

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION

FURNITURE DEALERS WALLY SHAW AND NICK PEZZO
ON TRACKING DOWN THE RIGHT STUFF

BY KATHLEEN M. SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID ALLEN



The late 1800s was a great era for men and women with eclectic tastes. In continental Europe, travel was the thing, and the mobile bourgeoisie brought home souvenirs of their visits to Italian palazzos and Egyptian crypts. Design fashions — for chinoiserie, arts and crafts, the Egyptesque, and the neoclassical — began to reflect the discoveries of such movement. Exquisite pieces with hybrid lineage came to take their place next to more pedigreed items in the drawing rooms of England, France and the colonies. So began the great cultural cross-pollination in home design that has reached its pinnacle

Nick Pezzo, Wally Shaw and canine pals Sunshine and Victor relax in the library. High ceilings accommodate their interest in scale. Here, it's oversize, as in the Thai teak coffee table and custom leather sofa. Right: Period romance in an anti-period dining room. The bronze chandelier and wall tapestry whisper 18th-century France; the newly crafted, hand-gilded Italian chairs and Mexican carved-stone table base state otherwise. The black bamboo console is from the McGuire line, one of the Shaw-Pezzo showroom mainstays.

in our own postmodern times.

Wally Shaw is a man who understands that evolution. In fact, the founder of Shaw-Pezzo and Associates Inc., the six-year-old furniture and accessory showroom for designers and architects, finds it cause for celebration: "I don't think that I have ever seen a time where so many different things are all popular and current at the same time. It's the best time for me because I'm very tolerant of other people's tastes."

Tolerance for other people's taste and the principles on which to base his own were early lessons for Wally Shaw. He learned





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them in his hometown north of Toronto from his mother, Charlotte Shaw, owner and proprietor of Shaw's Interiors. Shaw worked alongside his mother after graduating from university. "I learned a lot of good business-operating principles from her," he recalls today of his recently retired mother.

Shaw refined his design sensibility working on interiors and with Vancouver-based reproduction king William Switzer. He opened a showroom to represent the Switzer line in Toronto in 1984; partner Nick Pezzo officially came on board in 1988, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Signs of Shaw and Pezzo's design liberalism are on display everywhere in the Shaw-Pezzo showroom and in the home the two share in downtown Toronto. One environment is an extension of the other and both resemble nothing so much as treasure-troves, crammed as they are with the fruits of countless buying trips to Europe and across North America. "We travel to trade and design shows six to eight times a year," points out Nick Pezzo. "Two or three of those trips are to Europe."

There Shaw and Pezzo seek out original antique pieces or quality furnishing lines to augment their core representation of the William Switzer and Associates line of hand-crafted reproductions, the McGuire rattan series, the Designer's i accessory and occasional collection from Montreal, and several others. They also shop with the special needs of their clients — a who's who of top decorators, designers and architects — in mind.

"We try to listen to the specific needs of the designers," says Shaw, "hoping that someone is going to delight in something the way we do."

Finding that someone is not as difficult as it once was, according to Shaw. "What is great about right now is that there are certain definite trends and ideas that are very strong — steel furniture, for example, and finishes that



The epitome of livable luxury, the Shaw Pezzo residence resembles a treasure-trove in the same way the showroom does. Here, the crown jewels are ancient metal sailing ship-most finials and a magnificent Louis XVI walnut armoire.

Inset: A crystal ball finial adds a baroque touch to an otherwise completely modern stairwell. The cultural imports of no less than six countries — from Cantonese ginger jars to English Chippendale chair — give this little nook its impact. The faux-marble-and-travertine treatment on the doors to the pantry is by David Bermann.



range from polished to verdigris to outright rust. I don't see such trends coming to a dead stop as they have in the past because there's this great acceptance for them. I can remember when you could only sell a steel coffee table to a designer for their own use."

As Toronto has boomed, Shaw and Pezzo have noted increasing sophistication in consumers and designers.

"Generally speaking," says Wally Shaw, "the popular design attitude today is, if you want to do something in a complete period style, that's fine. But if you want to do a mixture of things, that's fine, too. Even at trade shows, there are so many items — from Art Deco to heavy baroque. People don't seem to be afraid of anything."

Nick Pezzo puts it down to exposure: "The more we travel, the more we see and appreciate. We can no longer be narrow scoped about what is right because there is no 'right.'" In other words, everything is right as long as it works.

"When I started in the business, blemishes were out," Wally Shaw recalls. "But because people have travelled to see wonderful palazzos, where the walls are in a decayed state, styles like hand-rubbed walls with visible cracks and rusted steel have come about. That's a look that can be just as charming as something that is freshly painted."

As well as tracking down the right stuff for showroom and

The master bedroom has a lofty aspect that's enhanced by solarium windows (hidden here by mini venetian blinds) and a few exotic pieces. The settee at the foot of the bed is actually a teak and gilt elephant saddle from Thailand.

Right: The stone fireplace is a prop that will never frame flames, but the wooden Florentine mirror (which dates from the 18th century) is the real thing. The green upholstered chairs from the Shaw-Pezzo showroom are every bit as welcoming as they look.

clients, Shaw and Pezzo keep an eye open for pieces to furnish their own spacious condominium home.

When you first visit *chez* Shaw Pezzo, you're struck by two things: the scope (with its large rooms and high ceilings, you could be walking onto a movie set), and the extreme elegance of the furniture groupings, particularly on the more formal main floor.

That elegance belies the fact that Shaw insists on useability when it comes to his own interiors. "It's such a pleasure to have fine furnishings around you, and to enjoy them, but you can't let it interfere with the enjoy-

ment of your family and friends, or with using your environment. I don't believe in the idea of saving it for best. I just don't use things that are so fragile that I can't live with them."

Because he is a believer in finely crafted reproductions of original antiques as "the heirlooms of tomorrow," Shaw has done a great deal of thinking on the relative values of both. He's not a snob, cherishing workmanship and detail over simple chronology. But he wonders which of his precious possessions will make it through to the next generation. "That's what makes the odd pieces so valuable. Not all of them make it."

Like those globe-trotting Victorians, Shaw has a penchant for aesthetics and philosophy. But there's nothing Victorian about his vision. He's a thoroughly postmodern, self-made man. ♦

