



# COLLECTOR'S SHOWCASE

The passion for antiques that made internet mogul Michael Bruno his fortune is given free rein in his Hudson Valley mansion.

By Helen Chislett. Photographs by Gianni Franchellucci



**STANDING IN** Michael Bruno's elegant Tuxedo Park home in Hudson Valley, looking out to the lakes, waterfalls, formal gardens, pasture and woodland that surround the property, it's hard to believe that it is only 35 miles from midtown Manhattan.

Bruno does not do things by halves: when he first happened across Tuxedo Park – a gated estate of about 350 properties beside Sterling Forest – he allowed his inner ‘real-estate junkie’ to emerge. First developed in the late 19th century, Tuxedo Park had fallen into decline. Bruno bought not only his own lakeside mansion, but has spent an estimated \$15 million since 2014, adding swaths of land and buildings to his portfolio, which now encompasses 120 acres, including numerous properties and the local convenience store.

Bruno is better known as the founder of the luxury online marketplace 1stdibs.com, so beloved of the interior-design industry that it is not unusual to walk into a studio and find two people

**‘I like cohesion in a home. No shocks from one room to the next’**

employed full-time to scroll endlessly through the options for, say, alabaster wall lights or grotto-style shell mirrors. He started the company in 2001, while living in Paris and making regular jaunts to the Clignancourt flea market. So many of his friends were fascinated by what he found there, that he had a light-bulb moment about creating a platform that would allow people to buy from the market without leaving the United States. ‘I realised that most of what was bought was not staying in Paris,’ he recalls, ‘and that interior designers were going there as a once-a-year pilgrimage. I figured that it would be great if they could shop there every day over the internet.’

So sound were Bruno's instincts that by the time he sold his final shares last year, his love of rummaging in antique stalls had made him a rumoured eight-figure sum. As for 1stdibs.com, it remains the premier online marketplace for antiques, jewellery and art, with thousands of dealers signed up worldwide. Two years ago, its worth was estimated at about \$300 million,



**Previous page** A pair of original suede 1970s sofas by Milo Baughman are juxtaposed with a 1950s armchair by TH Robsjohn-

Gibbins. The wallpaper is by Ralph Lauren Home. **Top left** An 1897 seascape by Paul Kuhstohs takes pride of place in the dining room. The

mahogany table is George III, while a CWhite & Co light fixture is 1920s. **Bottom left** The bronze chandelier in the hall is original to the house,

while the gilded grapevine was a Paris find. **Below** A bold 1970s sculpture is displayed on a limestone table in the gallery



**Below** Nature-themed pieces such as resin tusks and wooden mushrooms are displayed on the landing. **Bottom left** Bruno with his

1920s fish cabinet. **Bottom right** Designer Windsor Smith commissioned the dressing-area wallpaper. The burr cabinet is a vintage find



according to *Fortune* magazine.

However, property was Bruno's love before antiques; he sold real estate in Southern California and to the dot-com entrepreneurs of San Francisco, and currently has about a dozen spectacular homes for sale on the Tuxedo Hudson Realty books. This month Bruno opened the Valley Rock Inn, complete with two restaurants, bookshop, bike shop, farm shop and art gallery. 'The hotel is very close to the train station, which is less than an hour from New York City. I am aiming it at millennials who want to stay somewhere beautiful out of town,' he says.

His own Tuxedo Park home is where he lives with his partner, Alexander Jakowec, and their two golden retrievers, Natasha and Boris. Built by John Russell Pope in 1900, it has a brick-and-stucco exterior, arched windows and a portico big enough to shield a horse-and-carriage from driving rain. Bruno loved it for its proportions. He says, 'It is neither too big nor too small and it did

**What he enjoys is mixing things up, hanging an industrial light fixture over a George III table**

not feel stiff. It was so beautifully conceived architecturally that we really had very little to do - but it did lend itself to a more modern feel.'

Inside, the house is a masterclass in blending the classic with the contemporary, with period features preserved. The largely monochrome scheme provides a calm backdrop against which Bruno and Jakowec's collections are displayed. 'The previous owner had used a lot of colour,' Bruno says, 'so the first thing we did was bring it back to a purist blank canvas - slated ebony floors and white walls - so that we could really just look at it without confusion. In the end, we chose to leave it primarily that way, other than painting the walls dark. I like cohesion in a home. No shocks from one room to the next.'

Bruno chose to work with an interior designer, Windsor Smith, rather than rely entirely on his own eye: 'I am great at finding things I love - aren't we all? - but Windsor was brilliant at working with us and determining how best to place things that we have owned for a long time. I also relied on her to choose

## The Cut // Home

**Right** Bruno's Tuxedo Park home was built by John Russell Pope in 1900. **Far right** In the formal drawing room, armchairs by Jean-Michel Frank are teamed with a 1970s bronze cocktail table found in a Paris flea market

carpets, cushions, curtains, upholstery and such like, because I think it takes a lot of training to get those elements of design right. It allowed us to take the house to another level.'

As you would expect of the 1stdibs.com founder, Bruno bought many of the antique pieces from the site. 'I am enjoying having no other status than that of customer now, and I still scroll through looking for lovely things,' he says. 'We wanted a beautiful centre table, for example, that I assumed would be timber - but then found one in limestone on 1stdibs.com that was completely different from what I had in mind, but so much better.' This now stands in the gallery of the house adjacent to leather armchairs by Jacques Quinet and topped by an exuberant 1970s sculpture.

However, deep down Bruno has always loved trawling through antiques shops in person - a gilded grapevine in the hall was found in Paris, as was a 1970s bronze cocktail table in the drawing room. What he most enjoys is



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mixing things up, whether hanging an industrial 1920s light fixture by OC White & Co over the magnificent George III mahogany dining table, making a focal point of naturally shed horns from the Black Forest in the entrance foyer, or commissioning a striking custom wall finish for the dressing room. Art is bold and dramatic, but not confined to one style: the dining room features a 1897 seascape by Paul Kuhstohs, while in the sitting room is a portrait of Bruno by Nasha Wallin.

The furniture generally has an impressive pedigree, but Bruno insists that his choices have never been driven solely by provenance. 'For me it is not about owning the finest 18th-century desk ever, but about simply buying what I love. If there were a proverbial fire, the thing I would most wish to save – not very practical in that circumstance – would be a display cabinet of fish that dates from the 1920s and shows specimens caught around Hawaii. It is fun and conversational and quirky – but then quirky is me.' ♦



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