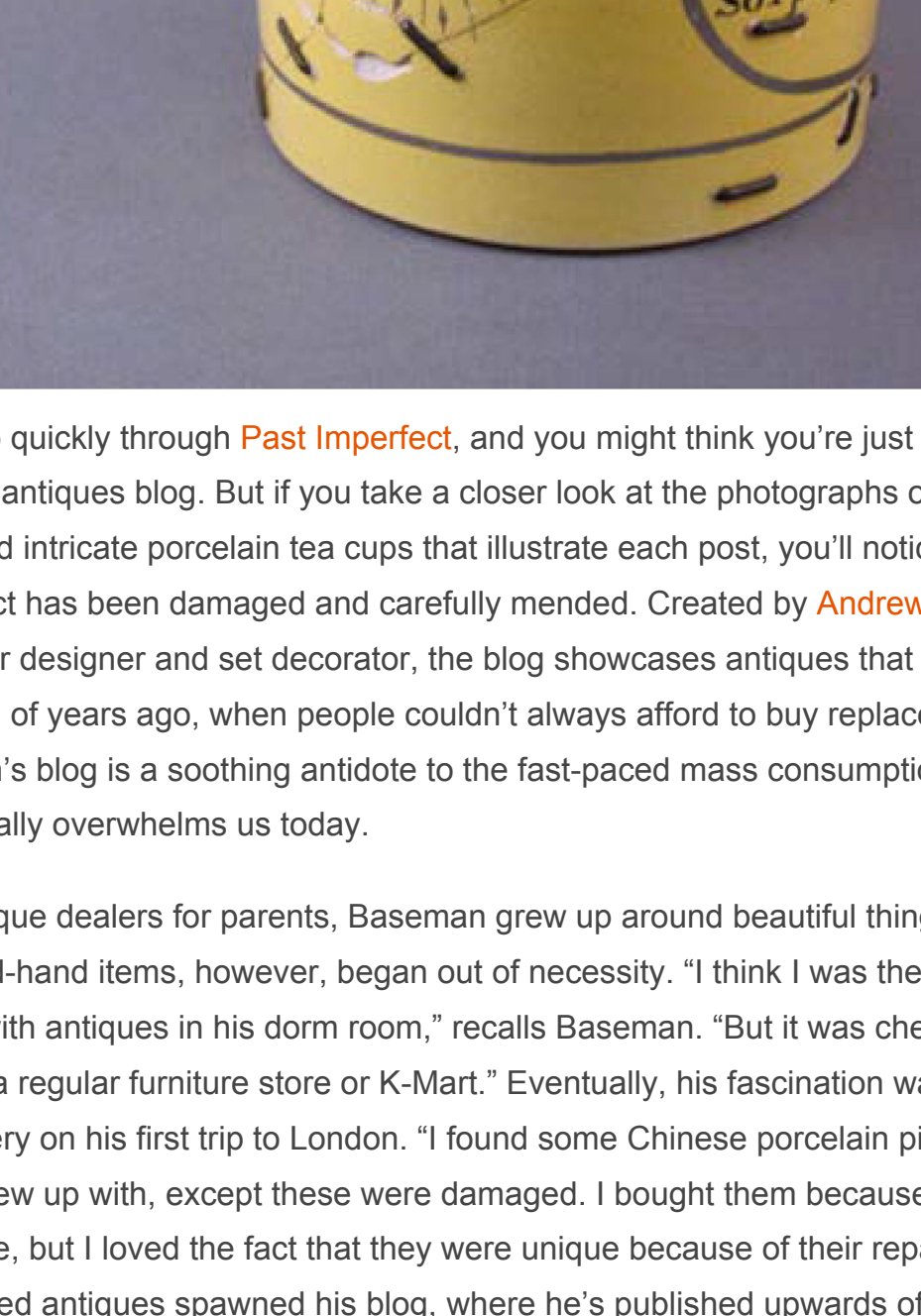


Read

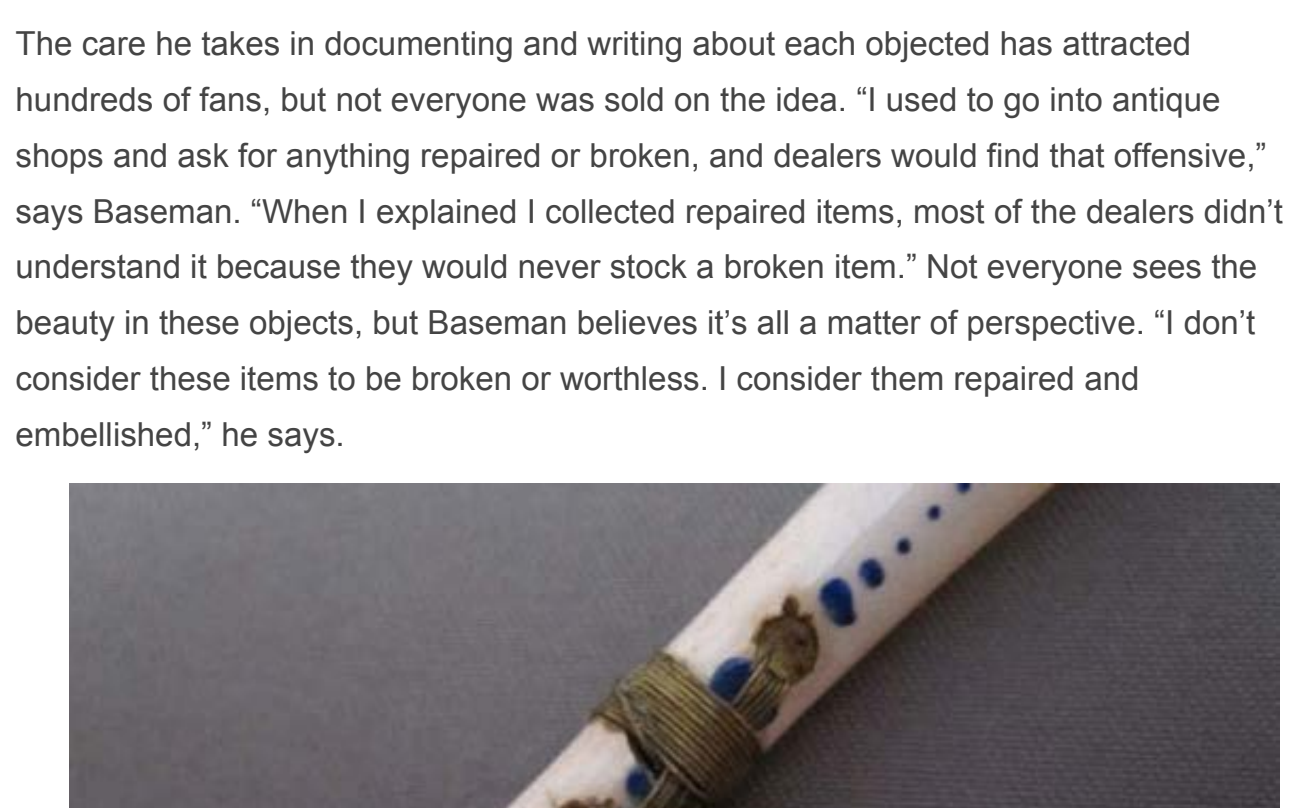
## Waste Not: The Art of Inventive Repair

Oct 19, 2012 · by Chappell Ellison



Scroll too quickly through [Past Imperfect](#), and you might think you're just looking at a standard antiques blog. But if you take a closer look at the photographs of beautiful vases and intricate porcelain tea cups that illustrate each post, you'll notice that each one object has been damaged and carefully mended. Created by [Andrew Baseman](#), an interior designer and set decorator, the blog showcases antiques that were repaired hundreds of years ago, when people couldn't always afford to buy replacements. Baseman's blog is a soothing antidote to the fast-paced mass consumption that occasionally overwhelms us today.

