Steven - Thomas
ANTIQUES & INTERIORS

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Italian Vacation Without Antiques? Impossible!

By Tom Silk

This spring, my good friend Joe Weatherly, an artist and art professor, invited me to accompany his wife and six students on an art tour of Italy. Since I speak fluent Italian and know my way around Italy, he thought I'd be a welcome addition to the group. Despite having been to Italy about six dozen times before, this idea intrigued me because each of my previous experiences were rushed to Northern Italy, with my mind mostly focused on buying antiques. With the focus on art, which I love, and the thought of visiting places I'd either never been or hadn't visited in over 30 years, I took Joe's offer on one personal condition: no antique shopping! I needed a break from the world of antiques, and this was to be a vacation, not a business trip. No antiques!

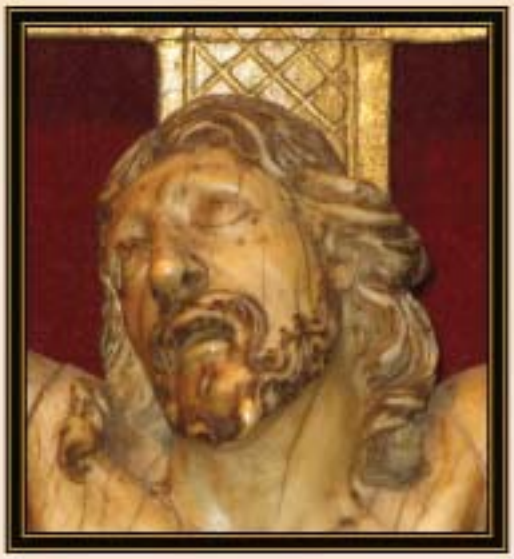
The most expensive antique I have ever seen for sale. A carved Genovese "monetierre" selling for One Million Euro (about $1,400,000).

The first day I kept my promise to myself, only because we were traveling from Rome to Naples and stopped only to sleep. Our second day we explored Pompeii: still ok; no antique shops amid the ruins. Lunch in Sorrento sounded innocent enough, but walking through the town I thought to myself, "I'll just have a quick peek in only one shop!"

I introduced myself to the "antiquariato", and it was at that moment that I knew I'd never be able to keep my promise to myself! I saw the most beautiful ivory crucifix in an ornately carved walnut Baroque frame, which was the most amazing I had ever seen. The passion and pain on Christ's face was felt from my head to my toes. A large fear overcame me when I approached the antiquariato to ask the price, and that fear was well founded as he was asking 15,000 Euro, a little over $20,000.

Had I seen such a piece from our buyer, Monica in Milano, the price would have been half and I still might not have bought it, as beautiful and moving as it was. I was hoping against hope that this wasn't going to be a glimmer of things to come: prices up to the moon.

After a couple more days in Rome, the bug bit me again! I was certain there must be some antiques for me! I started out again, marching up and down the Via dei Coronari with my buying tools in hand: a camera, notebook and business cards. After nearly a full day of searching, I realized I wasn't even going to find a piece in the style that we carry at Steven-Thomas. I saw a lot of Empire pieces, ebonized and gilded pieces, and very little carved walnut Renaissance and



Detail of ivory crucifix from Sorrento, Italy.

Gothic pieces that our market demands. Despite my feet killing me from walking Rome's seven hills (which felt like 700 hills by the time I was done!), I was bound and determined that I would find something I had been secretly looking for.

I had promised one of our best clients, Dirk, that on my next buying trip to Italy

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AN INFORMATIVE NEWSLETTER OF UPCOMING HAPPENINGS

How and Why to Customize

By Steve Shedd

Nothing is more gratifying in my work here at Steven-Thomas than being part of the team that creates lasting beauty and utility from antique carvings and components pieces. Our efforts are a fresh escape from the ready-made, disposable products offered everywhere in the new furniture market today.

Client and designer Jim Shaw feels the same. The mid 19th century Italian walnut baldachino (canopy) seen in the photo on the right provided the inspiration for Jim as he scoured our facility this past spring for ideas of a dream bed for his client, Gentry Terhune. The result is the custom made king size bed seen on the adjacent page. The project's crafting and finishing relied on STA in-house antiques technology, and talent. Measured by visual impact and originality, this is the finest example of its kind I've seen in thirty years of business.

Shaw Baronial Bed - Headboard mid-way to completion

Shaw Baronial Bed - Detail from bed footboard

The bed mid-project can be seen in the above photo. Here, the original baldachino at the top of the headboard was widened to king bed width. The lighter wood is new wood and composites created in-house by our expert craftsmen or "ebonistas."

All of us at STA are proud that no one, not even our craftsmen, can tell the difference between original antique carvings and our foundry composites. If you have not already done so, I invite you to visit our on-site kitchen crafted from antique buffets and composite work and put me to the test!

Unfortunately, there is a myth today that "composite," "cast" or "copy" means "inferior." The myth comes out of a public misunderstanding that casts must be inferior to the original since products today are built to be disposable. Most composite copies in the furniture industry today are done inexpensively and quickly.

