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My Space:

Alexandre Biaggi

At home with the gallerist and antique dealer, whose interiors reflect his love of the surreal. By Lisa Freedman



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Alexandre Biaggi didn't set out to be an antique dealer. Born in Corsica, he went to Paris to study law – in which he has a Masters – before qualifying as an auctioneer. 'I liked buying more than selling,' he says.

The two activities are, of course, often intertwined and, in the 1980s, he set up his stall at the Saint-Ouen flea market, where he quickly established a reputation for his *recherché* finds.

'I became fascinated by the 1930s interior designer Jean-Michel Frank. At the time, it was all Art Deco and [Émile-Jacques] Ruhlmann and no one was interested in anything made after the 1920s. It was very exciting bringing all this other work out of the shadows.'

Biaggi became a trailblazer, helping to shift buyers' appreciation not only of Frank, but of a myriad of other outstanding interwar craftsmen, including André Arbus, Marc du Plantier and Janine Janet – designers who, today, command prices that stray comfortably into the stratosphere.

As well as running his gallery in the Rue de Seine, Biaggi is sought-after as an interior designer. His home in the chic 6th arrondissement presents a felicitous mix of eras, with work by heroes like Frank sitting happily alongside 19th century sculpture and contemporary ceramics. Biaggi is drawn to anything that animates and fascinates – the unexpected, the humorous, the surreal – all united by his unwavering eye for the perfectly formed and crafted. 'There are, of course, purist collectors,' he says, 'but most people don't want to live in a museum. I certainly don't.'

alexandrebiaggi.com

01 I bought this lamp about 15 years ago. It was designed by Alberto Giacometti for Jean-Michel Frank, the most fashionable interior designer of his day, with clients who included Elsa Schiaparelli and Nelson Rockefeller. Giacometti worked with Frank at the beginning of his career and later said how important designing everyday pieces, like vases, screens and lamps, had been to his development as a sculptor. What I particularly like about this lamp is its references to the antique. Giacometti's sculpture was close to Nuragic [Sardinian] bronzes but, in his work for Frank, he also flirted with Egyptian antiquities.

02 I bought this mahogany and gilded-bronze desk from the estate of Prince Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne Lauraguais. I love the fact that it is both completely Louis XVI and fabulously 1940s, with a real surrealist quality. One of my great heroes is the designer and architect Emilio Terry, who was Prince Henri's maternal uncle, and it is possible the desk was made to designs by Terry.

03 Simone Crestani is a talented, young Italian glass maker and these glass trees were commissioned specially for the gallery. These bonsai have wonderfully poetic twisting branches. I see them as people – each piece has its own personality, as though it were inhabited.

04 I love anything with a surrealist quality and I find this contemporary piece by the Swedish ceramist Klara Kristalova very strange and moving. For me, it seems to symbolise the fears of childhood.

05 These stools were designed in 1959 by the Italian architect-designer Carlo Mollino for the Lutrario Ballroom in Turin. Mollino's work was often modelled on natural forms to create what he called the 'streamlined surreal'. In the ballroom, he was aiming for the effect of a forest clearing where fairies and elves would come to dance; the chairs and stools were covered in different colours – red, green, blue, yellow and pink – to give the effect of a field in bloom. I love the fact that they're both elegant and useful, very light and easy to move around.

06 I've collected 19th and 20th century sculpture for many years. My father, a doctor, was very interested in marine archaeology and through him, I learnt to appreciate Greek and Roman antiquities. In the 20th century many of the great decorators continued to be inspired by neoclassicism, using not only Greco-Roman motifs but Ancient Egyptian. This large bust is by an unknown 19th century sculptor; the plaster figure of Bacchus is a model for a bronze by Charles Despiau, who worked as Rodin's assistant before becoming a celebrated sculptor in his own right.