

Shopping With...Robert Verdi

By Lauren David Peden

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"I'm fascinated with possessions and people's obsession with possessions," confessed stylist/TV host Robert Verdi one recent Saturday morning when we met him at The Garage flea market (112 West 25th Street; 212-243-5343; www.annexantiques.com). "I used to go to garage sales when I was growing up in Maplewood, New Jersey because I always liked seeing how people lived, more so than what they were getting rid of."

Finding a pair of Biedermeier chairs while still in his teens and turning them around and selling them for beaucoup bucks increased Verdi's appreciation for other people's castoffs, and the thrill of the hunt keeps him on the flea market treasure trail to this day. In fact, you'll find the 37-year-old Brooklyn resident at The Garage almost every weekend he's in town.

"It's kind of like a good orgasm," Verdi told Fashion Wire Daily. "You want to have it again. So I'm always on the look out for something here that's worth a lot more than they're charging."

So what's more important, clothing or decor, we asked the fashion-cop-turned-home-style-guru (in addition to dressing stars for the red carpet, Verdi has also decorated the homes of Hugh Jackman, Sandra Bernhard, Mariska Hargitay and Eva Longoria, the latter of whom he also outfitted in a Doo.Ri dress and the bathing suit heard 'round the world - a ruffled Shay Todd maillot - at the MTV VMAs in Miami).

"I think they're seamless," he replied. "If I see a chick and she's got a mohawk and purple nail polish and punk rock jewelry, you know when you walk into her house she's going to have furniture from Urban Outfitters, something inflatable and a black rug. If someone's wearing Lily Pulitzer, you know they're going to have blue and white china, a chintz sofa, their grandmother's Persian rug and some big balloon valances."

So what could we ascertain about Verdi's home from his own ensemble which, on the day we met, included cargo pants from Massimo, brown suede Birkenstocks, a gray t-shirt with a black spider on the chest from Daffy's and a bright patchwork hobo bag from Lucky?

"I break the rule," said the man who usually favors super colorful clothes from Etro, Yohji Yamamoto, Paul Smith and Ted Baker. "But today is different because I'm in my flea market attire. I dress for propriety and the thing that I'm doing."

And the thing he was doing was hoping to not get ripped off at the flea market by wearing a \$3,000 suit and his signature diamond-encrusted cross ("It's as big as my hat; when I bend over it punches me in the stomach") while looking for vintage bags and belts for Longoria, who has a 21" waist - that *beetch!* - and searching for vintage crucifixes for his apartment, which he collects with feverish abandon.

"I collect a little of everything and nothing in particular," he quipped.

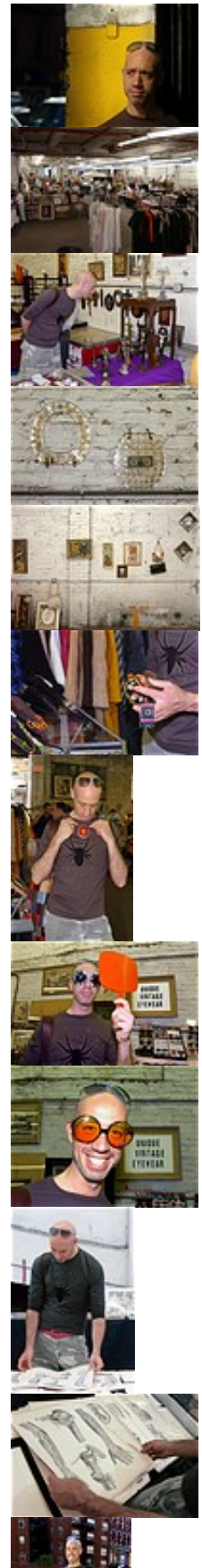
The Garage was surprisingly quiet when we arrived at 8:30 in the morning; apparently a lot of the dealers had made like the rest of Manhattan and hightailed it out of town for the Labor Day weekend.

Verdi saw a quilt he liked, but didn't think it was worth the \$300 asking price, and quickly moved on to a booth of old picture frames - another thing he collects.

So what does he put in all his frames?

"8x10 glossies," he joked. "I have the same picture of myself hanging in every room. No, sometimes they're just frames for frames' sake, in my world."

Verdi's world also plays host to many, many (many) crosses and crucifixes (he's Catholic but doesn't go to church). "I'm obsessed," he declared when we arrived at a booth full of religious relics. "This is what my house looks like."



Seriously?

"Oh, yeah. The walls are covered in crucifixes. If you're brought up with any religious parameters, that stays with you. I wear a cross every day. I think it's just this awesome reminder of my fragility on the planet. God I hope these are cheap."



God was apparently not answering Verdi's prayers at that moment, because the dealer quoted him a price of several hundred dollars for a single icon. Holy Mary Mother of God!

Verdi considered it, clearly torn, but decided to look around and think it over. ("Oh, look, the Patron Saints of Fashion," he said of a falling apart wall hanging with a trio of haloed figures. "St. Donna, St. Ralph, St. Calvin.")

He did better at a booth of vintage illustrations taken from "The Atlas of Human Anatomy," circa 1879, and bought five - sketches of the human heart, spine, hands, brain and back for the low, low price of \$150 after haggling dealer Arvy Rolband down from \$220.

It was hard to reconcile the image of the irreverent, fun-loving Verdi at home amongst his dusty crucifixes and macabre illustrations (paging Miss Havisham! paging Miss Havisham!)

"Yeah, there's a creepiness factor at my house," he said with a laugh. "I don't know where it comes from, but it's there and I like it. It's a fun creepy, like a mad scientist 'Island of Dr. Moreau creepy.'" Yikes! Invoking a post-"Godfather" Marlon Brando movie as a point of home decor reference? That's about as creepy as it gets, baby.

So where does he keep his goth gallery, in the living room?

"No, they're all in my bedroom, which is really really scary for that very small group of people who are forced to have sex with me," Verdi replied.

After chatting with several fans, who recognized him from E! TV and The Discovery Channel, where his now-defunct show "Surprise By Design" is still in constant rotation, Verdi graciously deflected the attentions of a persistent (and very drunk) man who kept approaching him, sputtering nonsense.

He looked at some ribbon trim (\$2 to \$6 a yard) which he uses to make throw pillows and scored a large oval striped Galalith laminated plastic necklace ("This might be too gay for me; this might upset my parents," he said with a laugh before buying the multicolor pendant).

"Where can we get some more crap?" Verdi cried, a style junkie in need of a fix. "I need some more..."

He headed outside to an ATM to get cash to add to his crucifix stash (he wound up buying five), when a bus went by with a poster for the new Nicolas Cage movie, "Lord of War."

"Look at this Nicolas Cage [poster]," Verdi said. "It's creepy. I'd buy that in a flea market 100 years from now."

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