

UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM



Vervoordt at Palazzo Fortuny in Venice.

VERVOORDT ON THE PERFECT MIX

From his fabled castle on the outskirts of Antwerp, Belgium, the antiques dealer and interior designer Axel Vervoordt reigns as one of the world's most influential tastemakers. His clients, who range from royalty to rock stars, are drawn to the Belgian antiquaire's cerebral good taste. An early proponent of mixing antiques with contemporary art, Vervoordt creates refined interiors—linen-covered furniture, an earthy palette, Old Masters mixed with archeological artifacts—that reach for the sublime. It's more, he says, than just aesthetics. "Choosing art and objects is an art in itself," Vervoordt explains. "It's about recognizing what is important in society, and where our civilization is going." **BY INGRID ABRAMOVITCH**



A work by Lucio Fontana with an antique table in a home in Belgium.



Rough-hewn materials in the designer's home.



The 12th-century castle near Antwerp.

BEGINNINGS

- I started dealing in antiques when I was 14—silver, furniture, Chinese porcelain, and paintings. I wanted to be a collector, and it was a way to make money so I could buy more and better things.
- My father was a horse dealer. Some horses had a difficult character. I'd ride them and break them in, but then my father would sell them. It was a good exercise in learning detachment. I buy what I love, but I have learned not to love anything too much.
- Collecting is in your blood. My mother loved it as well. We didn't live in a grand house, just a small one, but she always made it look beautiful. She lit candles every night. I love rooms with atmosphere.

IN THE MIX

- I mix art and objects from different periods. We're all products of the past, but we must also take inspiration from the present. And we have a responsibility to build a new society for tomorrow.
- It's a pity when collectors go contemporary and get rid of their older art. I tell them to keep the best of the old and search for interactions with the new.

DEALER'S CHOICE

- We just had one of our busiest years ever. People seem to believe more in art today than they do in money. They're buying less furniture and more art. They want fewer but better things.
- Young collectors should surround themselves with serious dealers. They do their research. Your purchase will rise in value—both in monetary terms and in the pleasure you get from the object.
- Never buy art just because the color is right. Art should bring you further along as a person, while also mirroring your view of life. When you approach a collection that way, you can buy different things but there will always be a connection among them.

- Don't just buy what's fashionable. That kind of collection is much less interesting. And it's dangerous. Nothing is so quickly out of fashion as fashion.

ART OF COLLECTING

- Approach the purchase of art as though you are a child who has no idea of the value of a piece or what other people say about it. Listen to your intuition and try to feel it. Does it move you?
- Archeological art and artifacts are a very good buy right now. I love Egyptian art.
- I like things that go right to the essence. This is why I don't like marquetry furniture, which is veneered, or gilded things. I'd rather have a piece of furniture made in a simple wood by shepherds with a natural sense of proportion—people who know how to do a lot with a little.
- Don't buy copies of art. If you can't afford the real thing, go for a walk and find a stone that looks as beautiful as a Brancusi sculpture. You can find amazing things in nature.

INTERIOR STUDIES

- A room should reflect your personality. It should look like it has always existed, even if its style is contemporary. I always like a room where there is a fire burning.
- My favorite colors come from the shades of local earth. Dig in the ground and you'll find so many layers of color—amazing yellows, sand, browns, black, beige. I don't like cool, dogmatic white houses. They're not human. I prefer warmth.
- My home is a castle, and my castle is also a home. It's nearly 1,000 years old. The southern part of the house is very open with big windows. We never miss a ray of sun. The property is amazing. A thousand years ago, they were able to choose the best location. My family deeply loves this place. For us, a holiday means staying home.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JEAN-PIERRE GABRIEL; CHRISTIAN SAVRAMON; CONGO BLUE; LAZIZ HAMANI; SEE RESOURCES