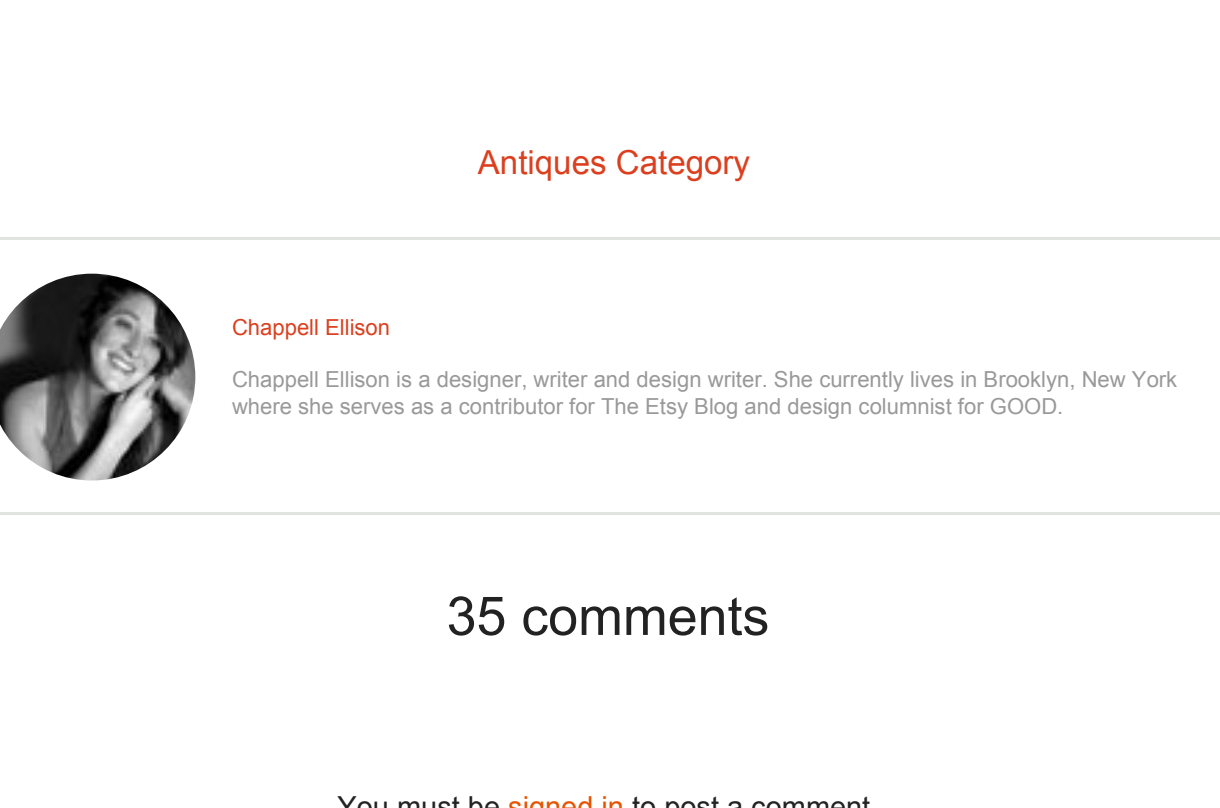
With antique dealers for parents, Baseman grew up around beautiful things. His interest in second-hand items, however, began out of necessity. "I think I was the only kid in college with antiques in his dorm room," recalls Baseman. "But it was cheaper than going to a regular furniture store or K-Mart." Eventually, his fascination was cemented by a discovery on his first trip to London. "I found some Chinese porcelain pieces like the ones I grew up with, except these were damaged. I bought them because they were affordable, but I loved the fact that they were unique because of their repairs." This love for repaired antiques spawned his blog, where he's published upwards of 300 posts on his finds from the past twenty years.



