



PHOTOGRAPHY: JOEL ANDERSON

# THE COLLECTOR: MATCHBOOKS

Words: ANNA BRITTEN

## VINCENT MCEVOY'S COLLECTION OF RETRO MATCHBOOKS EVOKES A PAST FULL OF GLAMOUR AND DECADENCE

For a non-smoker, advertising designer Vincent McEvoy has an exceptional number of used matchbooks strewn about his North London home. But unlike those most of us have rattling about in our kitchen drawers, these matchbooks weren't absent-mindedly grabbed from the chain restaurants and budget hotels of today.

Dating back to the 1950s and 1960s, they're the fascinating remnants of a time and place that was widely deemed altogether more glamorous (provided you didn't look too closely at anyone's lungs). "It's very much an American thing for me," admits Vincent. "Growing up in Liverpool in the 1950s and 1960s it felt like everything important was happening across the Atlantic – music, fashion.

"Eighteen months ago I was in an antique shop in Camden Passage and came across a huge pile of matchbooks. Whoever was collecting them got them from all over Europe and in the States. In most cases they were all empty, so had probably just been thrown aside by Don Draper-type smokers.

"I homed in on the American ones, all from hotels

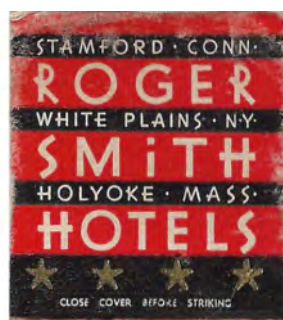
on Madison Avenue and elsewhere, and I grouped them together and thought about the days of *Mad Men* – the glamour and charm. I don't know if we always see the past through rose-tinted glasses, but I thought, 'These are amazing'.

"For me, they hold a mirror up to another time. Things aren't the same now. Lots of them celebrated smoking, which is such a sidelined thing today. And travel is more commonplace now. Today we rush through busy airports and it's all very impersonal. I bought two dozen matchbooks. I now wish I'd bought the whole box..."

Examining them, the romantic among us can't help but wonder who sparked up with these matchbooks – their names, their love lives and the topics of their conversation (Dylan going electric? The Apollo missions?). Or maybe they were loners – moping into an Old Fashioned at the end of the bar?

As a designer, however, Vincent's curiosity stretches beyond these obvious, surface associations. His professional background gives him a unique perspective on the way these mementoes were actually made. Having earned his designing spurs on the Littlewoods catalogue before moving into album covers for the record industry and then high-end advertising, Vincent is most intrigued and impressed by the characters behind the scenes – the hard-working commercial artists who turned these »

1: Roger Smith Hotels, USA  
2: Hawaiian Room, New York  
3: Stamp collection



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tiny folded squares of card into eye-catching designs found in every breast pocket and handbag.

"The commercial artists didn't have the myriad of different tools we have today – they had to do their own typography and illustrations, probably by hand, and give it to the printers. Things are so easy today for designers by comparison.

"You could reach a much bigger audience with a matchbook then than you could now, so all the matchbooks had a hard sell on them. Even on the inside there were coupons – one of my favourites says, 'Become an engineer in six weeks.' That just doesn't happen now.


"I love the ones from hotels in the middle of nowhere – strange-looking places you've never heard of in places such as Nebraska. It's a bit spooky; they make me think of *The Shining*."

Vintage ephemera – which is technically scraps of printed or written matter that's designed to be thrown away, such as tickets, pamphlets and postcards – has always inspired the visually creative, and Vincent is no exception. "I've always loved ephemera," he says. "Taking a closer look at the things we throw away.

