

THE BUZZ ON ANTIQUES



← me

before Jenny Craig

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Wednesday, April 13, 2011

About the Antiquarian

MY INTERVIEW WITH PAUL VINCENT WISEMAN: THE LOST FOOTAGE



THE ART OF
THE EXQUISITE
The Buzz on
PAUL VINCENT
WISEMAN
By BUZZ KAPLAN

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Buzz Kaplan

Buzz Kaplan is Executive

Director of C. Mariani Antiques,

Restoration & Custom in San Francisco, the
largest U.S. wholesaler of high-end 17th,
18th, and 19th century European antiques.

It's like the Louvre, only with price tags.

Our specialty at C. Mariani is 18th century
Italian, French and English furniture,

I love it when those reality TV shows like "The Real Housewives of *Fill*
in the Blank" try to stretch their season by adding episodes called
lighting, and accessories. For more than 30
years, our antiques have graced some of the

"From the BRAVO vaults: the Lost Footage."

Yeah, I know, there are no vaults at Bravo and this footage was never lost, but even so it's usually interesting stuff. And sometimes it's the **most** interesting stuff! Like when Tamra in "Orange County" went swimming in the lady pond (whatever that means) with her Brazilian girlfriend/trainer who's really cute but kinda mannish. The point is that I really like "lost footage" because it's just plain fun.



Photographer: Matthew Millman

So I was thinking, in my recent [Decorati interview with Paul Wiseman](#), one of the deans of American interior design, the interview ran a bit long because we were having so much fun.

world's most luxe interiors and are regularly featured in major shelter publications including Architectural Digest, House Beautiful, Veranda, Elle Décor, Luxe Magazine and Traditional Home.

Buzz is also the senior partner of Kaplan & Co., a consulting firm he founded in 1981, specializing in antiques and other investment-grade tangible assets.

Buzz is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of UCLA where he earned both Bachelor's and Juris Doctorate degrees.

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And because of the length, some parts just couldn't fit into the article.

In other words, as they say in Hollywood they ended up on the "cutting room floor" (don't forget I was born in Hollywood-adjacent Van Nuys so I know these things).



Photographer: Matthew Millman

So from the vaults of The Buzz on Antiques, here is some NEVER BEFORE SEEN "lost footage" (OK, "lost verbiage") from my Interview with Paul Vincent Wiseman:

Q: Paul, how's the interior design industry changed since you started out?

A: When I started my business about 30 years ago, a lot of the really "big" decorators were crooks.

Q: Did you just say crooks?!

A: I certainly did and I meant it.

Buzz thinking to himself: OMG, this is SO great! Maybe I'll get a

- White Webb
- Wheeler Design Group
- Vallone Design Inc.
- Tucker & Marks
- Tim Whealon Interiors
- Thomas Bartlett Interiors
- The Wiseman Group
- The Warner Group Architects
- Tamm-Marlowe Design Studio
- Suzanne Lovell Inc.
- Suzanne Kasler Atlanta
- Steven Volpe Design
- Stacey Lapuk Interiors
- SMW Design
- Sills Huniford Associates
- Shelby de Quesada Design
- Scott Himmel Architects
- Scheiber Design Group
- Robin White Interiors
- Ria Mendoza Design
- Reginald Adams Associates
- Patti Skouras Inc. Interior Design
- Paige Koch Interior Design & Decoration
- Orlando Diaz Design Associates
- Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects

Pulitzer for this interview-I mean it's really more like hard-hitting investigative reporting. Or forget the Pulitzer, what about a Nobel Prize?! I could go to Sweden! Or is it Norway? A cruise to Scandinavia! I love cruises.



Photographer: Matthew Millman

Q: Crooks. Ok, please go on.

A: It's just that I could see that many of the "big" decorators back then weren't dealing straight with their clients. They were being sneaky and dishonest.