The composite production practices at STA are anything but cheap and quick. Our composites are equal to the original hand carving in both appearance and longevity. Look at the incredibly fine detail illustrated in the cast work in the lion mask faces in the photo on the left!

For now, our foundry activity centers on special projects for clients like designer Jim Shaw who believe in and understand the advantages of this system for customized projects. When the public perception changes on composites, STA will consider replacing missing antique carvings and

AN EXAMPLE OF OUR IN-HOUSE CUSTOMIZATION

moldings on original antiques with composites rather than wood. But for now, the restoration you see on our showroom floor is nearly 100% wood rather than composite.

The best way to understand the composite system used at STA is to compare it to one with long standing acceptance: bronze castings from the lost wax process of duplicating. Let's pretend we want to make a bronze statue like Michelangelo's David. Once we've found our sculptor, the artist will render his impression of David in terracotta or clay. Next, wax is placed over the terracotta David. After that, another layer of terracotta is placed over the wax and hardened. Multiple holes are then drilled through the top layer of terracotta where molten bronze is then poured, vaporizing the wax. When the top layer of terracotta is broken away you are left with a bronze of David. From this original, a mold is then foundered. This mold can then be used to recreate (or strike) additional Davids.

For fine bronzes, the process is called lost wax because the wax placed over the original sculpture is lost when the molten bronze vaporizes the wax. The value of the foundered bronze - or STA's composites – is then determined by the closeness of the strike to the original casting, as detail is lost with each copy made, with the first duplication always being of greatest value.

We at STA do not hire a master woodcarver for the panels and pediments for each of our client's special project because we have all the originals provided to us by the master 19th century woodcarvers who have left their legacy in the pediments, panels and figured carvings of STA furniture.

Our molds are formed in a much less complicated manner from the lost wax system, but with the same principle of copying the detail of the original as closely as possible. Since our molds are only used a few times, there is no loss of detail from the original, leaving us with finely detailed composites.

Once out of the mold, the individual piece is chastened and sanded to remove any rough edges and restore the finest details if needed. The composite is then secured to the body of the project and is ready for our old world STA finish.

A combination of stains, glazes, lacquering, and hand-waxing results in the finest old world finishes on the market. This process guarantees that our newly created work is incorporated and blended perfectly with the original 19th century work on each and every project.

We have recently completed a "Before and After" album that will take you through the step-by-step process of many of the custom projects we have completed for our clients. The album is available at our front counter for you to browse. Our design consultants and owners will be more than pleased to answer questions on how our unique process can meet your most challenging needs.

I'll leave you with this final thought: there is a general saying in our business, "Buy what the dealer has in his home." Well, my home library is a combination of thirty running feet of original antique panels and their composite twin, and both my wife and I just love it!

Shaw Baronial Bed - The completed bed after our old world STA finish

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE!

New Arrivals

Neogothic Sideboard,
France, c. 1940

Rococco Tea Table, France, c. 1890

Neogothic Cabinet
France, c. 1940

Carved Oak Bookcase
Holland, c. 1900

Rare 3-Piece Rosewood Clock Set,
France, c. 1870

Oak Bookcase, France, c. 1930

Neogothic Dining Set
France, c. 1940

- Subject to Prior Sale -

GET 15% OFF THESE NEW ARRIVALS

Gothic Halltree, France, c. 1880

Pair of Louis XVI Armchairs, France, c. 1900

Gothic Armchair
France, c. 1880

Carved Walnut Lion Base Table
Italy, c. 1880

Hand Painted Oak Throne Chair,
France, c. 1920

3-Door Bookcase, Italy c. 1900

Oak Neogothic Throne Chair,
France, c. 1880

- Subject to Prior Sale -

WHEN YOU BRING IN THIS NEWSLETTER!*

* Not valid during Storewide Sale

Italian Vacation Without Antiques? Impossible!

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I would search for a unique, important, and expensive bedroom set for him! The next day I escaped from my group once again, and this time decided to look for smaller, less prestigious dealers in the old Jewish Ghetto district in hopes of stumbling upon Dirk's bed set. My feet were still killing me as I was hobbling around the narrow streets in the sweltering Roman summer heat, not really knowing where I was going and too exhausted to try to figure out my map. My mind was set though, and I just couldn't let Dirk down. I talked to dozens of proprietors, hoping that I would find one good connection. Nothing!

I began to think, "Italy is a country filled with art and antiques so how am I batting zero?" It's not like I had never gone to a new city before to find antiques. Thirty years ago, when we were only dealing in Milano, I opened up the English, Danish, Torino and Genova markets for STA. It was easy then! I simply looked in the local yellow pages and found where the antique dealers were clustered, and in those days the dealers were loaded with treasures, just waiting for Steve and me to buy them. I then decided that Rome was not going to offer me anything other than sightseeing and sore feet.

