

HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

— Editor Eric Gibson (*Belvedere/Alpina*, 1972) says *Aiglon* inspired a can-do spirit that has proven essential throughout his career.

Words Helena Pozniak Illustration James Olstein



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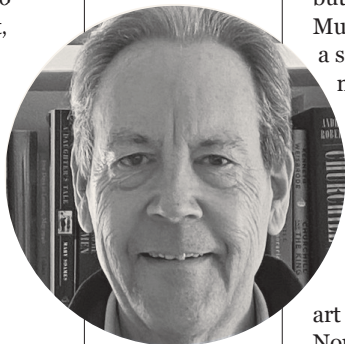
HEN FLAMES ENGULFED PARIS'S Notre-Dame Cathedral in 2019, editor **Eric Gibson** (*Belvedere/Alpina*, 1972) knew he had just a few hours to act. "I called our architecture critic and told him, 'This is a big deal, we've got to get it in tomorrow's paper'. I knew we could do it, and that for me has always been the greatness of *Aiglon*: it taught me that when you need to, you can just get on and do it."

As Arts in Review editor for the *Wall Street Journal*, he's haunted by the prospect of empty pages in his newspaper. Happily that's never happened, and he credits *Aiglon* for his competence. "Although I was, in fact, a terrible student," he recalls. "My English teacher told my father I'd do brilliantly in an upcoming exam if it was on the British artist Henry Moore – unfortunately the topic was Shakespeare's *Hamlet*."

It was his English teacher, though, who taught him the power of language. "Mr Senn was really my first 'editor'. He'd return my homework all marked up – I was using too many words or he felt I could find better words – and this took my writing to a new level. I found it was what I liked doing the most. He was Swiss; English wasn't even his first language and yet he had such command. He had this mammoth vocabulary and he knew Shakespeare inside out."

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Man of letters
Eric Gibson is Arts in Review editor for the *Wall Street Journal*.

Eric did, however, get an 'A' for his first essay on sculpture, and later went on to write two books about it – forging a career critiquing art and exhibitions. But he was strangely reluctant as a young boy to trail around museums with his parents. "I hated them, but *Aiglon* helped change that. On an expedition to Munich, I persuaded a teacher to allow us to visit a sculpture exhibition. From then on I would take myself off to see new shows."

Eric flourished in *Aiglon*'s progressive ambience. "Half the students were from America and they'd complain how strict *Aiglon* was. But I'd come from a British boarding school, and I'd tell them, 'At least there's no corporal punishment here.'"

Eric's love for art history developed during weekly art classes with – "thrillingly" – practising artist Norman Perryman. "I remember learning so much from him. For example, he once pointed out a Modigliani and said, 'There are no straight lines, only curves'. That really registered with me." Perryman's art history lectures hooked him – he went on to study it at Trinity College, Hartford before becoming a roving art critic in New York, writing for *The Economist*, the *Washington Times* and editing *ARTnews*.

He's been at the *Wall Street Journal* since 1998, and is one of the small group of "art nerds" from that time at *Aiglon*, including **Connie Curran McPhee** (Exeter, 1974) who is now a curator at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. And if he were back at *Aiglon* now? He'd be up every mountain and on every ski expedition. "I was never very good at sports or skiing but, like everybody else after they've left, I wish I'd done more. It gave me a real appreciation of the beauty of nature. I began to understand why artists want to paint the outdoors when it can be that spectacular. Whenever I see landscapes in art, I have the view from *Aiglon* at the back of my mind." 📍