- Michael S. Smith Inc.
- Martha Angus Interiors
- Marsh & Clark Design
- Marla Sher Design
- Marjorie Shushan Design
- Madeline Stuart & Associates
- MacCaul Turner Design
- London Boone Inc.
- Lane McCook Interior Design
- Kensington & Associates
- Kendall Wilkinson Design
- Jeffers Design Group
- Jed Johnson Associates
- Jane Antonacci Interior Design
- James Swan & Co.
- Hutton Wilkinson Interior Design
- Hendrix Allardyce
- Grant K. Gibson Interior Design
- George Constant Design



Photographer: Tim Street-Porter

Q: How were they doing that?

A: In different ways. Like saying a carpet was custom woven in Crete by virgin mermaids and charging a ridiculous price when the rag really came from some shlocky furniture line in Grand Rapids.



- Dara Rosenfeld Design
- Dale Carol Anderson Ltd.
- Cullman & Kravis, Inc.
- Chelsea Court Designs
- Cecilie Starin Design
- Bunny Williams
- BraytonHughes Design Studios
- Benjamin Dhong Interior Design
- BAMO
- Ann Brown Interiors
- Angela Free Interior Design
- Andrew Skurman Architects
- Agraria
- Achille Associates International

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Q: So what did you do, call in the Feds?

A. [Smiling] No, nothing that dramatic. But I saw an opportunity not just to do the right thing but also a way to stand out from the crowd by building a business on not just my talent but also my integrity. And I think I've succeeded in that regard.

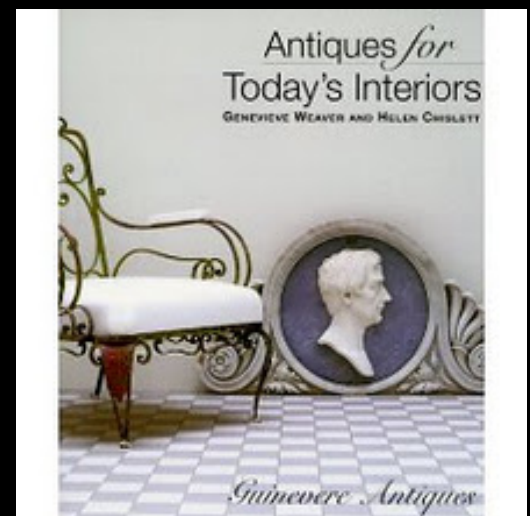
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- • 2008 (3)



Photographer: Christopher Irion

Bookworms of the world unite!

. . . The Buzz recommends:

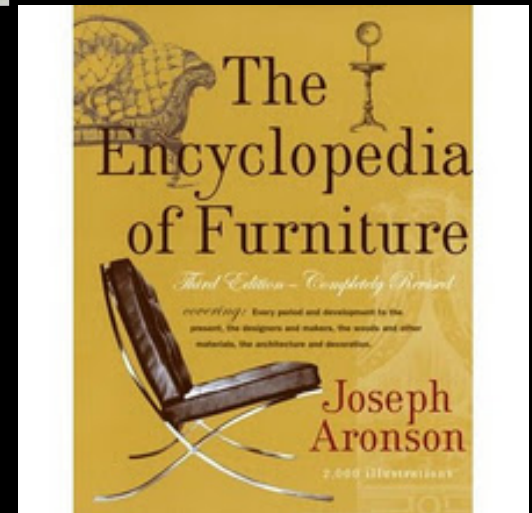
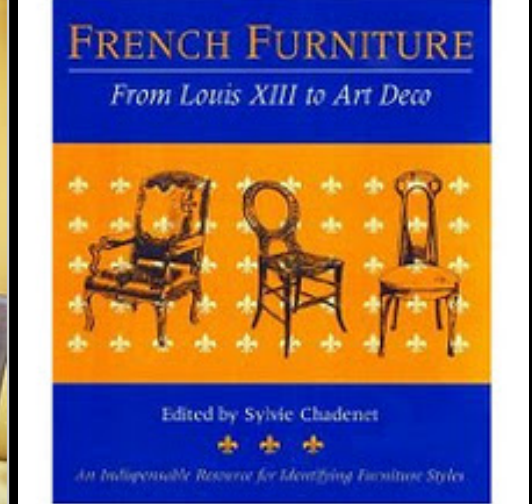




