

SPECIAL ANTIQUES SECTION: THE AUCTIONS, THE DEALERS, THE SHOWROOMS

STYLE

SMART LIVING IN BALTIMORE

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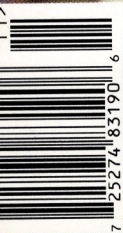
Stylish Cocktails

Cherished Traditions

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On an Indian summer day in early October, the dapper Joseph Paul Davis, as sleek as an Armani ad, arrives at E.J. Grant Antiques ready to shop. One of the 30 to 40 interior designers who regularly make their rounds here, he's braved the morning rush hour to drive up from Washington, D.C. "No one in Washington has this scale, this variety," he explains, as he begins to lead me on an hour-long tour of this big red barn in Savage Mills. Inside the rustic building is a breathtaking panorama of European elegance, some 2,000 antiques, architectural elements, paintings and accessories handpicked in western Europe and the Far East by owners Ed and Jane Grant.

"I often come here looking for something like a console or hall piece because I know there'll be 15 things to choose from," continues Davis. "But today, I have a list.

"For a Pikesville client, a financier, I'm looking for a large armoire for the master bedroom. For a Potomac client, who just spent \$1.2 million on his garden, I need a large garden ornament: a grille or possibly a large clock face." And for himself—the perfect desk for his new office on Dupont Circle. "Ed and Jane have already sent

me pictures of what they saw on their most recent buying trip in Europe, and I'm buying a desk I saw in the pictures."

Davis continues to lead me through one stately vignette after another, admiring a pair of Louis XVI fauteuil chairs here, and there, a pair of French *bergeres*, c. 1780, made from fruitwood and priced at \$10,500 for the set. "Part of what is reassuring," he notes, "is that everything here is what it's supposed to be: Provenance is never dubious. I love this place and I love these people."

These people, of course, are the Grants, the couple who opened this store 16 years ago, and who are "born antique dealers," according to Jane—though it took them years to discover it. Ed, an electronic engineer who worked 13 years for the National Security Agency, spent a couple of those years in England, where he found his interests shifting. Shortly after he returned, he emerged from a self-described early mid-life crisis as an antiques dealer. "I went into business with another guy I knew from England," says the tall, soft-spoken Ed, elegant even in the jeans and casual shirts that are his daily uniform. "We opened up a wholesale import business that

ED AND JANE GRANT: SETTING THEMSELVES APART AT SAVAGE MILLS



"It's not an easy business for one spouse to be in and one not. It's all consuming," says Jane Grant of her business partnership with husband Ed.

evolved into a store called The Antiques Gallery." And then, enter Jane, quite literally.

A former college English teacher, she came into the store in 1978 as a research assistant to an author, and by proxy, a personal shopper for an antique desk. A year-and-a-half later, on New Year's Eve, 1979, she and Ed were married. Two years later, they formed E.J. Grant Antiques.

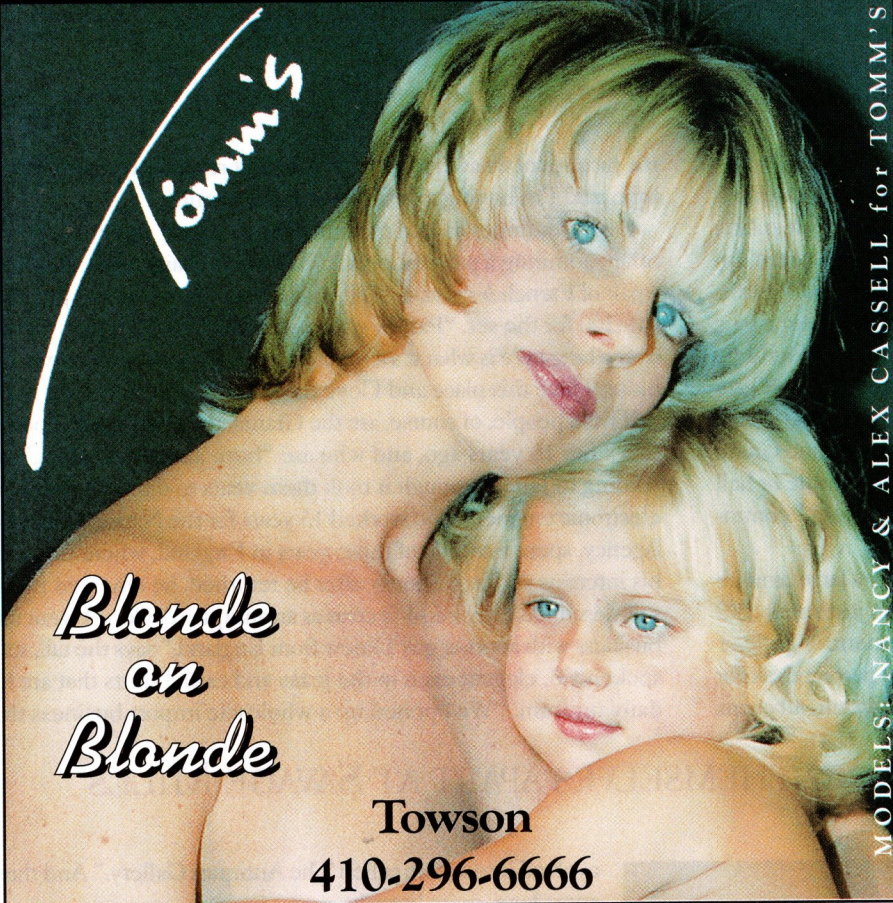
"It was a rough business in 1981," recalls Jane, a natural beauty with glowing skin, soulful brown eyes and a short crop of blond hair. "We were here seven days a week. We moved the furniture and we delivered it.