**Andrew Baseman** The broken handle of this c. 1800 Chinese porcelain teapot was replaced with a metal handle.

The pieces that Baseman collects, most of which are 200-300 years old, were initially made for very wealthy families. "Average people didn't have porcelain," explained Baseman, noting that even when these fragile pieces broke, they weren't just thrown out. People resorted to ingenious, and often primitive-looking repairs. "It's fascinating seeing these homemade staples hold porcelain together. I have teapots that were stapled 200 hundred years ago and still hold water today. It wasn't the most attractive or pleasing solution, but to keep using the items, they overlooked that." Next to smooth, milky porcelain, the staples are almost jarring. Stapling pottery requires such a deft hand that the art is lost today. "I don't even know if anyone staples anymore. It just isn't done," laments Baseman. "People glue things and create invisible repairs. I've been to restorers who tell me that people bring in a objects with staples, or a teapot with a metal spout, and they'll just yank it off and make a new, seamless repair. I think it's so sad."

The care he takes in documenting and writing about each object has attracted hundreds of fans, but not everyone was sold on the idea. "I used to go into antique shops and ask for anything repaired or broken, and dealers would find that offensive," says Baseman. "When I explained I collected repaired items, most of the dealers didn't understand it because they would never stock a broken item." Not everyone sees the beauty in these objects, but Baseman believes it's all a matter of perspective. "I don't consider these items to be broken or worthless. I consider them repaired and embellished," he says.



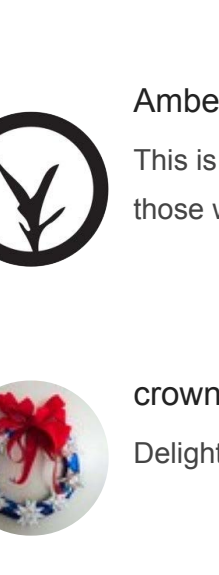
**Andrew Baseman** The broken handle of child's ladle, c. 1840, repaired with wire.

Baseman isn't alone in his opinion. Since starting his blog two years ago, Baseman has received correspondence from all over the world, with eager admirers sharing their own repaired items. "I received an email from a woman who saw a picture of a popular piece on my blog: a [wooden shovel](#) with a very large patch of metal repair with lots of tacks holding it together," says Baseman. "As it turns out, this woman's great grandfather made it. He was a famous shovel maker and there's even a documentary and a book about him."

Looking at the range of photographs Baseman has posted on his blog, the repairs bring an undeniable human touch to the object. You can't help but wonder about the life of the object, how it was broken and what led someone to repair it. "I have a yellow mug with at least 50 staples in it. It must've shattered at some point but someone cherished it so much, they'd rather staple it together and keep it," says Baseman. "There's something very poignant about it." The yellow mug might've even been a gift from a cherished loved one, too precious to leave as a pile of shards. The repair is a testament to that unknown meaning. "I think a lot of people can relate to that. We've seen perfect, beautiful antiques for years, and most people want those things, but the odd ball items with these repairs — it's almost folk art. It adds so much character." It's a beautiful exercise to put yourself in an early 19th century mindset, and think about how you would repair an item you love.

For more images of repaired antique object, visit [Andrew Baseman's blog](#), [Past Imperfect](#).

## Antiques Category

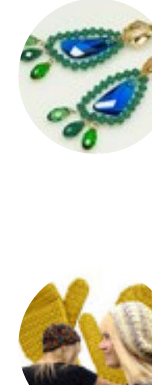


**Chappell Ellison**

Chappell Ellison is a designer, writer and design writer. She currently lives in Brooklyn, New York where she serves as a contributor for The Etsy Blog and design columnist for GOOD.

## 35 comments

You must be [signed in](#) to post a comment.



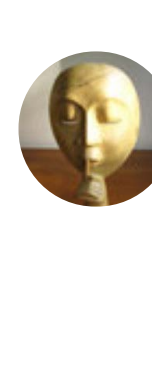
**Elaine Mari** from [ElaineMari](#) said 4 years ago

I loved reading this. It took me back to my grandmother's home. She had a few vases and a sugar dish and milk jug made from that porous white clay stuff that a lot of "cheap" pottery was made from back in the 40's or 50s. When something broke she would use canned evaporated milk to glue it back together, it would create a darkening of the line of the crack and some yellowing. I thought that beautiful and it was an ingenious thing, the repair with milk. They were subsistence farmers, my grandparents, in Newfoundland, which is basically a rock in the Atlantic, so they had to be very resourceful and careful with money.



