

HOME & GARDEN

By Kathryn DeLong

CLASSIC FLAIR

In your home-decorating fantasies, do distinctive pieces add just the right flair to every room? In reality, however, do your rooms fall sadly short of your dreams?

Perhaps shop owner **Mitchell Sotka** can help.

Whether you're a knowledgeable buyer or a novice, you want to be happy with any purchase you make for your home. Your tastes evolve as you learn and grow, so seek out dealers who will help you along the way, Sotka advises. "It's important to trust the person you're working with."

When he started his own antiques and collectibles business two and a half years ago, his aim was to sell unique objects in a non-intimidating environment. By all accounts, he has succeeded in making his store, which he named after himself, accessible to a lot of people. "It's not an elitist place to shop. It's very friendly," he says.

In November, he moved from Lorain Avenue on the near West Side to Rocky River, occupying a space across from 'Stino da Napoli restaurant. Unlike many antiques dealers who specialize somewhat narrowly, Sotka's inventory covers broad territory: 18th- to 21st-century furniture and accessories. He does that to appeal to modern sensibilities. "Antiquing, to me, has changed since the '70s and '80s," he says. "More people are exposed to it. More people are interested in it, but not necessarily collecting. They're looking for interesting objects. They want their homes to reflect their personality." They might buy the bulk of their furniture at a furniture store, but are in the market for accessories or an accent piece. That's where Sotka comes in.

He's been in the antiques business for 11 years. The Cleveland native graduated from the University of Toledo with a degree in long-term-care administration, a field in which he worked for several years before becoming disenchanted. "I was always captivated by old objects, interesting objects," he says. "I just sort of said, that's what I'm going to do."

He worked for a family-owned antiques store for four and a half years before spending another couple of years as properties manager for an auction house. When that closed, he and his colleagues opened a retail and auction venue. He gained valuable experience, but "I realized I really love pure retail," he recalls. That realization prompted him to go into business for himself. "I finally had the confidence to do it." ▶



Above: A pair of painted Chippendale-style chairs; a black lacquer coffer, Chinese, 19th century; and an architectural reprint by Piranesi, 20th century.

▶ He's particularly enthusiastic about the Chinese furniture he carries. It's not anything like the heavily carved, ornate pieces that many people associate with furnishings of that type. "The more simple Chinese furniture inspired the arts and crafts movement," he says. "That's why it's so wonderful. It has simplicity, great proportions and elegance. It's well constructed with phenomenal lines." And it can work with all kinds of décor: formal French, traditional English or Western, or contemporary. In addition, it will maintain its appeal. "It's the one piece of furniture you'll never purge from your household," Sotka says.

Through his website, he sells all over the world, his most distant customer being in London. "Still, 95 percent of my sales are done in person," he says. "I'm dealing with a group of people, like myself, who want to touch the object and be comfortable with the object, and who they're buying it from."

Mitchell Sotka, the store, is located at 19071 Old Detroit Road, Rocky River. It's open Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to at least 6 p.m. For more information, call 440-333-1735 or visit www.mitchellsotka.com.

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