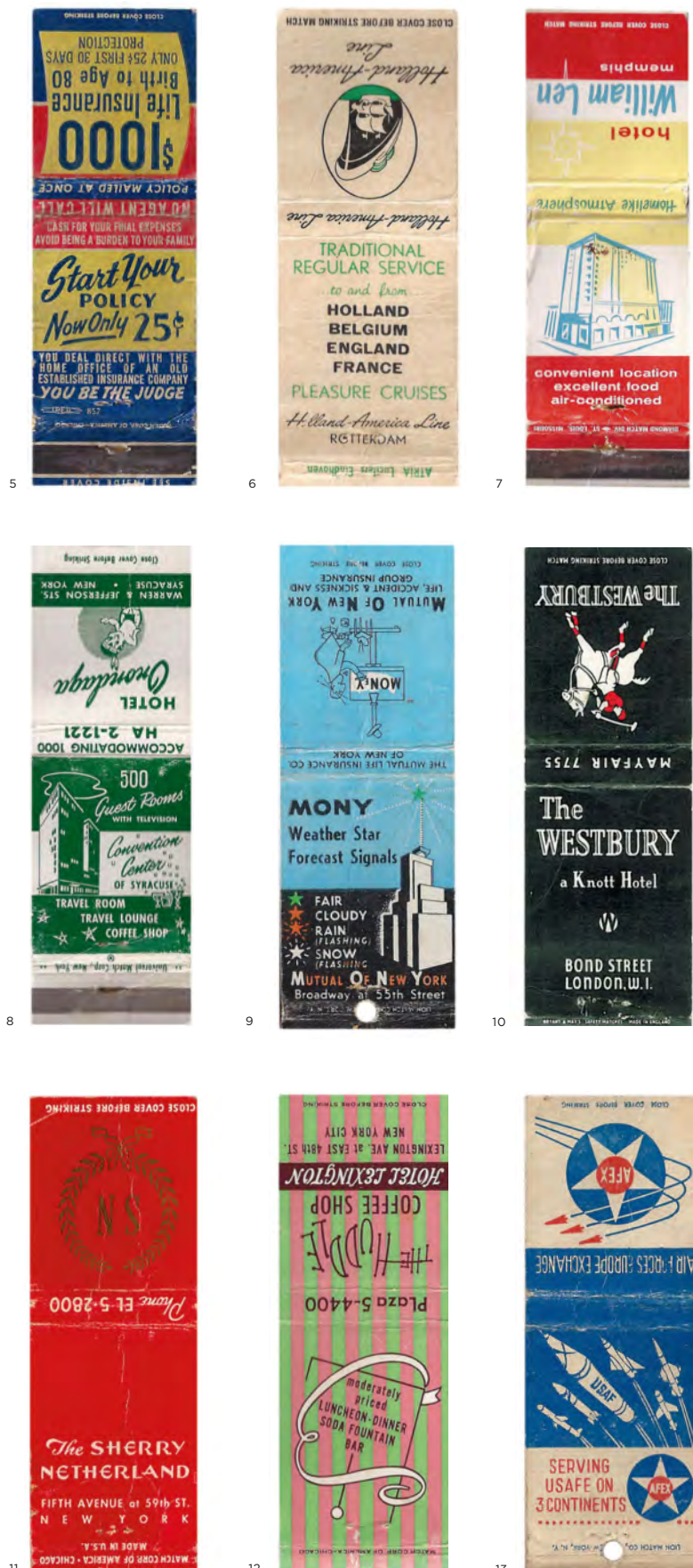
"I worked with Andy Warhol during my time in advertising and he said, when you take something small and blow it up big, it becomes something else entirely. He was an inspiration and the total opposite of his public image – he was quiet, polite, easy-going and had a good sense of humour."

Recalling Warhol's advice to him to return to the art of silkscreen printing, Vincent recently began making and selling roughly A3-size prints of his matchbooks, inspired by the ephemera-based prints of Sir Peter Blake.

Blown up like this, the matchbooks' impact is even greater, teleporting you to a fantasy life where there's always Sinatra on the turntable, a Lucky Strike in one hand and a penthouse suite key fob in the other.

"I really like the Lexington Hotel matchbook that says 'Visit our Famous Hawaiian Room: A South Sea Holiday in the Heart of New York'," (fig 2) says Vincent. "It sounds so decadent!" 

TO FIND OUT MORE about Vincent McEvoy collections and prints see his website [www.littleshopofrock.com](http://www.littleshopofrock.com) and stockist [www.pedlars.co.uk](http://www.pedlars.co.uk).







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4. Golden Nugget gambling hall, Las Vegas
5. Life insurance
6. Holland-America Line cruises
7. William Len hotel, Memphis
8. Hotel Onondaga, New York
9. Mutual of New York insurance
10. The Westbury hotel, London
11. The Sherry Netherland hotel, New York
12. The Huddle Coffee Shop, New York
13. Air Forces Europe Exchange
14. P Hoppe, Amsterdam
15. Hotel Edison, New York
16. Wawa Dairy Farms, Philadelphia
17. Chesterfield cigarettes, USA
18. Holiday Inn hotels
19. 7Up soft drink
20. Hilton hotels, New York
21. City Centre Car Wash, Calgary
22. Salem cigarettes, USA
23. Unknown, made in Canada
24. Hotel Lexington, New York
25. Unknown, made in Canada



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