

Write, He Said

A novelist seeks a desk suited for longhand and a computer.

SHOPPING WITH

ARTHUR PHILLIPS

WHEN Arthur Phillips bought his wife an enormous television for Christmas, he failed at what he calls the “manly art” of measuring. Too big for its intended cabinet, the TV now sits on Mr. Phillips’s desk.

That was no trivial gaffe. Mr. Phillips, 42, is a novelist. His most recent book, “The Tragedy of Arthur” (Random House), is about a writer named Arthur Phillips who inherits what might be a lost play by Shakespeare.

Mr. Phillips wrote not only this tale, which is narrated by his namesake hero, but also the play, which appears in full at the end. Reviewing the book for *The New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani described it as a “wonderfully tricky Chinese puzzle box of a novel.”

So why should a lawyer, an architect, a podi-

atrist have a desk, and Mr. Phillips no writing surface at all? Touring furniture stores in downtown Manhattan late last month, he checked out examples from the sublime to the affordable.

At ModernLink on Bond Street, Mr. Phillips fixed his heavily lidded eyes on a 1950s desk designed by the Danish couple Edvard and Tove Kindt-Larsen, made from a single piece of rosewood (\$14,000).

“This could be my first-draft desk,” said Mr. Phillips, who writes his novels in longhand before running them through the computer. “It’s inviting for paper and pencil, but when you get into electronics, you would need a whole other room. It wouldn’t look good with cabling.”

He was more comfortable with two modestly sized (and priced) desks at Blu Dot on Wooster Street: Cant (about \$600) and Stash (about \$400). “You wouldn’t feel sacrilegious throwing a computer on one of them, and if you spilled, it wouldn’t be the end of the world,” he said.

He also liked the tidy size of the Basis desk

down the street at Room & Board: “If it’s just going to hold your novel, it’s perfect.”

At Cappellini, Mr. Phillips compared Bambi, a desk by the Japanese studio Nendo, to a nicely designed picnic table: “So much modern stuff seems quirky and chipper. The Earl of Grantham wouldn’t approve,” he said, referring to the character played by Hugh Bonneville in the British TV drama “Downton Abbey.” (For the record, the Earl has a Carlton House desk, a style that dates from the English Regency period; Hyde Park Antiques on Broadway offers a circa 1810 example for \$130,000.)

Venturing online to see the 1958 chrome-and-glass desk by Franco Albini for Knoll, Mr. Phillips was reminded of his ongoing desire to live in midcentury Rome. He was less transported by Carl Hansen’s recent revival of CH110, a desk designed 40 years ago by Hans Wegner.

“A man needs serious drawers,” he said. “And that Danish scheme won’t cut it. Not for a real man, with stamps and stuff.”

JULIE LASKY



ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

FIRST DRAFT Arthur Phillips at a 1953 desk by Edvard and Tove Kindt-Larsen at ModernLink in Manhattan; \$14,000, (212) 254-1300, modernlink.com.



Basis desk in solid walnut; \$1,299 at Room & Board, (212) 334-4343, roomandboard.com.