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OCTOBER 2012

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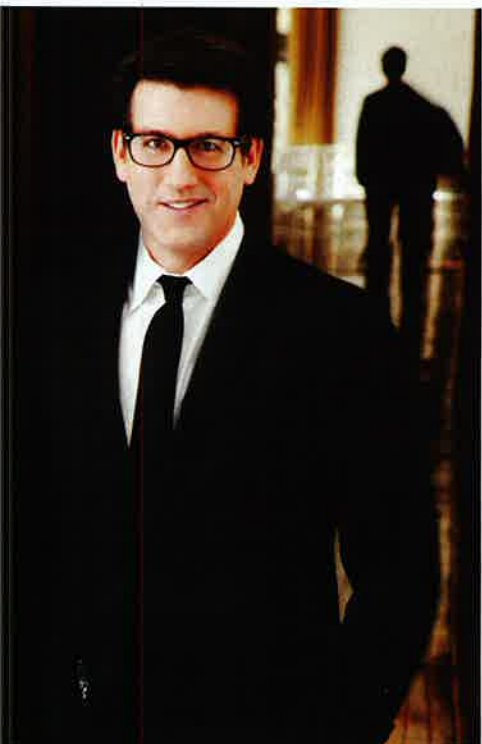
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HIS FAVES

Stellar shop
 "This is a world of its own with carefully edited selections of the most wonderful things." *Bergdorf Goodman, New York.*



Morning ritual
 "I wake up at 5 a.m. and read the *New York Times* online, but I still read the printed edition, too."

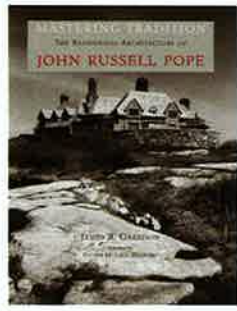


Best brogues
 "I wear these suede lace-ups all week. I own about 10 pairs." *Shoes, John Lobb.*



Cool collectible
 "I love the playful element that animal-themed accessories add to a bar." *Shaker, Cynthia Findlay Antiques.*

Top architect
 "John Russell Pope was a true master of design and space." *Mastering Tradition, Acanthus Press.*



Michael's Top 10 Picks

1. **Shoes:** John Lobb
2. **Store:** Bergdorf Goodman
3. **Favourite find:** Animal-themed items
4. **Motto:** "Decide what you want, believe in it, and then get ready for the ride of your life"
5. **Website:** New York Times
6. **Sheets:** Hotel Classic collection by Frette
7. **Drink:** Starbucks' iced unsweetened green tea
8. **Book:** *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill
9. **Fabric:** Loro Piana Cashmere
10. **Architect:** John Russell Pope

Michael Bruno

The intrepid founder of 1stdibs brought the thrill of antiquing online. *By CATHERINE SWEENEY*

While most of us only dream of perusing the aisles at Paris's Marché aux Puces, the innovative website 1stdibs.com made it possible for us to buy its offerings from afar. The company's visionary founder, Michael Bruno, was strolling that very flea market when he decided to bring these amazing finds to the world — via the internet. The former real-estate agent turned his love of old homes, architecture, and by extension, antiques into a lucrative online business. Started as a direct vendor-to-designer antiques site in the late 1990s, it's grown into an all-encompassing online marketplace and resource site for everyone.

Bruno is no stranger to hard work and innovative business ventures. "I always tread lightly when I do something new to see if it's the right path, but I'll always *do* rather than talk." The advent of vintage style and of mixing antique with modern must give some credit to 1stdibs; it made vintage such a hot collectible, first with designers hopping on the trend, then filtering down to homeowners. The site has now branched out to include fashion, jewelry and art, with around 3,000 pieces uploaded daily. Bruno, who splits his time between the Hamptons and a lakeside Georgian just outside Manhattan, is always thinking big. We caught up with him in New York to see what he has tucked up his entrepreneurial sleeve.

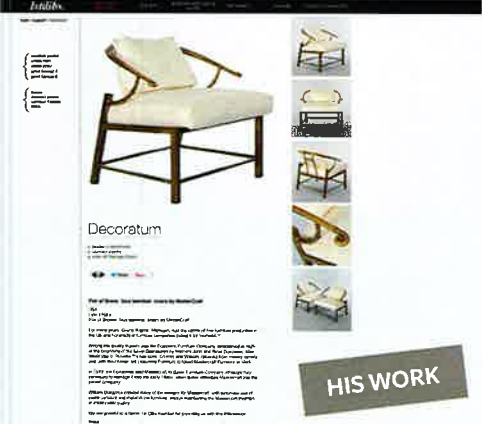
House & Home: Have you always had a love of architecture and homes?

Michael Bruno: Real estate led me down the path to where I am now. It's an obsession of mine. I grew up in Larchmont, N.Y., which had a lot of lovely old homes, and you couldn't help but notice and admire them — I couldn't anyway. I got into the real-estate business when I was very young, 19 or 20, in La Jolla,

Calif., which had a lot of great houses, so I was always drawn to architecture. And with architecture, you have to have design. **H&H:** How did you transition into what you do now?