Next stop: four days in Florence. My appreciation of art had grown tremendously, and thanks to Joe all of our museum visits were pre-arranged so we didn't have to stand in the queues to enter. However, the sightseeing only

5 Questions to Consider Before Buying Home Furnishings

1. Is this an investment?

You don't buy a car without considering what it's worth even after you drive it. You don't buy a house in a neighborhood where the market will only go down. So why would you not consider these same things when buying the furniture you put in your home? Antiques tend to hold their value and can appreciate, whereas new furniture is usually just given away.

2. Does this store offer customization?

We all know the importance of half an inch, but why let it keep you from buying a piece you love? Or, "If only this could fit our TV!" Where at most home furnishing stores it's a "How you see it is how it comes" philosophy, ours is "Anything is possible." You want a 52" LCD TV inside that armoire, we will make it happen. Heck, we'll even come over and watch the Trojans beat the Bruins with you.

3. Does the store offer a certificate of authenticity?

Let's face it, accidents happen! In the event of a fire, flood or an earthquake, if your furniture is damaged it may as well be considered trash. At Steven-Thomas, we offer certificates of authenticity for insurance purposes, stating the value, description, circa date, origin, the invoice number and date you purchased them on.

4. Is there a Trade-Up policy if I change my mind or move?

Sometimes people move or simply want to change the feel of their home. If you try to take your bed set back to any number of big box stores one, two or even three years later, they wouldn't even offer you an ear to listen to the request that they buy that bed set back. At Steven-Thomas, we offer 90% of what you paid on your purchase for up to three years! There's nothing more comforting than knowing your furniture still has at least 90% of its value for up to three years.

5. **Can I find these items anywhere else?**

The most common answer is, yes! Why waste your time shopping around for a piece of furniture that you, your next door neighbor, your mom and your uncle all have? At Steven-Thomas, you are not likely to find any other piece like what you'll find here. With custom homes and custom cars aplenty, why not have furniture that is completely unique to only you?

CONGRATULATIONS TO STEVE AND TERRI ON THEIR

distracted me from antiquing for a brief moment.

I hoped that Florence would be better than Rome, so I asked the owner of our small hotel where I would find the "antique districts." Luckily, one was on the other side of my hotel, so instead of taking the "Chianti Wine Tour" with the rest of the group, I set off early in the morning, buying tools in hand yet again. I was just sure that I would fulfill Dirk's request.

At first, I found many of the shops looked intimidating; locked doors seem to give that feeling. But then I thought about it and remembered that STA's front doors were nicer than I would see here, and how could I be intimidated when I have a world-class antique store of my own. So I wiped my brow and marched on. Each time I introduced myself and handed my business card over, I was welcomed with open arms. Each had their share of exquisite pieces, but at prices beyond what I would ever pay. Florence offered me nothing more than Rome had!

Throughout my search, one re-occurring thought struck me. Market conditions have changed so dramatically over the past thirty years that it would be impossible for anybody to start in the antique business today like Steve and I did thirty years ago without a network of reliable suppliers. It made me appreciate the valuable resource and relationship we had developed with Monica, Vanni and the network of dealers throughout Europe loyal to STA.

It was also great to network with other Italian dealers and hear each version of the common theme to all in the small world of antiques: the finest quality antiques are becoming increasingly scarce and it has become quite difficult to explain this fact to clients. I was surprised, but proud, that several knew of Steven-Thomas even in areas that we do not frequent. Many had worked with dealers we've worked with in Italy over the past 30 years. It made me feel like a real veteran of this business!

Focusing back on shopping, I knew I would find something when I met with our buyer and good friend, Monica in Milano. Dedicated to their work, Monica and her partner Vanni scour Italy exclusively for STA. As soon as we got settled into our hotel, I quickly climbed aboard the number 24 tram for the crowded and always entertaining 25-minute ride to Monica's little shop and warehouse, which had two months worth of treasures.

Upon arrival, I was amazed at the quality and excellent condition of the stocked warehouse of antiques available to me, or already purchased for me. And best of all, the prices were affordable! What a difference from Rome and Florence! Waiting for me was an exquisite, highly carved bedroom set (not quite unique enough for Dirk), several beautiful wrought iron chandeliers, an important executive's library set, and an emotional art nouveau bronze plaque of an unknown soldier; more than a container of goods just waiting to be shipped. Monica and Vanni had really come through for us. It was a great way to end my trip.

Finding the good stuff at the right price is about trust and relationships. It's not all the glamour some would make it out to be. It's about trusting the natives who have proven they will put forward the effort through hot summer days or bone chilling nights. When the time comes for Steve and me to retire, we will leave the next generation of leadership at Steven-Thomas with valuable resources and relationships that can't be developed over night.

Did I feel like my vacation was slighted because I spent so much time antique shopping? Not at all, in fact it added to my trip. This is what I've done for 30 years, and it's undeniably who I am. I didn't find the bed set I was looking for, but Dirk is patient, and so are we. Not everything comes easily. Especially in the antique business.

On Tom's trip he saw this small carved box, selling for 8,000 Euro (almost $11,500). We recently sold almost the exact same box for $4,000!

FIRST GRANDSON, BRETT ALEXANDER SLYMEN