

Ruby Lane Designer Spotlight – Andrew Baseman

Posted August 18, 2014 in [Interviews](https://www.rubylane.com/blog/category/categories/interviews/) (<https://www.rubylane.com/blog/category/categories/interviews/>), [Vintage Collectibles](https://www.rubylane.com/blog/category/categories/vintage-collectibles/) (<https://www.rubylane.com/blog/category/categories/vintage-collectibles/>)

by courtney



<https://www.rubylane.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/andrew.jpg>) Past Imperfect – The Art of Inventive Repair

By Cathy Whitlock

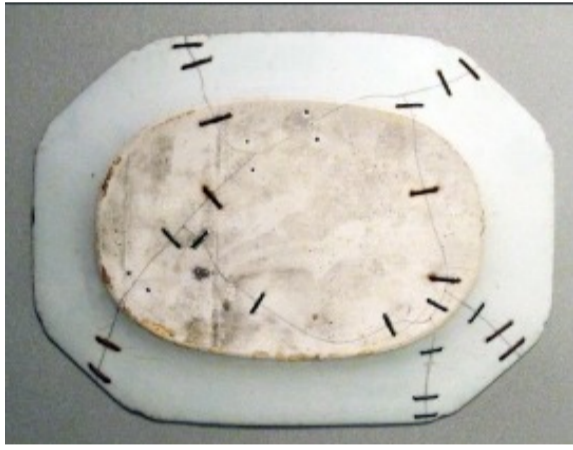
A love of antiques and a passion for collecting became the basis for one of our favorite blogs, *Past Imperfect: the art of inventive repair* (<http://andrewbaseman.com/blog/>). Written by the multi-talented interior designer, set decorator and book author Andrew Baseman of Andrew Baseman Design in New York, the amusing and informative blog provides both a history lesson and primer on the creative ways to repair our cherished collectibles.

Andrew's fascinating career is far from *imperfect* and perhaps you have seen his television and film work. As a Hollywood set decorator, his beautiful interiors have graced both the silver and small screens – Manhattan high-end digs for *The Nanny Diaries* and ABC's *666 Park Avenue* to seventies period details in the FX spy thriller *The Americans* and HBO's recent docu-drama *Normal Heart*.

Taking a moment from his latest set design project – namely the upcoming Fox crime series *Gotham* – Andrew sits down with Ruby Lane.

RL: Where did you get the idea for your blog? It's a very unique and specific topic.

AB: In 2010 I decided to create a blog showcasing my collection of antiques with inventive repairs. It was a way to catalog and photograph examples from my collection, which at that time numbered about 250 pieces. I had been casually collecting for about 20 years and I felt like I was rescuing and finding a home for these mostly unwanted castaways. I was, and still am, moved by the poignancy of the repairs, and admire the tenacity of these early survivors, and the ingenuity of the repairers. As each piece is unique yet unsigned, I enjoy speculating on who the original owner was, how the piece broke, who fixed it, and how many homes it lived in prior to my acquiring it.



<https://www.rubylane.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/andrewplate.jpg>) **RL:** What sort of things do you collect antique-wise and why?

AB: I have always been drawn to quirky and unusual things, and never follow collecting trends. When I first moved to NYC right out of college, I would regularly hit the Upper East Side thrift shops, as the best quality merchandise was found in the high-end neighborhoods. I bought clothes to wear, as well as antiques, at the over-stuffed and sometimes snooty shops. My favorite finds were \$1 psychedelic silk ties from the 60s signed "Emilio", which I wore with white shirts and jeans.

Years later I discovered they were Pucci originals (one shopkeeper called them "Puck-ies"), but this was about 15 years before wearing Pucci was considered hip. At the same time I collected vividly printed vintage silk scarves, many by celebrated artists and designers, paying no more than \$5 each. The first scarf I purchased, and still my favorite, has a 1950's black and white illustration by Charles Addams, complete with members of the Addams Family, flying bats, and their haunted house at center. I used the collection as the source of my first book, *The Scarf*, published by Stewart, Tabori and Chang in 1989. Since then my collections have been diverse, and have included bound volumes of 18th-19th century Japanese fabric swatches, first edition books by Edward Gorey, antique post cards (I still have my winning show ribbons from exhibiting at deltiology conventions while in my early teens!), and original artwork and illustrated books by faves Hilary Knight, Maurice Sendak and Roz Chast.

RL: What sort of advice would you give Ruby Lane readers on inventive repairs? And any recommendations on sources for parts?

AB: The advice I give to all collectors is to buy what you love. If you are filling up shelves and rooms in your home, then you'd better like looking at them daily. I know of one collector who only buys wine goblets with replaced bases, and another who just buys oil lamps. My taste is more varied, as I like the wide spectrum of different types of repairs. And I love being surprised. I have a single, seemingly unremarkable brass candlestick which if perfect, I wouldn't have given a second glance. But this one has a replacement base made from a carved coconut shell. Clearly this was done at home and the clever repairer used whatever material was at hand. I also have an early porcelain teapot with $\frac{3}{4}$ of a silver thimble used to replace the broken end of a spout. As far as sources for parts, check out local antiques and junk shops for inexpensive broken items with usable parts. A dented tin pot can be repurposed for its handle or spout, and a broken teapot or sugar bowl can be bought for its lid. And don't forget to look in your basement or garage for an endless source of knobs, parts and gadgets.

[https://www.rubylane.com/blog/wp-](https://www.rubylane.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/andrewroom.jpg)



[content/uploads/2014/08/andrewroom.jpg](https://www.rubylane.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/andrewroom.jpg)) **RL:** Interior design these days appears to be trending toward more modern and contemporary styles. How do you get clients to incorporate antiques into the mix for a touch of old world and authenticity? What are some of your favorite categories or items antique-wise that you like to use?

AB: I think (hope?) that the bubble has finally burst on the trend of using strictly mid-century modern furnishings in interior design. Clients will always want modern and contemporary but I have recently seen a shift and heard from dealers that good quality American and European antiques are selling stronger than in recent years. My personal aesthetic has always been to mix periods, styles, metal finishes, and colors...as long as the final result looks good! To me, there's nothing more boring than seeing an uptight room with every metal surface matching exactly and every stick of furniture made of the same color wood. While I greatly admire rooms decorated all in one period, I respond more to an interior full of variety, mixed colors and styles. I tell my clients that antiques are an investment and can appreciate in value, unlike a newly made table that just like a new car, loses its value the minute it leaves the showroom. But if a client is drawn to modern pieces, for example, I can usually get them to invest in a good piece of French Art Deco or Biedermeier. And for the record, I deplore the derogatory term "brown furniture" to describe all antique furniture that isn't modern.

RL: We can't wait to see your next television project. What sources do set decorators glean when accessorizing sets?

AB: Currently I am working on *Gotham*, a new television series for Fox/Warner Bros., airing this fall. It's an exciting premise that tells the backstory of Batman's Gotham City, and we see the early development of Bruce Wayne, the Penguin and other iconic characters. It has great potential for operatic-like settings that incorporate various periods and styles and I am ready to sink my teeth into it. Unlike decorating residential interiors, I have much less lead-time to procure items. More often than not, I have just a few days to fill a set with furniture, lighting, flooring, artwork and "smalls," so I depend on the immediate gratification of shopping Ruby Lane, etc. So keep your eyes open for some subtle foreshadowing set dressing seen in The Penguin's mother's apartment set!