**Silvia Berrios** from [DesignsbySilvia](#) said 4 years ago

Great reading, I believe the inventive repair, recycling, upcycling, etc., it's in my DNA from my ancestors. It comes very handy in these days of economic difficulty, and sustainable living. It's good for the pocket, and the environment.



**AnneSo Godby** from [crottedebique](#) said 4 years ago

I love this post!! People should mend more and throw away less!! xxx



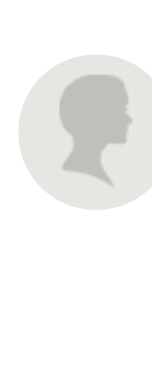
**Megan** from [MegansMenagerie](#) said 4 years ago

Great post! Thanks!



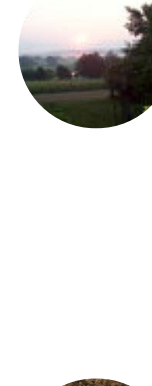
**Debbie Vasilinda** from [SuVasi](#) said 4 years ago

Wonderful post, thank you.



**LostInTheValley** from [LostInTheValleyPhoto](#) said 4 years ago

I LOVE this! What fascinating history he's collecting! As someone who has a house full of not-so-perfect antiques I can totally identify with this!



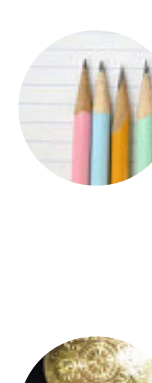
**Suzi** from [ThePillowStudioShop](#) said 4 years ago

I think the metal handle looks amazing! An improvement possibly?



**Monica** from [ThreeBarDGifts](#) said 4 years ago

Some objects hold too many memories to just throw out. Thanks for the post!



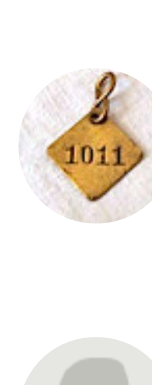
**Amber** from [BambuEarth](#) said 4 years ago

This is so great. I love that in the midst of a culture with a "disposable" mentality, there are those who don't look at the material as something to just be replaced when broken. ♥♥♥



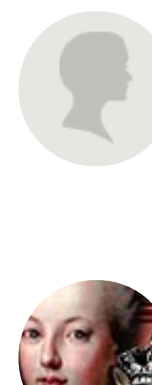
**crowning** said 4 years ago

Delightful! :)



**Emily Delfin** from [reflectionsjewelry](#) said 4 years ago

lovely!



**Kristina Smiley** from [CreativeEndeavorsKS](#) said 4 years ago

Wonderful story! I'm always trying to teach my children and my students about preserving things and to not get caught up in our "throw away" world. I am a Social Studies teacher and love learning about all aspects of our history. Thank you for sharing your passion :)



**Sara Brazil** from [SararaVintage](#) said 4 years ago

As an anthropologist and vintage seller, this article and his collection spoke directly to my heart. Material culture gives us insight and his attraction to these "repaired" examples speak volumes. I love the folk aspect that they have as well as the example they give us to think on, in a culture that disregards objects many times without a second thought. Clothing is often repaired and reused. When I run across something that speaks to me (it has a fantastic design and age to it-especially 20s items) but is beyond repair for resale I often keep it to wear scars and all. Thank you for sharing!



**Jennifer Boaro** from [TheCatBall](#) said 4 years ago

Wow! What a fascinating collection! It really is a matter of access to goods. I grew up in a rural area and things were scarce and expensive. Everyone reused stuff cleverly, and a popular activity was digging through the trash at the dump for good stuff. We called it JcPenney's.



**VintageRescueSquad** from [VintageRescueSquad](#) said 4 years ago

I love blogposts like this ... so evocative. Keep them coming, please!



**DewyMorningVintage** from [DewyMorningVintage](#) said 4 years ago

Wow, do I love this article! I love it when people can embrace so-called imperfections with objects, and well, with people too! I fall in love with so many objects( and people) that are imperfect in some way. I feel the world is fascinating to see how my grandmother would make a perfect last and and the imperfections that make life and people and things so very interesting! Thank you so much for this wonderful article!



