

ANTIQUES

Vintage Riches Beyond France

By WENDY MOONAN

Published: February 11, 2005

Fair organizers are worried that young people consider antiques so out of fashion that they won't attend shows. Now one group has created a show that doesn't even use the word antiques in its title.

The New York Design Fair made its inaugural appearance yesterday at the Seventh Regiment Armory on Park Avenue at 67th Street and continues through Sunday. Forty-six dealers are selling everything from antiquities to contemporary wares.

Meg Wendy, a member of the Wendy family management team that has organized fairs for decades, said this new one would address the current trend of mixing furniture and objects from various periods. "Great design, like great style, is not from one period or one look," she said. "Buyers are encouraged to mix and match from a variety of periods and price points."

This approach is why the dealer Anthony G. Victoria is participating here, his first fair in six years. He has been exhibiting only at top New York shows like the International Fine Art and Antique Dealers Show in October and the Winter Antiques Show in January.

In 2000, Mr. Victoria, an expert on French decorative arts, began selling other kinds of antiques, including English Arts and Crafts, German Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Scandinavian modern, at Chez Soi, his shop in Bridgehampton, N.Y.

"I buy what I love, in part because to come home to things I felt were boring would be the closest thing to hell that I could imagine," Mr. Victoria said. "My decision to open new premises in Bridgehampton freed me to search all periods and schools for items that brought a response from my eye and heart."

Mr. Victoria grew up at Frederick P. Victoria & Son, a Manhattan gallery of top-quality French decorative arts that his father founded in 1933. A few years ago, after his father's death, he sold the five-floor gallery and its rarefied stock.

"Having spent 30 years at the headily rich decorative art table set by France in the 17th and 18th centuries, I haven't so much changed my taste as broadened it to encompass much more," he said. "This new fair will allow me to show those who may have known me just how much my eye has evolved."

Among other offerings, he plans to exhibit an Art Nouveau side table from Nancy, France, a Swedish sterling silver coffeepot from about 1910 and an important Secessionist desk box with inlaid brass designs by Erhard & Soehne of Germany, from around 1905.

"I go to Europe three or four times a year," Mr. Victoria said. "I'm now beginning to see great things in Belgium and Germany."

His most fetching piece may be a German Art Nouveau mahogany bench with brass decorations that resembles an ancient Roman bridge. It dates to about 1900 but has none of the excess of contemporary pieces from Austria.

Mr. Victoria's fine editing of objects reflects his decades in the trade. The bench recalls the sleek Biedermeier style so popular in Austria 75 years earlier.

Influx of German Pieces

German antiques, not often seen in America, are beginning to appear more often, especially at Palm Beach! America's International Fine Art and Antique Fair, which closes on Sunday in West Palm Beach, Fla.

One of the first things sold was a German Empire mahogany center hall table of about 1810 with legs carved to look like palm tree trunks. Instead of capitals, its legs terminate in resplendently carved, gilded palm fronds. The dealer, Iliad Antik of Manhattan, did not reveal the price or the buyer.

"Because the economy is bad in Germany, people are selling their noble houses - or the contents of them," said Erik J. Paol, a dealer from Amsterdam. "As for the families that retrieved their former houses in East Germany, well, they are now loaded with debt."

Bernard Steinitz, a veteran Paris dealer, said he sold German antiques because "I have a few good German clients who buy only German things." He has a set of four white and gilded Louis XV-style armchairs from Munich, from around 1750.

Asked what distinguished them from similar French chairs, he said that the feet on French chairs swung out beyond an imaginary vertical line from the chair's top to the floor. "French feet go outside," he said "German feet go inside. It must be a psychological thing."

He also has a pair of carved and gilded early-18th-century tables with faux marble tops and hoof feet from Schillingsfürst Castle in Bavaria. The carving on the apron and legs between scrolls of acanthus leaves resemble sheep's wool.

"Such carving is too strong and heavy to be French," he said.

Another table, a German oak console of about 1720 with an Italian marble top, has more delicate decorations, with a pierced cartouche on the apron. Oak is famously difficult to carve, but this table is covered with intricate motifs. Each corner boasted the smiling face of the devil.

"The quality and nervousness of the carving are typically German," Mr. Steinitz said. "It is more expressionistic than French carving."

Lars Bolander, a dealer specializing in Swedish antiques, has a six-foot-tall carved and gilded mirror made for the Royal Palace in Stockholm in the early 1700's.

"The carving is on a Neptune theme, with swirling waves, seaweed and sea creatures," he said. "It was made by a German. After the royal castle in Stockholm burned down, a lot of foreign craftsmen were brought in, including Erhart Götel, who made the mirror. The king loved it so much he took it to his summer castle."

Mr. Paol, the Amsterdam dealer, has a one-foot-tall silver-gilt rigged galleon on wheels (1624-30) at Fijnaut & Paol, which was made as a table decoration by Abraham Winterstein of Augsburg.

That city was a center of gold and silver workshops, and these richly wrought silver ships, called nefs, were often made for the nobility and the clergy.

"This is a ceremonial drinking vessel meant for use at official dinners," Mr. Paol said. "It's really a conversation piece."

Equally grand is a multicolored agate and gold box from 1780, at John Jaffa Antique and the Enamel Company of London. Set with 86 different colors of agate, each numbered, the box is signed by Johann Christian Neuber of Dresden.

"It's the Rolls-Royce of snuff boxes," Mr. Jaffa said. "Only one person ever made boxes like this, and it took him a year to do each one."

Its splendor makes a pair of Meissen porcelain swans with ormolu candelabra at Zaras Antiques of Palm Beach, once owned by Mrs. John Hay Whitney, look simple.