

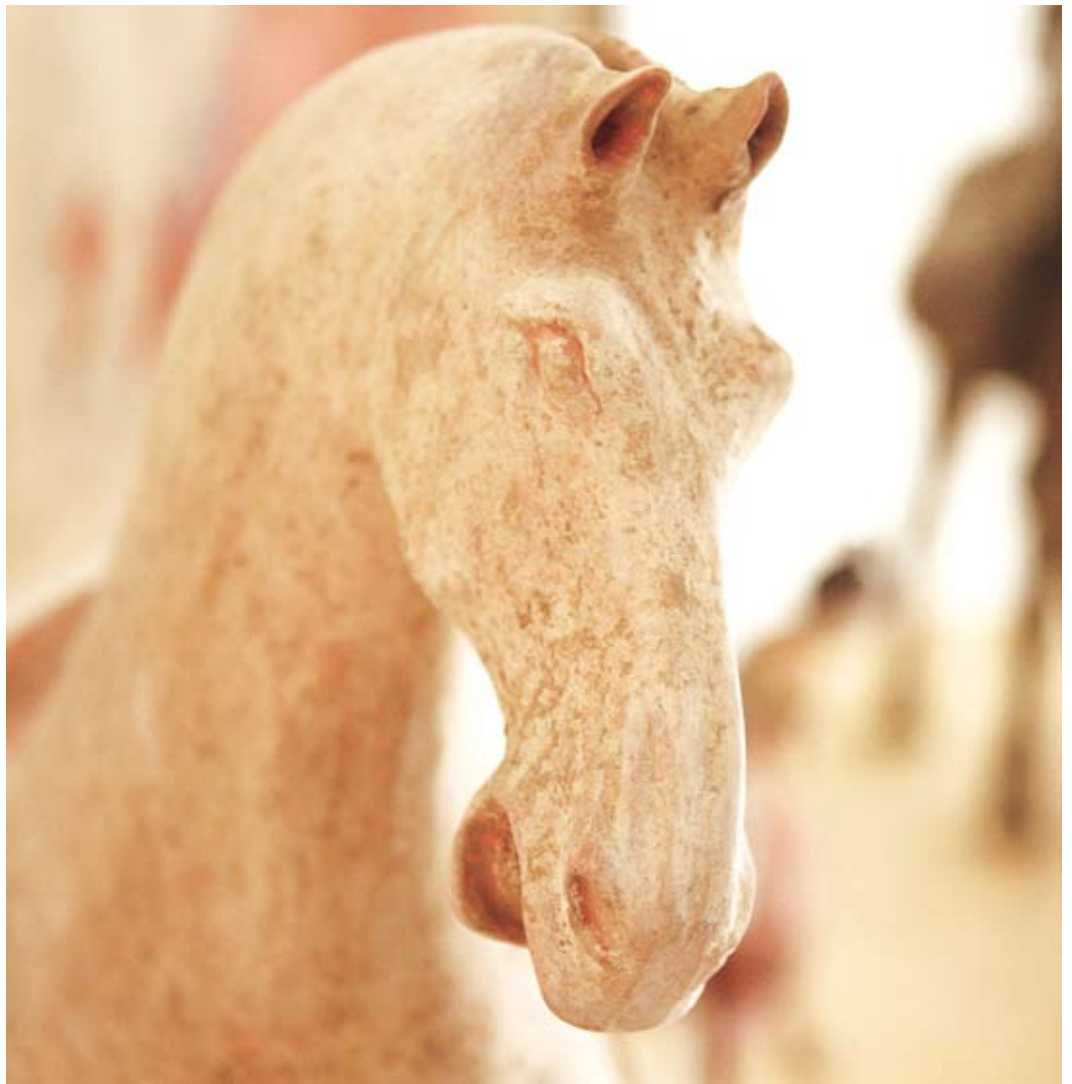


ANTIQUES

# China Syndrome

By Jami Supsic

CROUCHING TIGERS AND HIDDEN DRAGONS IN CHAPPAQUA AND ELMSFORD



If the 2008 Olympics were in part a platform for China to confirm its place in the modern world, well then People's Republic, job well done. The country walked away with 51 gold medals, orchestrated dazzling opening and closing ceremonies, and erected architecturally magnificent athletic venues to host the games.

But to lovers of Chinese art, these accolades were just icing on an already very rich cultural cake. Here in Westchester, one designer finds the historical origins of this ancient people just as fascinating as its powerful present. "There's a spark of interest in Asian antiques that hasn't been there before," says Bedford-based Susan Marocco of Susan Marocco Interiors.

