

One person's trash?

by BROCK WEIR

Garage and yard sale season is now in full swing, and I, for one, can't wait to get a belated start on treasure hunting.

If you're a seller, it's a great time to cash in on some of the stuff you've shoved to one side or into a garage after a flurry of spring cleaning. If you're a buyer, and let's face it, we all are at some point when we come across a true bargain that really speaks to us, it's an equally great time to hunt for those weird and wonderful items you never even knew you needed!

As I'm yet to fully recover from my move earlier this year, I'm trying with varying degrees of success to exercise some sort of restraint. I'm writing this from an office that meets my day to day needs and, had Monday been a work-from-home day, I'd be doing the same thing from a space that is similarly equipped but still packed with some of the personal treasures I've collected along the way.

It's often said that one person's trash is another person's treasure, and I've often found that to be the case. As a collector of things that are best described as a specific 'niche' under the umbrella heading of 'old Hollywood,' some of my most prized finds are things that made my heart sing but had little to no value sentimentally on the part of people who were de-cluttering.

I've also been lucky enough to find the majority of my collection 'holy grails' on relatively bargain-basement prices, but there are still a few things that have always eluded me.

I guess that's one of the drawbacks of being attracted to ephemera - that is, things that weren't necessarily made to stand the test of time - rather than stalwart pieces of furniture, large-framed paintings, or barrels of fine China, to pick just three examples.

(That being said, however, if you happen to have a cylindrical ceramic cat from the late 50s or early 60s that is ugly as sin, one that holds a special place in my heart for that very reason, let me know. It might just be the last of my grails!)

The 'one person's junk' idea often unfolded before me. In the first decade of the millennium, like many of us have had to and still do, we went through the process of helping both sets of grandparents downsize when the time ultimately came. So many things my parents, aunts and uncles decided to get rid of were understandable at the time, yet the sheer volume of what went out in those ubiquitous junk trucks almost feels like a crime in retrospect.

Back then, furniture and tchotchkes from the 1940s, 50s and 60s was decidedly out of fashion.

There was little appreciation over that aerodynamic-looking electric blender from 1949, to pick one example, when there were more energy-efficient and smaller models available for a comparative pittance, so why keep it around? That atomic-style love seat had to go. After all, the upholstery choice was beyond salvation in any era. The idea of getting something RE-upholstered, be damned.

That heavy wooden hi-fi? Who needs something that plays vinyl when CDs, then the order of the day, were giving way to digital download?

Well, who could have foreseen the resurgence of record players and vinyl, or the sudden and rapid renaissance of that leftover 'post-war junk' under the guise of 'mid-century modern'? Truth be told, a lot of people did, but we sure didn't.

Now, I still look back fondly at some of the things we disposed of that were hideous to my eyes back then as now, 20 years on, with more refined taste (that's what I'm telling myself, so let's go with it) they are the things I would like to have around me, both aesthetically and sentimentality.

Perhaps the 'one's man's trash' is less accurate than beauty being in the eye of the beholder.

The next time you're out in our community, take a few minutes to take a good look around.

Whether you're at a busy commercial intersection with little more glass and steel before you floating on a sea of asphalt, or at a more rural corner where fields might be littered with weeds or signs trumpeting future development, you're sure to find glimmers of beauty all around.

A few days ago, for instance, I was preparing for an interview at Aurora's primary intersection of Yonge and Wellington. A few minutes early for the appointed hour, I pulled a book out of my backpack, found a bench and waited. While this intersection is a stone's throw from our office and an intersection I travel through most days of the week, my eyes were drawn across the street to a former bank building made primarily of glass, accented with a particularly nubby kind of concrete.

It very much looks 'of its time' and, as such, in some people's eyes, is seemed less 'historic' or of a lesser 'heritage' value over some of the more classically-built examples of bank buildings in our general area.

Yet, being 'of its time' is the point - it's this very concept that makes it just as valuable architecturally as many of our built Victorian survivors; the Victorian hotel that previously occupied the bank site in question fared less lucky in this respect, however.

When we consider heritage, we've been using the same benchmarks as we have for decades. No matter how far along we come in our collective march of time, it often feels the baseline of what is considered 'historic' or 'heritage' is rooted firmly in place.

Relics from the 1800s through to the end of the First World War are often venerated as landmarks that should be preserved for future generations, and rightly so, but, because of that arbitrary line in the sand, we've lost many treasures that speak to different areas, populations, and needs.

Interior design styles from the 50s and 60s are making a remarkable comeback in the public's imagination, but the homes and other buildings in which these styles were honed, and were often reflected outside as well, at least in most parts of this country, are not.

When we look at what we want to preserve for future generations, we need to look beyond, in addition to, the Victorian Era and early 1900s.

Examples that followed, particularly public spaces, might not, on the surface, exhibit as much imagination or warmth as their forebears, but future generations might have a very different perspective, hold different aesthetic values, and lament the loss of 50s, 60s, 70s, and even 80s architecture simply because the decision-makers of today see history and heritage as a done deal that wrapped up in 1939.

If the humble audio cassette tape of the 80s and 90s can see a surge of re-found popularity, just about anything could be possible!