



Cabinet of Curiosities

A centuries-old sense of fabulousness

Cabinets of curiosities have been described as miniature universes combining the treasures of art and the wonders of nature in one strangely intriguing place. Pairing natural wonders such as shells and skulls; scientific instruments such as globes and telescopes; coins, jewels and antiquities; and works of art, these cabinets were amassed by wealthy Europeans as a way of documenting their travels and striving to understand the world at large by creating a world in miniature. Here, we collect coveted curiosities into our own theater of the world, designed to both fascinate viewers and amuse the curator in us all.

Photography: Kennon Everett. Editor: Michelle Croce. Styled by Randy Powers.



In cabinets of curiosities, as in any other collection, the presence of any particular object was justified, a priori, by its rarity.

— Patrick Maurès in *Cabinets of Curiosities*

Left: Specimen box that belonged to a French family, set of five \$3,500 or \$700 each, at Urban Chateau. Vintage French books. Small polished-horn vase \$35, filled with 300-milliliter test tubes of Orientaliste fragrances Fleur d'Oranger, Santal and Vanille.

Below: Rock-crystal and sterling cup with lapis stopper \$1,200, at B.F. Agee, Houston. Vintage tortoise shell. Twentieth-century articulating hand \$625, and Vatel Buffet French wax lemon, part of a set of three \$1,125, at Urban Chateau. Leather-bound vintage French books. Ted Muehling porcelain branch candlestick \$1,785, at de Vera. Circa-1870 lithograph of a French-style cake, later framed in Paris, part of a set of two \$625, at Urban Chateau.

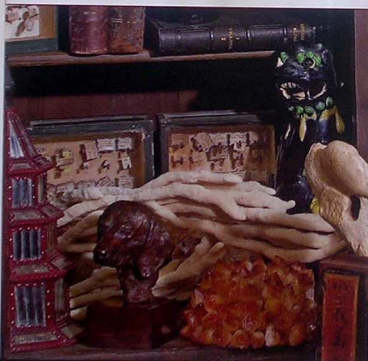
Opposite page, on cabinet doors: Tiny vintage theater photographs \$11 each, at Addison Endpapers, Oakland. Set of two miniature Don Quixote books, printed in Spanish in 1947, from the collection of Countess Anne de Ruille \$300, at Urban Chateau. D.L. & Co. shadow-box comprised of wasp nest, preserved insects, pleated panels of old scrim and original Victorian artwork in a Victorian frame, at Gump's. René Magritte's *Ceci est un morceau de fromage*, 2003 limited edition (number 2 of 300). Canvas, wood, gelatin print (12 x 14 x 14 inches) under glass dome on a marble slab (not shown), price on request at McClain Gallery, Houston. Parfums DelRae Début eau de toilette \$80, at Alabaster, de Vera. Diana Slavín Womenswear. Chinese carved crystal opium bottle, circa 1900, \$580, at de Vera. Japanese oil with original contents \$36, at Paxton Gate. Large horn boxes of oxidized bronze by artist Lee Hale \$900 each, at de Vera. Gilt bronze reliquary \$495, at Antique & Art Exchange.

Coral under glass dome with gilt-wood base \$48, at Surprise Party. Large thorn boxes of oxidized bronze by local artist Lee Hale \$900 each, at de Vera. Bird's nest \$38, at Paxton Gate. Christoffe palm vase by Michele Oka Doner \$250, at Pavillon Christoffe. One of five specimen boxes that once belonged to an old French family, \$3,500 for the set or \$700 each, at Urban Chateau. On the floor: D.L. & Co. spiderweb mirror, at Gump's. Bovine femur \$20, bovine pelvis bone \$15, and alligator snapping-turtle skull \$200, all at Historia Naturalis, Dallas. Lotus Arts de Vivre shell ashtray with sterling snake \$2,145, through Lotus Arts de Vivre USA, 212.832.1844. On the bench: Late 19th-century Chinese articulated fish with hinged head \$4,250, at East & Orient Co., Dallas. Desk magnifier in shagreen and silver-plat, circa 1920, \$2,600, at Gump's. Albertus Seba's *Cabinet of Natural Curiosities* (international edition; by Irmgard Müsch, Taschen) \$250. Finger sponge under vintage glass, at Surprise Party; Tail of the Yak, Berkeley. Vintage bear rug. Karastan Mystical Zebra rug, at Abbey Carpets of San Francisco.



The first impression on entering a cabinet of curiosities was one of a world in miniature, an accumulation of objects in such profusion that it was difficult to find one's way round it.

— Patrick Mauriès in
Cabinets of Curiosities



Left: Two specimen boxes, as above, at Urban Chateau. Bronze statue of a beagle head by renowned dog sculptor Richard Fath \$10,000, at Urban Chateau. Finger sponge at Surprise Party; Tail of the Yak, Berkeley. Citrine votive holder \$395, at Antique & Art Exchange. Eighteenth-century Chinese foo dog \$1,200 a pair, at B.F. Agee, Houston.

SHOPS OF CURIOSITY

Abbey Carpets of San Francisco

3100 Geary Blvd.
San Francisco; 415.752.6620

Addison Endpapers

6397 Telegraph Ave.
Oakland; 510.601.8112

Alabaster

597 Hayes St.
San Francisco; 415.558.0482

Antique & Art Exchange

151 Vermont St.
San Francisco; 415.522.3580

B.F. Agee (to the trade)

505 Brannard St.
Houston; 713.527.9595

de Vera

29 Maiden Lane
San Francisco; 415.788.0828

Diana Slavin Womenswear

3 Claude Lane
San Francisco; 415.677.9939

East & Orient Co.

1123 Slocum St.
Dallas; 214.741.1191

Gump's

135 Post St.
San Francisco; 415.982.1616

Historia Naturalis

1505 Hi Line Dr.
Dallas

McClain Gallery

2242 Richmond Ave.
Houston; 713.520.9989

Pavillon Christoffe

140 Grant St.
San Francisco; 415.399.1931

Paxton Gate

824 Valencia St.
San Francisco

Sloan/Hall

2620 Westheimer
Houston

Surprise Party

1900-A Fillmore St.
San Francisco; 415.771.8550

Tail of the Yak

2632 Ashby Ave.
Berkeley; 510.841.9989

Urban Chateau

3228 Sacramento St.
San Francisco; 415.673.8026