Photographer: Matthew Millman

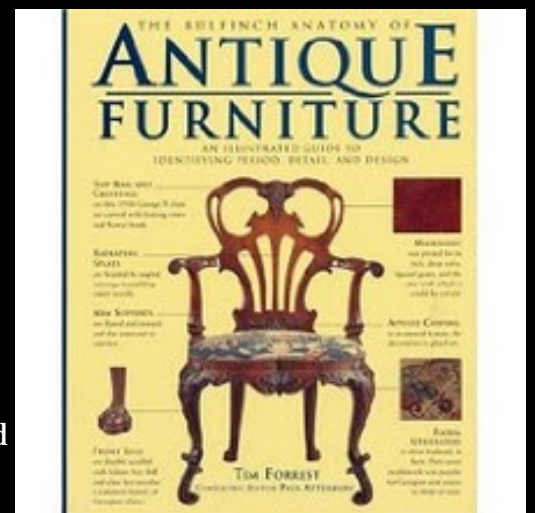
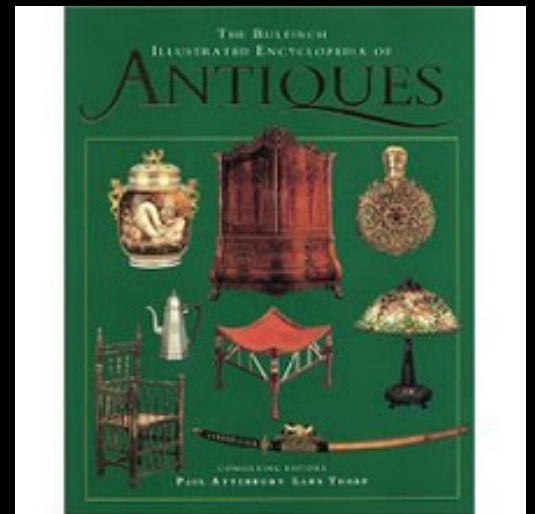
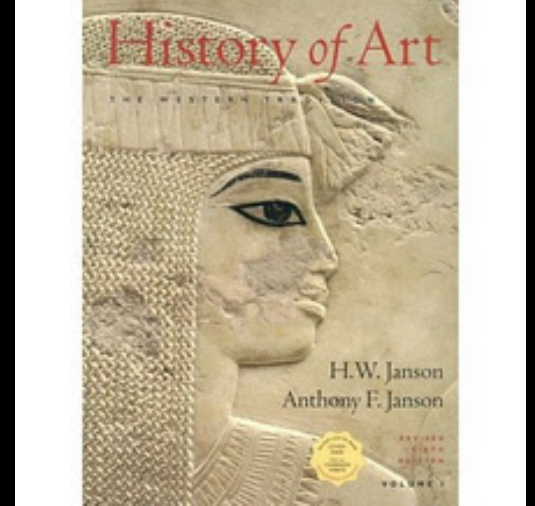
Q: And how did you go about doing that? Did you parade around the Design Center wearing a sandwich-board saying, “I’m the honest decorator!”?

A: [Laughing]. Not exactly. I started by hiring lawyer named Naomi Ramsden who was tired of practicing law. She wanted to work with creative people and also knew about the sorry practices being used by the “big guys” back then.