**iammieCLAYshop** from [iammieCLAYshop](#) said 4 years ago

Nice blog!



**Victoria Baker** from [LittleWrenPottery](#) said 4 years ago

Neat idea, its interesting how these objects become more unique because of being broken!



**Sarah Firkins** from [SarahLeahJane](#) said 4 years ago

Those are lovely pieces! I had a similar upbringing, though I noticed the repairs of clothes. I always found it fascinating to see how my grandmother would make a garment last and last. Then when she could no longer repair it, she would make it into something else. All incarnations were beautiful in their own right. Thank you for sharing this!



**Susie** from [Vintage4Antiques](#) said 4 years ago

AH, I do so love your post! I think I'm the reincarnated antiques dealer mentioned because my shop holds several well-loved, mended or just plain damaged items! My upbringing forbade the disposal of things simply because of (mis)use. I can't seem to let go of the habit, either, although I sometimes have a lot of explanation to do! Seems to me that antiques ARE a journal of use....



**sandra moon** from [NewtoUVintage](#) said 4 years ago

Super ideas for some of my broken treasures.Nothing needs to go to waste especially yesterday's treasures.Great reading Thanks



**Yvy** from [thecarbonfader](#) said 4 years ago

Wonderful post. I love old/used objects and have several antiques in my home that have been mended or proudly display their imperfections, and sometimes those imperfections make them more beautiful. So glad I read this, thank you.



**Enterprise Americana** from [EnterpriseAmericana](#) said 4 years ago

Some repairs a just wonderful parts of an item's history. They often add great beauty and an organic feel. Copper Flashing! That was the upgrade I did to my floors when I removed the soup can patches to sand.



**LaELECTICA** from [Laelectica](#) said 4 years ago

Love this article. I have been enjoying up-cycling and breathing new life into broken old objects. Thanks for the inspiration!



**breadandroses2** from [breadandroses2](#) said 4 years ago

I've always admired the ingenuity of 'make-do' repairs. I'm still mystified how stapled ceramic repairs were accomplished and I've found a few examples over the years. Magical.



**tereskaanna** said 4 years ago

I went to the blog and it is AMAZING!!!! what a testament to inventiveness and creativity and such a stark reminder of the consumerism and lack of frugality today. LOVE.



**Darlene Jones** from [RomanceCatsAndWhimsy](#) said 4 years ago

I love this post! What an interesting perspective! And I love the primitive repaired pieces. I will definitely look at things differently now. My husband broke the head off of one of my favorite ceramic cats. I glued it back on but it wasn't very pleasing so I tied a nifty "scarf" around it's neck and now it's a very handsome cat!



**VaLon Frandsen** from [thevicagirl](#) said 4 years ago

How cool.



**Emilie Monson** from [PaperHeartFire](#) said 4 years ago

I repair antique books and it is always important to maintain any writing or what may have been added. I think it is so beautiful that other objects can hold their story too. Thank you for recognizing this and allowing us all to see.



**Carol Daniels** from [Atticbargains](#) said 4 years ago

Great work. I like to add broken pottery and flowers to wreaths whether it is straw or grape vines. Looks great hanging on a door .



**ansluasi** from [OnceUponABookshop](#) said 4 years ago

So much of the beauty of antiques is the life they have had before, and will have again long after I am gone. Both people and things get a lot more interesting when they've been around the block a few times. We live in a 160 year old farmhouse and my very walls are riddled with the preservation efforts of careful hands over the years. At times I find myself shaking my head at some of the "repairs" I find (the bent hatpin used to staple part of the original attic wiring in place comes to mind) when adding my own 21st century layer to the mess, but in each one I touching the hands of someone before me making do just as I am.



**Elizabeth Pickett** from [bittersweetdesign](#) said 4 years ago

Material Culture is so incredibly fascinating! As a buyer and seller of antique and vintage items, as well as handmade items - I find it the hardest to part with the 'most loved'. These are the items that are imperfect, repaired - the misfits. One of the things my mother always 'preached' to me was 'that there was beauty in imperfection'. So true...