

Creative Living

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Furniture fit for a castle goes on sale

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

You've got to believe that as a kid, Joe Bianco didn't just dream of living in a big house, he dreamed he was a king of the castle.

Bianco is the owner of World of Architectural Antiques of Troy and this weekend the contents of his museum/store will be auctioned off (on location at Maple and Dequindre) by DuMouchelle's. He's already taken what he needs from the vast inventory to furnish a mansion he's in the process of restoring for his personal use. The rest will be up for grabs — for a price — anywhere from two to six figures.

The paneled ballroom from the Piccadilly Hotel of New York with 24 oil paintings mounted on the paneled walls, 10 crystal chandeliers, a splendid mahogany and marble fireplace and an oak floor, is at the high end and a large collection of Jim Beam bottles are on the low side.

In between are literally hundreds of larger-than-life items such as a wooden mirror and console from Scotland in which the carved cherubs are the size of actual babies, a stained glass window of a nymph in a pond that was at the landing in Lillian Russell's home and a massive 12-foot high cabinet made to showcase the woodcarver's art for the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition.

Larry DuMouchelle said he expects the bidding to be fierce for the three-piece Centennial bedroom suite by Berkey and Gay of Grand Rapids, also shown at the 1876 Exposition. While admitting that a great many pieces will be challenging to move, DuMouchelle said, "It takes five strong men to move that door," emphasizing the work strong. He was referring to an Italian bronze door in high relief that tells the story of woman in great (and heavy) detail.

Before Bianco himself arrived at a preview and after he left ("I've got a lot of things to do"), his assistants and auction house staff spoke for him.

His daughter-in-law, Judy Bianco, who has worked with the antiques for several years, said, "this was just

his hobby. He's been collecting for 20 years . . . what he wanted he already has. Most of what is here needed very little restoration or repairs."

Bianco said, "I was going to build a house — a lot originally was going into a big house."

Plans fell through, he said, and the house was never built. He has since found a smaller Meadow Brook-style house to restore. When Bianco wasn't buying and selling architectural antiques, he was and still is, president of Proto-Plastics of Troy, which makes injection molds for the auto industry.

"It was the artistry — the work done by hand that he loves," said one of his assistants.

And size — don't forget size. Bianco obviously responds to mass. A 20-ton marble pulpit, several altars and Stations of the Cross were sold with the building which will be soon become the Polish Cultural Center.

However, left for bidders and buyers, who also think big, are an 8-by-9-foot, rosewood hand-carved mantle from the Israel Sheenman home, designed by Albert Kahn; a 22-by-9-foot oval mahogany conference table; a 19th century rococo chandelier, 8-by-7-by-5, decorated with maidens and cherubs; an American burled walnut bank island, 9 feet 6 inches by 5 feet 6 inches; a massive English Victorian, hand-carved oak staircase; and an entire room from a 19th century Cape Cod home including two larger than life figures of Elizabeth I and Henry

VIII in stained glass windows.

Sure there are sofas, tables, dressers, mirrors, light fixtures and chairs that will fit into an average size dwelling, but somehow they seem dwarfed by the oversize examples of fine workmanship from the 19th century and earlier.

Preview times are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. today and 10 a.m. to noon Friday. Auction hours are 7-11 p.m. Friday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday at the World of Architectural Antiques, Dequindre and Maple, Troy and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday at Proto-Plastics Factory, 1100 Piedmont, Troy.

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Judy Bianco, the owner's daughter-in-law, pauses beside a burl walnut Victorian bedroom suite made in Grand Rapids by Berkey and Gay. It was shown in the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876.

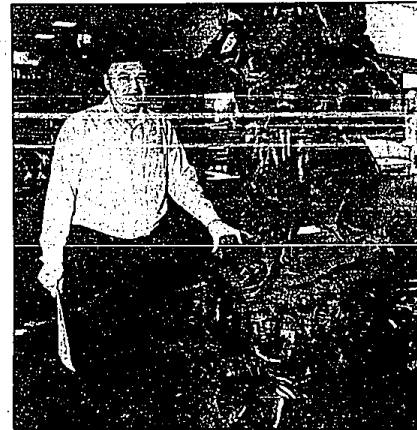
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Paneled ballroom, circa 1928, from the Piccadilly Hotel of New York, was removed and completely reinstalled in Joe Bianco's Proto-Plastics building in Troy. Now, he needs the space.



Joe Bianco rests a hand on a wood sculpture with Nubian slave figures at the base and three figures of Atlas above them. Bianco is a great admirer of finehand carving as exemplified here.

Staff photos by Jerry
ZolynskyInternational look
Antique dealer uses European sourcesBy Corinne Abatt
staff writer

First Mia Wimer fell in love with Austrian bridal chests and cabinets, then she fell in love with an Austrian chemist, now based in Birmingham.

That's what lured this charming Dutch-born antique dealer here from her former home in Philadelphia. She's only been here since last summer, but she's taken to the community eagerly. She's done antique shows (most recently in Plymouth) and cultivated several interior designers and a list of clients.

Because she was born and educated in Rotterdam, she has an excellent source for the European antiques which she likes to handle — those beautiful hand-painted 18th and 19th century bridal chests and cabinets from Austria, Germany and Holland, although the latter are getting very high priced and difficult to find. She often has a selection of French clocks, other accessories such as decoys and country furniture.

She's in the habit of taking six or more of the large cabinets to a show and doesn't blanch when her mover

arrives to start loading the half dozen or more heavy cupboards she usually takes to a show — it goes with the territory.

THESE AUSTRIAN cupboards (she has three or four in her own home) were made for couples just starting out in their married life. They are painted with scenes or portraits in the door panels with lots of detailing in a variety of colors. Frequently the year and the name of the bride are written over the door.

Wimer keeps dishes and glassware in the one in her breakfast room, a TV and stereo in one upstairs and china in the one in the living room. Many of them, she said, come from around Steiermark, south of Vienna. She said they are often found stored in barns. The original paint remains in good condition, relatively undamaged by years in storage.

"I think the combination of modern, high tech and antiques is wonderful," she said. Her home illustrates her preferences and her skill as an interior designer as well as collector/dealer. Contemporary black leather sofas form an L around

a fireplace over which is an antique oil painting, a winter scene of her native Holland.

"I love this type of painting with its brooding skies. It reminds me of my home. There is more sunshine here," she said with a smile.

The large heavy antique oak coffee table is Dutch and she speculated that it may have been used as a pay table where wages were handed out to workers and that it was originally standard height.

A large Spanish table with a wrought iron crisscross stretcher at the far end of the living room, holds several crystal decanters and glasses. In the foyer is antique Spanish cabinet and above it is an intricately worked stained glass panel that came from a Dutch home. The off-white carpet and walls form an exciting setting for these dramatic pieces.

In her business in Philadelphia, she worked closely with an excellent stencil artist doing furniture as well as walls for interior design commissions. So far, a skilled stenciler seems to be the one thing she hasn't found since she moved here.



A stained-glass window from Holland over a Spanish chest, above, Mia Wimer, right, with antique pine cupboards.

