



## september inspiration... *collectors*

When we talk about "hunting and gathering" in art or the decorative arts, I find that most people fall into two categories - accumulators and collectors. Speaking for myself, and for most designers I know, we fall into the accumulator category. To be a serious collector, it takes focus, reserve, and a willingness to walk away from a "find" no matter how beautiful, if it doesn't fit the specifications.

As a designer, I am constantly on the hunt for decorative objects that, "pull a room together". My eye is trained to enter a shop and scan for any items that are interesting. All of this scanning usually takes place in under 3 minutes. I am rarely looking for a specific item and it isn't important to me that these items have intrinsic value or not. The search is for chic, stylish or the unexpected.

It's hard to turn down a great find, and as you can imagine, many of those objects end up in our inventory/home (much to my husband's chagrin). A collector, on the other hand, tends to narrow his or her focus to their collection and decide if that object is not only design worthy, but if it is it needed to round out or move their collection to the next level. Discipline is the name of the game. Discipline, when shopping for antiques, is not a word that describes me.

When our two boys were young, we decided rather than buying numerous, dreaded video games, we would start collecting something they were interested in and that had value. It would be a good learning experience for them, and who knows, maybe one of them would catch the "collecting bug". My sons were, and still are, avid baseball players, so we started them on a collection of signed baseballs. It was a perfect fit. Going forward, for birthdays and holidays, they received gifts of baseballs that were signed by players of the New York Yankees.

When our oldest son was about to celebrate his 9th birthday, I made a trip to the New York Yankee Store in Manhattan. He requested a Mariano Rivera baseball. I was relieved that they had one in stock. I purchased the ball, wrapped it for his birthday, and all was well. The morning of his birthday, I remember our family of four, huddled together on our bed, waiting for the *Birthday Boy* to open his gift. My son anxiously tore open the box. Rather than the expected squeal of delight, there was the sound of silence. I knew something was wrong.

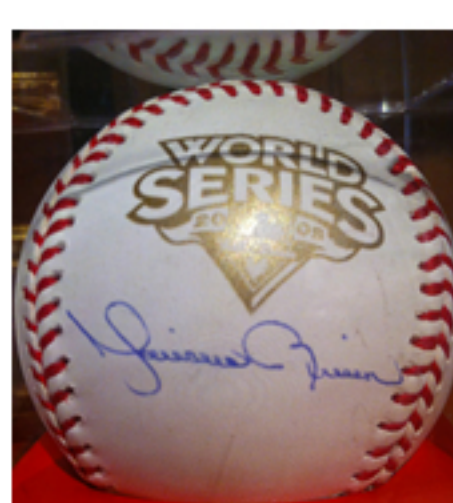
"Mom, this isn't Mariano Rivera's baseball.

"Don't be silly, of course it is", I replied, "I bought it at the Yankee Store. I specifically asked for Mariano Rivera."

"No Mom, Mariano's number is 42, this baseball is number 24! It isn't Mariano's!!"

I looked at the baseball. The signature certainly looked like it read Mariano Rivera....but wait...the authenticity card fluttered out of the box. It said, Manny Ramirez #24. At that moment, both our sons (along with my husband) started screeching....not only did I NOT buy the correct baseball, I bought Manny Ramirez's baseball. To my guys, Manny was the Bad Boy of baseball, and, to add insult to injury, he was a BOSTON RED SOX!

How could I have made such an error? I should be ashamed. OK, I thought, what was the big deal? It was an understandable mistake. Mariano Rivera #42 and Manny Ramirez #24. I could totally understand the mix up, why couldn't they? I learned my lesson right then and there about collectors - they take their collections seriously! I obviously didn't have the same connection that they did. In short, you have to have the "passion".



Never underestimate the passion of collectors. Last year, at a dinner for the Hudson River Museum, I sat next to a couple who were serious collectors. They loaned the museum two wonderful 19th century paintings for the museum's *Industrial Sublime* Exhibition. However beautiful, however valuable, their collection of art was not the focus of their collections. The husband collected large scale iron trains and his wife collected British Biscuit Tins in the shape of Transportation Vehicles from a very specific "circa" (sorry but the dates have totally escaped me.) They waxed enthusiastically all evening about those objects. The passion for metal trains and cookie tins in the shape of British Taxi Cabs really eluded me. It is always interesting to understand where the passion for an object comes from.

Some collections start out as a quest for decorative objects. I was working on a Nantucket project and during the design process, my client and I discussed the design focus. She really loved Blue and white porcelain and we discussed that she would start to purchase some Chinese export objects for the new interior. On the day of the installation, the largest and most extensive collection of blue and white export porcelain I had ever seen arrived. During the previous months, she had moved from accumulating for the new house, to compiling a serious collection. In addition, she also brought out her collections of scrimshaw, woolies, Nantucket furniture and lightship baskets that I had only heard about. Her focus - Nantucket maritime folk art and antiques. For a designer, having such a treasure trove of objects to add to a project is Nirvana.

Where to house or showcase collections often pose challenges. Another client has been collecting Civil War weapons and ephemera since he was a young man. To house his antique rifles, pistols, muskets and sabers, along with other Civil War items, he turned a small maid's room in his NYC apartment into a tiny armory. The tour starts either during cocktails or after dinner (No cheese and crackers please). Surprise....some collections start out quite by accident.



Before I close, I do have to admit that I have one tiny collection. I found a coffee mug commemorating the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II at one of my favorite haunts. I actually bought it to use, as I am always hunting for bone china coffee mugs. Later, I found another, and before I knew it, I had a small collection of items commemorating the British Royal Family from Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, to the wedding of William and Kate Middleton in 2011. Not long ago, a friend of mine presented me with a gift of 46 pieces she had inherited from a dear friend's collection. She knew her friend would approve. Her beloved objects had found a good home. Sometimes collections just find you...

**Buyer Beware!**

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