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Photograph by Robert Levin

Shop Talk

Benoist Drut of Maison Gerard

As told to Sarah Horne Grose · September 27, 2017

The New York City-based Collective dealer on finding inspiration in the woods, talking to furniture, and how to know when to buy

I started collecting very early in life, like at age ten or twelve. I was born near Giverny, in France, very close to where Monet lived. Our village isn't that far from Paris, but it's a world away, maybe 350 people, the sort of place where you know everyone. It's like the little French village you might imagine in a movie. My mother never bought a new piece of furniture, and I was the one going with her to the antiques stores or auctions.

I had many collections. One of my first purchases at auction was a little metal car, a dinky vintage toy. It was in the original box. That was a prized possession for many years. When I was 15 years old, I knew everything about [18th century royal furniture](#), I would read books on the furniture of Versailles and the various royal castles. When I become obsessed with a period I truly become obsessed.



Maison Gerard store and gallery. Photograph by Robert Levin

At home, I can spend hours moving furniture and objects from here to there. It's satisfying. I live in New York but every weekend I go to my house in the country, in Sullivan County, which is where *Dirty Dancing* was filmed. You can be my best friend but if you invite me to something on a Saturday, I will pass. The house is in the middle of the woods, it's kind of magic. I will be there with my books, blasting opera or something like Cat Power. I get a lot of inspiration from doing that.

“ When I was 15 years old, I knew everything about 18th century royal furniture. I would read books on the furniture of Versailles and the various royal castles. ”



Maison Gerard's booth at the Winter Antiques Show. Photograph by Robert Levin

Whenever I start working with an artist, it's because I have a lust for a piece. If I don't like something I won't bid on it. And I like a mix. I was born in France and I have lived in America longer than I ever lived in France, so I feel like a mutt. That's also how I collect. I might have 18th century doors, 1940s furniture, and then [contemporary pieces](#). I think they talk to each other.

I have been to Marrakech recently on a few buying trips. I usually like to be against the latest design trend and to just buy what I have a passion for. The only rule I follow is to follow my instinct. On one of my last trips there I purchased some beautiful carved pieces of wood that are a part of a wedding saddle. When the bride would be on top of the camel, there were four sticks of wood to hold her on top. I didn't know anything about this woodwork but after four or five days of seeing them here and there I was obsessed. I bought like 20.

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