Photographer: Matthew Millman



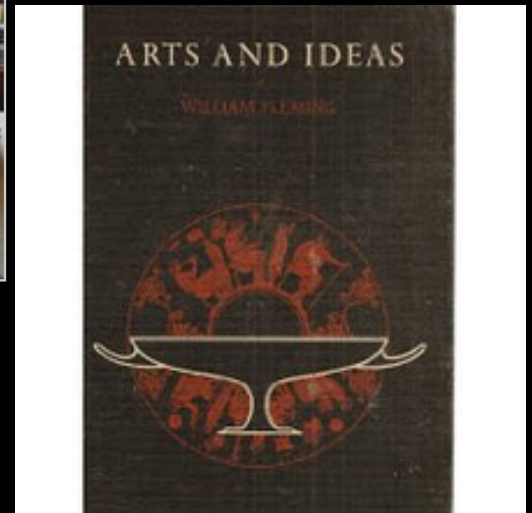
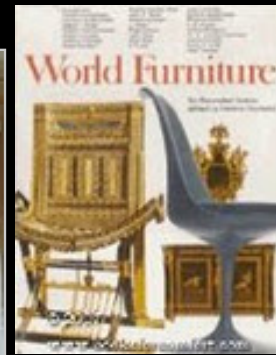
Q: How did she help you?

A: She taught me about my bottom line—and that if you don't understand it, then you can't create a fee scale that's fair and reasonable. She also taught me how to communicate to clients exactly what I would provide in terms of goods and services and that my goal was to make a fair and honest profit. Naomi taught me to be very clear with clients and vendors as to how I make my living. My clients see all of my invoices and backup documentation, whether they request it or not and they know that I always negotiate the best price I can from vendors. They understand that I charge a percentage on that negotiated price as my fee along with the time spent on their project. My clients also know that my mark-up percentage is the same for everyone—there

are no exceptions.

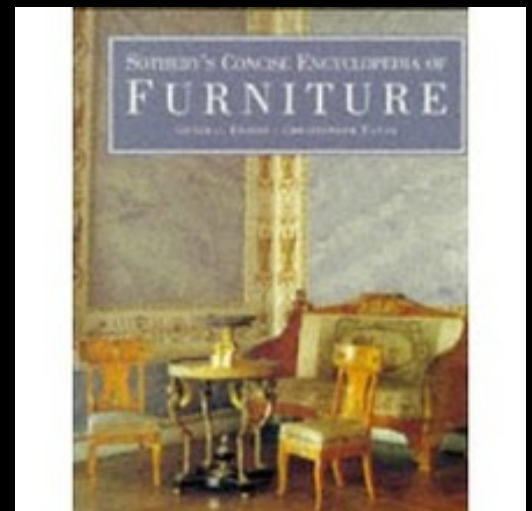


Photographer: Tim Street-Porter



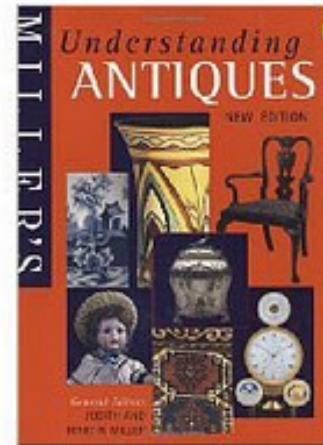
Q: Do you offer multiple fee arrangements to your clients, like “hours plus mark-up” or “comprehensive flat fee deals”?

A: No. I offer the same fee arrangement for everyone. There are no exceptions. I charge for hours plus a percentage. A set lump-sum fee arrangement is a disaster and it never works in the client’s favor. I’m amazed that some clients actually believe that a designer is going to quote them a flat fee that’s not going to cover all of his costs and include a nice profit. Every designer offering a flat rate knows that in decorating people always change their mind. They add on features and items as the process unfolds. And this inevitably adds to the costs. Flat fee designers build this contingency into their lump sum fee.





Photographer: Tim Street-Porter



Q: How has the onslaught of decorating websites affected the world of design and you personally?

