



Christmas round-up,
chosen by Damian Thompson

books



In **MAGNUM MAGNUM** [1] (ed. Brigitte Lardinois; Thames & Hudson, rrp £19.95, *WoI* price £17.95), you flip from Capa's shaky image of a Spanish Loyalist soldier stumbling into smoke to Cartier-Bresson's Ahmedabad women spreading out their saris – in rhyming curves – in the sun. These alphabetic neighbours, and Magnum founders, capture the blurry faultline between reportage and art photography that snakes through this 60-year celebration. That's one clue to why the agency's annual meetings are legendarily rumbustious. Eugene Richards described 'tirades that went on for hours' and retired after his inaugural meeting; Martin Parr's work was denounced by the old guard as 'fascistic'. So it's a delicious irony that the six pictures by each of the 69 photographers featured have been selected by a different Magnum peer. 'My six most hated?' That I'd also like to see.

If an Englishman's home is his castle, he has also favoured hedges to keep prying eyes from his crenellations. In the USA, the love of verandas and lawn running down to the road suggests a more open relationship to the world outside. This thematic trail winds through **GREAT GARDENS OF AMERICA** [2] (by Tim Richardson; Frances Lincoln, rrp £40, *WoI* price £36). Because the wilderness has always symbolised 'plenitude and potential', we see natural landscapes welcomed in to gardens as diverse as the Conceptualist Grand-Métis, Quebec, and the colonial estate of Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC.

After the 12th century, the Moguls used monumental mosques and minarets as manifestations of power. In **THE GLORY OF THE SULTANS: ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA** [3] (by Yves Porter; Flammarion,

rrp £50, *WoI* price £45) we also learn that bodies were housed in mausoleums of staggering size (tremble beneath Gol Gumbaz, in Bijapur, with its 44m-across dome). Compared to North Africa, say, they are also unusually prevalent. Why? Porter argues that it represents a clear visual rejection of the Hindu practice of cremation. It's a shame he does so in a style that can be as convoluted as a wall of arabesques.

Peter Clark forages for papers with patina – love letters, prewar maps, yellowing sheet music – to create (mostly canine) collages of great wit and skill. Closer inspection of **PAPERWORK** [4] (by Peter Clark; Black Dog, rrp £24.95, *WoI* price £23.70) reveals details that crease you up – a bulldog's nose made from a grainy shot of Churchill, or an old dog licence forming a whippet's haunch. But it's the exuberant characters of the breeds that lure you into looking deeper. Somewhat superfluous bravos from random fans (Stuart Collins, organiser of Henley Festival, anyone?) pockmark the pages, but Clark is a worthy heir to that other Peter, Blake, and the British Pop art tradition.

'Good taste is to be avoided at all costs.' The Marquise de Ganay, current châteline of Courances, typifies a blue-blooded sangfroid at the heart of **FRENCH INTERIORS: THE ART OF ELEGANCE** [5] (by Christiane de Nicolay-Mazery; Flammarion, rrp £45, *WoI* price £40.50). Written by a former Hôtel Drouot auctioneer, the book is short of *brocante* bohemians. Instead, this stately tour of how the upper echelons of French society lived and live – be it Hubert de Givenchy, Madeleine Castaing or decorator Jacques Grange, who occupies Colette's old flat above the Palais-Royal – is grandly atmospheric. ▷