

welcome

mixing a room

What a great luxury it is to collect things, and not for the obvious reasons. Quite apart from what it might (but not necessarily) say about one's bank account, collecting requires a quick instinct for beauty, the refinement of the eye, an unremitting passion, and the time it takes to develop a seriousness of purpose, an ability to focus, a sense of concentration, discipline, and the layering of a special knowledge.

This is just the beginning.

Anyone with money can hire someone to help "build a collection," as it is now referred to—as if we were erecting some sort of social scaffolding. There is nothing wrong in setting out to create some coherent display of taste or achievement; it has long been the way of the world. But there is something wrong when, either through intimidation, ignorance, or sheer carelessness, we lose the distinction between collecting and accumulating.

I have been on one too many visits to a newly decorated house during which the owner will walk me through room after room, pointing to chair, sofa, desk, lighting fixture, saying, "This is my Prouvé; this is Arbus, that's Adnet, there's Perriand, and over there, the Ruhlmann . . ." (These, by the way, tend to be the homes where visitors are invited, at the door, to pull surgical booties over their shoes; I mention this in the spirit of reporting a custom of some country that was heretofore unknown to me. It certainly makes a slippery path of any marble foyer. But rampant germ phobia is another subject.)

Only a few years ago, house tours went along the lines of "There's the Noguchi; here's my Nelson; that's the Eames—prototype, of course." Soon, if my hunch that the next mania will be for things of the '70s holds, we will be shown through rooms filled with serial purchases of Aulenti, Pantoni, and Pesce. This sort of brand-name collecting (and decorating) has even moved into our gardens, er, excuse me, garden rooms; any self-respecting garden can no longer simply have beds. "There is my David Austin rose garden; there is my English border; here's my Japanese meditation stroll; ah, we have arrived at the Moroccan teahouse." So many must-haves with which to fill our lives.

In all the accumulating, only one thing is forgotten. Surprise. The sense of a personality revealed. Personality, with all its quirks, humors, whimsies, twists, and charm. The charm of the

insouciant. Personality, in all its ego, its will to order and impose, its confidence to say something interesting. That's what great collecting, and great decorating, is about—saying something we haven't heard before. Putting things a different way, but a way that makes sense. Making us think. Making us feel. Whether it is the collection of furniture in a room, or the art on the wall, or the rocks and minerals, or the medieval tapestries, what must come through is the deliberating mind of the collector. Painting by number had its appeal—when we were children. Now it is time to muster the energy, nerve, and caring to fill our homes with our own collections.

I've recently become enamored of the cocktail hour, thanks largely to the tutelage of our food and wine editors. Whiskey sours are my particular passion. (I finally get it, what those Cheever characters were up to, in their suburban houses. But the latent heartache in suburban living is also another subject.) It strikes me, from the depths of my highball, no doubt, that a good collection—a good room—should be like a good drink. It is all about the ingredients. It needs to be smooth, but it also needs a lot of zest. It needs to give a rush, turn your head, and at the same time work its spell easily enough to make you want to linger. Decorating and collecting should be quixotic; you will never amass the perfect collection, you will never finish the perfect room (you will never have the perfect drink either, but don't give up), you would never even want to, if you stopped seriously to consider it. That would ruin the fun. There is always more to do, more to redo, more to try, more to finesse, more to mix, more to sample. You may think you have the perfect recipe, but what would happen if you added a shot (of color) here; what if you muddled (the provenances) there? And, after a certain point,

so what if you can't remember who made it, where you bought it, or how much it cost? That was never the most important consideration—or it never should have been.

We don't need a Good Taste Board to certify our objects or organize our impulses. We just have to learn to follow our hearts. That is, after all, how we find the best things we take into our homes.



Dominique Browning, EDITOR