"We learned by doing. By reading, making mistakes, and talking to everyone. Buying trips are enormously educating," she adds. "This last trip we bought about 150 to 200 items, but we put our hands on about 10 times as many."

Computerized in 1985, and moved to its current site four years later, the business has grown every year. The staff now numbers 11, and the market, while still concentrated in the Baltimore/Washington area, extends up and down the East Coast and beyond. "We also have the biggest Web presence of any antiques dealer in the world," says Jane about their 1½-year-old Web site (<http://antiques-usa.com/ejg>), which "techie" Ed designed. Fully 25 percent of their current inventory is online.

Their work with designers, always an integral part of the business, now accounts for 60 percent. "Ed and Jane buy with a design sense," says Baltimore designer Alexander Baer. "They offer a cross section of antiques, from country pieces that don't cost a fortune to the finest period styles. So a piece they have might not be a true Chippendale, but it will have a decorative appeal. They understand the need to see how an object fits into a home."

BEST HAIR COLORIST IN BALTIMORE

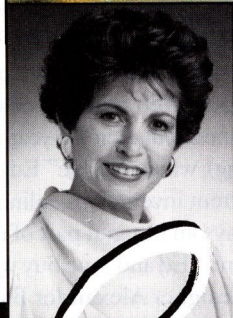
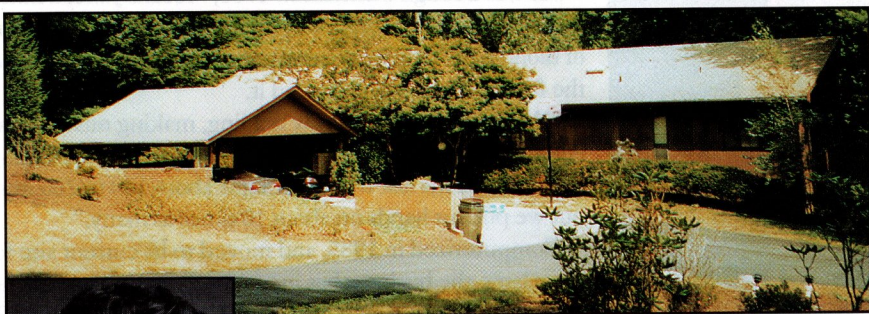


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Ed and Jane Grant

(continued from page 93)

"Our stock in trade is good, stylish, useful furniture," says Ed, noting that their pieces are generally priced under \$20,000.

Joe Davis, now surveying an expansive array of tables, appreciates the volume, too. "If I say to my client, 'Wouldn't it be nice to have a clock in this space,' I know Grant's carries a lot of clocks, so I come here." Same thing with chairs, case goods, mirrors—and tables. Further along, he is drawn to a small, somewhat distressed painted French table with exceptionally graceful, slender curving legs. He rues the fact that none of his Washington clients would go for it. "They want things to be just perfect," he says.

Nonetheless, he can't resist playing with the idea of this painted table. "I love its soft color and charm; it has the integrity to carry the room."

As Davis gets down to business about that garden ornament, Ed first leads him back to the workshop to check out a large wooden candelabra. Pretty, but the wrong material, says Davis. Next, Ed suggests an Italian window grille. Not quite right. But when Jane leads him to a Gothic grille door, Davis exclaims, "It's perfect." There's only one problem: the relatively modest price tag. "It probably needs to be marked up for this client to appreciate it," Davis says, laughing. No problem, deadpans Ed.

The first piece we look at for the Pikesville client is a nearly 10-foot-tall French armoire, c. 1720, made out of solid walnut. "They have a two-story ceiling," Davis explains, "but 8 feet up, it begins to taper in. So we need one no taller than 8 feet." On to a French oak piece, c. 1830. Davis likes the color, the "almost naive" carvings on the door, and the Pennsylvania-Dutch-like frieze running across the top. He decides to send a picture to his client.

As for his new office desk, Jane brings out the pictures from the recent buying trip in Europe. Flipping through the photographs to show me the high Regency mahogany desk he covets, Davis stops at a picture of two mid-19th-century Canton vases and becomes excited over the black-lacquered Louis XV bureau plat they're sitting on. Unfortunately, the sleek desk is an item the Grants *didn't* buy. But Ed, ever unflappable, is familiar with this turn of events. "Often people will pick out something in the background of one of our pictures and say, 'I love this.' And then we try and get it for them." □