A: Online sites like Decorati and First Dibs are great for preliminary shopping. Of course, we never buy something, certainly not an antique or vintage piece, without seeing it first. Photos of antiques you see online are often better than the objects themselves. Unique objects have to reveal their soul. And they can't do that through only photographs. But for viewing furniture lines as we do on Decorati and seeing what other designers are doing, online media is very useful and wonderful.



Photographer: Matthew Millman

Q: What are some well-known public spaces, like buildings or restaurants, that you've designed?

A: Almost all my work is private residential and so by definition it's not "well known." Of course, many of my clients' homes have been featured in Architectural Digest, Veranda, Traditional Home and other shelter publications. The only somewhat public space I ever did is Nanea, the very private golf club on the Kona Coast of Hawaii. And it was also published in Architectural Digest.



Photographer: Matthew Millman

Q: OK, then let's talk lead times and deadlines. Are clients requesting quicker deadlines and how do you handle those requests?

A: Yes and it's a problem. Especially with younger new money clients who want "instant" results. I try to educate them that we aren't selling a product but rather a process. If they want just product, they can go to any retail store and see the quality and style available instantly. Once they see what's out there, they usually back off.



Photographer: Tim Street-Porter

Q: What will be different about the interior design industry in 15 years?

A: I think the line between retail and wholesale will go away. There won't really be a wholesale market and everyone will just pay retail.

Q: Ok, that's kinda scary since C. Mariani is a wholesaler. You think I should start job hunting?

A: [Laughing]. No Buzz, I think that Claudio and you will be around for a long time to come. But look how most of your wholesale competitors have gone out of business in this recession.

Q: Guess that's true. Anyhow, it's now time to play our "lightning round!" Name your favorite...

Q: Actress?

A: Meryl Streep

Buzz aside: If I ever become Head of Casting at a big Hollywood

studio, I'm going to make "Little Bo Peep-The Movie" just so I can

scream: "I want Streep for Peep!"



Q: Movie?

A: "I am Love"

Q: I don't believe it! That's my all-time favorite too!

Buzz's off-the-record confession: Never heard of it.

Q: TV show?

A: I don't watch television.

Q: [Shocked] Not even The Real Housewives?! Ok, I can understand not watching "Miami"-the Cuban accents are hard to understand. But "Beverly Hills" is so great. Although I'm sad "Camille" isn't coming

back. And “New York” is a must see. Plus “Orange County”-that one’s

getting really good again-did you see that “Vicki” divorced “Don”!?

What a tragedy. Makes me sad because he was so nice.

A: Pardon? I really haven’t watched TV for 25 years.

Q: Oh, OK. Yeah, me neither except the occasional Masterpiece

Theatre.

Buzz comment: You didn’t really expect me to confess that I’m a reality TV junkie, did you? Paul’s an important client and I have an image to uphold.

Q: Singer?

A: Judy Collins



Q: Judy Collins?. Is folk music making a comeback?

A: [Silence]

Q: Never mind. What’s your favorite book?

A: That would be tie between “War and Peace” and “Red and the

Black.”

Q: Food?

A: Boy that's a tough one. [He pauses]. I'd have to say Jean Georges'

Seared Foie Gras with mango and orange juice reduction.

Q: I'd have to say does Safeway carry that?

A: I doubt it.

Q: Broadway play or musical? Wait! Don't tell me! I'm guessing

"Annie!". Am I right?

A: [Laughing] No, but you're close: "The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?"

Q: I'm not sure. Who is Sylvia?

A: That's the name of the play.

Q: But which of those plays is your favorite, "The Goat" or "Who is Sylvia"?

A: [Looking up, shaking his head and clearly frustrated]. Buzz, it's getting late-just say "Annie" and you can correct this later in editing.

Q: OK. Favorite soprano (opera coloratura not the HBO show)

A: Joan Sutherland



Q: She looks like a football player.

A: Is that a question?

Q: Um, what's your favorite football team?

