

# welcome

## when the provenance is love

**T**HE QUESTION I AM MOST frequently asked is: What is the next hot color? The next question is: Should I get rid of the things that remind me of a person from the past? This question is much more interesting than the first because it has a clear answer: Yes, and no. The beginning of a new year is as good a time as any to take stock of your belongings. (Other good times are Valentine's Day, the Ides of March, April Fools' Day, May Day, etc.; you get the idea.)

To have and to hold. Ever wonder what, exactly, that means? When you are no longer holding, you probably shouldn't be having. The *feng shui* experts would tell you that you should never hold onto things that will keep you in thrall to the past. You cannot underestimate the power of things to affect your every waking mood, and your dream life, too. But it is difficult to let things go, particularly if their provenance was love.

The quality of souvenirs of a shared life falls along a broad spectrum. At one end are the friends and lovers who were mingy. If he wasn't generous in the Thing Department, you have an easy task ahead of you. Twenty or thirty minutes, tops, leaving you half a century for weeping and gnashing of teeth. This sort of cleanup calls for Total—oh, was I about to say Retribution? I meant Redistribution. Give everything away. Otherwise, you will be constantly reminded of parsimony, and there is nothing quite as unattractive as parsimony. You can't do a thing with it.

And then there are those who were stunningly lavish, bringing into your house paintings, vases for the mantelpiece, candlesticks for the dinner table, to say nothing of those old rings for the dressing table and silk slips for the bedroom, and so on. Admittedly, these sorts of pals don't come along too often, but the fortunate correlate is that neither does so much of the attendant trouble. (The generous ones tend to be high-maintenance. You didn't think all those gifts came at no cost, did you?) You would think the lavish loves would present more post-breakup stress, but that isn't necessarily so. If you were with someone that generous, you were probably very happy, at times, and many of the things he gave you will be replete with good karma, and remind you of the kind of people you want in your future. These things should be treasured. Letting go—what your friends, your sister, and your taxi driver are telling you to do—is somewhat overrated. Looking back can be quite satisfying. And, as you sort through those fruits of abundance, you get your chance to exercise

discernment about what to toss and what to keep, an exercise in judgment you probably ought to have engaged in *before* he moved into your life, but how could you have known, and so on and so forth.

If you are living in rooms filled with mementos of lost love, you simply cannot get rid of them all. This is where we abandon the wisdom of the *feng shui* experts. Let's face it: by now we've all had enough breakups, in major and minor keys, to understand that we cannot burn down the barn after each one. Everything cannot be tossed. You must practice a sort of emotional triage, and figure out when to stop. (Of course, if you knew how to do that, things would never have gotten so bad in the first place.) Try the bubble wrap exercise. Roll some of those gifts up, hide them away. This is what closets, attics, basements, and garages were invented for: troubled pasts. Even better, this is a good use of your sister's closets, attics, etc. A last, and tricky, matter is the boxes filled with gorgeous old ceramic pots for his conservatory, cases of that silver-winged wine you savored at lunch for his cellar, a painting of a seascape—all the presents you bought for his birthday but didn't have a chance to give him. You liked them enough for him. You'll like them enough for yourself.

Of course, if he was the author of that clever combination of hues in the walls and carpet in the living room, you're cooked. You'll never find a better match without starting from scratch;

but you've done that before, and you can do it again. For now, revel in decorating services rendered, and remember the pleasure of striking the right tones. And if you cannot bring yourself to give up that birthday gift of a handsome clock sitting on the mantel, chiming your heart out on the half hour, just think: Every bell puts you that much closer to finding the next hot color.



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