Is it China's emergence as an economic power? The blazingly hot market for Chinese contemporary art? All of those Wong Kar-wai films at the art cinemas? For Marocco, whose use of Asian antiques in general goes way back, it hardly matters. "Usually I'll add at least one piece, whether it's furniture or an accent object. The fabulous thing about Asian antiques: they transcend any décor and add an eclectic element to almost any environment." So we were all too happy to tag along with



**Asian Fusion** | Bedford-based interior designer Susan Marocco (pictured at right, top left) frequents Rose Court Antiques in Chappaqua for valuable Asian antiquities. Located in the home of collector Karen Schlansky (pictured at left, top left), her private showroom hosts an array of rare and ancient finds including (clockwise from top) a Tang Dynasty pottery horse; a 200-year-old document box; a set of musicians from the Ming Dynasty; and bronze food vessels that date back thousands of years.

## ANTIQUES

Marocco to two of her favorite local sources for Asian antiques.

First on our day's journey was a stop at the area's answer to the Forbidden City, the by-appointment-only Chappaqua home of Karen Schlansky, owner of **Rose Court Antiques** (914-262-2590, [www.rosecourasianantiques.com](http://www.rosecourasianantiques.com)). Many years ago Schlansky, who was raised in the leather business and traveled frequently to Asia for work, began collecting antiques as a hobby. Soon she was sourcing items for family and friends and before long a business was born. In recent years, as the Chinese government cracked down on exports, antiques became increasingly difficult to procure. Fortunately Schlansky's connections are so long-established, her reputation so impeccable, that she's still able to find exquisite items for her bulging Rolodex of collectors from around the world.

"I love coming here," says Marocco. "The pieces are incredible and because Karen uses her own home as a showplace it's easy for my clients to appreciate how the antiques work in a residential environment." Mostly concentrated in the common space, the collection is elegantly arrayed at barely an arm's reach, so one assumes this is a kid- and pet-free zone. Au contraire. "Two children and two Labrador retrievers grew up here," Schlansky notes. "It helped them to develop an appreciation for art."

Upon entering the home one encounters a dining console outfitted with a female ceramic polo player from the Tang Dynasty. A pottery horse from the same period rests nearby. In the

**Live Long and Prosper** | A Chinese shoe cabinet from Oriental Furnishings features a lacquer and gold leaf finish. The cranes symbolize longevity.



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**Design in the Details |** Oriental Furnishings' hand-painted reproduction of a traditional Tibetan cabinet mimics the ancient enamel technique of cloisonné.

foyer, a collection of bronze vessels dating back some 2,000 years are clustered along a ledge. Perched on the piano a fierce figure from the Han dynasty scowls at passersby. Though it was originally used in tombs to scare away evil spirits,

Schlansky found a convenient use of her own for this surly old guy. "He hovered over my kids when they would play," she laughs. "It's kind of like he glares down at them and says 'Don't mess around! You better practice hard.'"

Next we head to Bob and Bette Mari's outpost, **Oriental Furniture Warehouse, in Elmsford (609 Saw Mill River Rd., Elmsford, 914-592-6320, www.orientalfurnishings.com)**. Whereas Rose Court serves as an art gallery, Oriental Furniture's wares run a more practical gamut. In the industry since the early 80s, the laid-back husband-and-wife team packed the space with reproductions, contemporary designs and antiques. "Bob and Bette really reach a broader audience," says Marocco. "What you'll find here is ideal for someone who is just beginning to contemplate decorating with Asian antiques."

Wandering through the lanes and rooms is a bit overwhelming, as almost every corner is jam-packed with goods, but Marocco is nonplussed. Almost immediately her Sino-meter goes haywire at an 80-year-old wedding chest with a brass butterfly centered on its front. Traditionally the first present for a newly married Chinese couple, Marocco envisions the bright red-painted design in a bedroom, serving perhaps as a television cabinet or storage for linens. "Every room should have one dramatic focal point," she notes of pieces like this. "The rest then falls together around it."

Next Marocco examines a six-foot-long bench etched with clouds. Dating back 100 years, Bob Mari explains that the bench likely sat outside an official's office. But Marocco can't really see it functioning as comfortable waiting-room seating; instead she thinks it would work best in a foyer acting as an arresting sculptural object or a place to pause to lace up shoes or slip on wellies.

There's much more at Oriental Furniture, and not all of it Chinese. There are Thai Buddha heads, Japanese shoji lamps, Tibetan spirit houses—"all beautifully appropriate," Marocco says, "for bringing an Eastern inflection to homes of any style." If ever the design world created an Olympic-style contest for Asian furnishings, these two dealers would be strong contenders for the gold. ●



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