A: Why would you ask me that?

Q: Because of Joan Sutherland.

A: OK then, next question.

Q: Favorite NASCAR driver?

A: What's NASCAR?

Q: I'm not sure. Maybe a football team.

A: [Laughing]. Great! Put NASCAR down for my favorite football team.

Q: Who's your favorite Louie? Quatorze, Quinze, Seize or Armstrong?

A: None of those. My favorite Louie would have to be "Louie, Louie" by the Kingsmen.

Q: As in "Uh Louie Loo-ay, Oh no, said we gotta go...da-da...yeah yeah yeah yeah"?

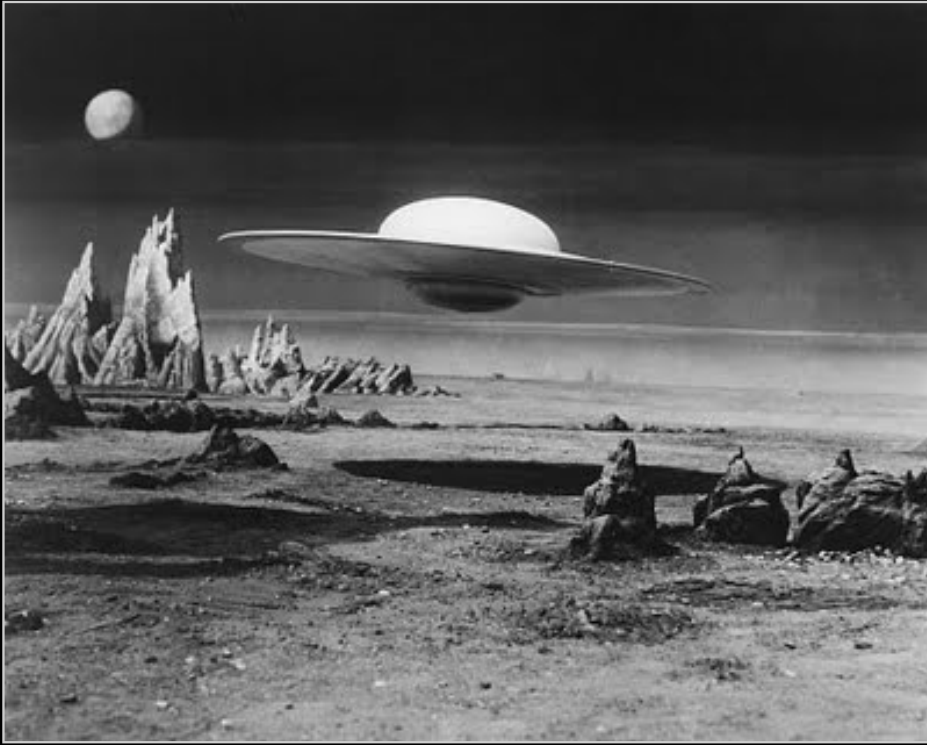
A: Yeah.

Q: [Laughing] That was funny!

A: [Smiling] I thought you'd appreciate that.

Q: What movie set would you most like to live in?

A: "Forbidden Planet," with Walter Pidgeon and Anne Francis



Forbidden Planet Set

Q: Forbidden Planet? The sci-fi movie? What about "Barry Lyndon?"

A: What about him? I'd want to live on Forbidden Planet and that's my final answer.



Photographer: Matthew Millman



Another Satisfied Wiseman client?

Q: OK-What's your biggest gripe with most interior designers today?

A: Their lack of historical knowledge of periods and pieces.

Q: If you could ask any two people to join you for dinner (they can be past or present) who would they be?

A: The Roman Emperor Hadrian and Bette Davis



Photographer: Matthew Millman

Posted by Buzz Kaplan at 10:46 AM 

1 comments:

Lynne Ruttersaid...

that was fun! thanks!

April 18, 2011 7:46 PM