www.andrusier.com - Adam Andrusier's website with information and autographs for sale.

www.ami-autographs.com - autograph dealer.

www.visink.com - website of US dealer Sheldon Tarakan.

2004 events:

4-5 September - UACC annual convention, Los Angeles.

8-10 October - annual 'Autographica' show, Coventry. See www.autographica.co.uk for information.

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