MB: In the late 1990s, designers were driving around and taking Polaroid pictures then taking them to their clients. It became clear to me that this was not the

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HIS WORK

ABOVE: Michael Bruno's website, 1stdibs, connects consumers to furniture, jewelry, art and fashion vendors around the world. Above are two of the many selections we found while surfing for gorgeous mid-century finds.

Produced by Holly Meighen (images)/Photography by Andrew French (portrait)/Kim Jeffery (cocktail shaker, newspaper)

INTERVIEW

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way for this to work, so I set out to create a database and a whole orchestration to make the products that became available more accessible.

H&H: You essentially brought the antiques markets of the world to everyone with access to a computer, which was certainly not the case when you started the site.

MB: Then, people would travel, which was not practical to do all the time, or they had to shop at stores close to home. So designers were forced to use brand new items to get what they wanted. Once we made the market more accessible, more designers used antique and vintage product. It's helped to grow the market for antique and vintage finds.

H&H: At first, you just sold to the trade.

MB: Initially, we felt designers would be the only ones qualified to look at pictures and buy items online, but after 18 months, we opened it to consumers.

H&H: What is your own home like?

MB: I have two houses right now that I'm absolutely crazy about. I just finished renovating a house in Southampton. It was the first time I've worked with a designer — Windsor Smith — and the result is spectacular. And, I have a brick Georgian mansion on 12 acres by the lake in Tuxedo Park, N.Y., which is an hour outside of Manhattan. It's just a beautiful, special place on Earth. I commute to work from there because I like to go to bed and wake up in the country.

H&H: How would you characterize their interior style?

MB: I'm a non-professional collector, so my look would be that of a casual collector's house.

H&H: You must find it difficult to resist all these pieces you've found for the website. Any risk of hoarding?

MB: I recently edited out everything that wasn't right for my Southampton house and took the rest to the house in Tuxedo Park, which swallowed it all up like it was nothing. So if I sell it someday furnished, then I'll really have to go shopping, which would be fun.

H&H: The site seems to be part marketplace and part online magazine

where you profile designers behind the pieces you sell.

MB: We decided to go for the introspective side of things. "Who is this person and what makes them tick?" We're able to get them to share in a deeper way that isn't 100 per cent about their projects. I joke that it's like *People* magazine for design.

H&H: Do you have a favourite designer?

MB: I'm usually attracted to one-of-a-kind pieces, but there are so many designers, living and dead, that I love. Jean-Michel Frank was one of the first designers to do something that was contemporary-looking that's still being copied to this day. It looks fresh and new but was made in the '30s.

H&H: What's your most treasured object?

MB: The first luxury item I purchased online was a 1963 220 CE convertible Mercedes in Diplomat Gray from eBay. Before I started 1stdibs, over a decade ago, I test-drove the idea of luxury e-commerce — I wanted the experience of buying a big-ticket item on the web.

H&H: Any advice for people buying antiques online for the first time?

MB: Be sure to buy through a trusted source and double-check measurements and condition.

H&H: Where do you see 1stdibs going from here?

MB: We are focused on growing our territories. We just recently introduced the Benelux region, which includes Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. We have about 80 dealers from that area. And, we're preparing to launch Italy and Germany in the fall, and many more European markets after that.

H&H: And how do you spend your downtime?

MB: It depends on the time of year. I travel a lot for work, so I like to stay home. I'll spend most of the summer at the beach in the Hamptons. I'm so happy there. I swim in the ocean every day for about 30 to 40 minutes and I do Ashtanga yoga four or five times a week.

H&H: What are you most proud of?

MB: Being a good son.

H&H: Any last thoughts for our readers?

MB: Be a good steward, and buy and live with special things that make you smile and deserve to be saved for the next generation. **H&H**

A WINNING MIX

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a high ceiling and great scale.

KB: What were the biggest challenges to realizing your vision?

LR: We're on a corner lot, so achieving privacy in the backyard was a challenge. Similarly, we wanted lots of light in the house and really worked at designing it so you get sunlight everywhere, but don't feel exposed to the street. The two-storey height of the living room reduced the second floor area, and we had to be careful to have enough space for generous bedrooms and baths upstairs. Ray did a brilliant job solving these challenges.

KB: The landscaping nicely echoes the style of the interiors.

LR: Our landscape architect, Ron Holbrook, understood the concept right away. Bradford pear trees are planted in rows to give a hint of an old-fashioned orchard, for example, but the overall planting plan has a boldness and simplicity that makes it contemporary. The landscaping also helps give privacy on our corner lot. Ron is the best!

KB: What was the overall concept for the decorating in the house?

LR: It's clean and bold. Every room has a feature that is dramatic, there is no clutter, and colour is used strategically — it's definitely a high-contrast approach. I don't know how to do a house that is entirely soft, muted layers. I prefer to inject drama, like a black geometric rug and hassocks on a bleached-oak floor with a white linen sofa and chairs.

KB: The decorating has a more contemporary feel than your signature style. Was this a departure for you?

LR: No, thankfully my style has evolved, and this is what feels comfortable to me for a new home designed for an active family. And I've always loved a mix. In the library, rough-hewn shelves give the flavour of an original farmhouse, but we contrast this ruggedness with the trendy appeal of a modern sectional and the drama of silk ikat pillows. I work with talented young designers who are always bringing me new ideas. They're not afraid to use inexpensive pieces mixed with investment furniture.

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