



MIKE WOLFE HELPS FRIEND ALEXANDRA CIRIMELLI ANTIQUATE LEIPER'S FORK, TENN.

## Fresh picked

A California transplant makes history come alive

**T**wo of the most significant artifacts in Alexandra Cirimelli's 3,000-square-foot antiques store are not for sale. Yet they may be the best reflection of both the Leiper's Fork, Tenn.-based Serenite Maison's aesthetic and Cirimelli's respect for things that have gone before.

On the front-door frame are horizontal lines with names and dates marking the heights of the neighborhood kids who have wandered in. To the right is a corner with antique guitars, banjos and mandolins. Over the years this 1914 building has served as everything from a general store to a gas station to a hair salon, and there has always been a place for locals to strum. Most shops with costly instruments on display wouldn't allow just anyone to pick them up and play, but for Cirimelli, the functionality of an antique is part of what contributes to its value as an objet d'art.

Cirimelli, an interior designer, and her husband, a music producer, relocated to this bucolic town from California in 2003. She opened Serenite Maison as a way to continue to offer clients her chic, history-inspired designs.

"We brought French chandeliers to the town of Leiper's Fork, and they truly embraced it," she says. Serenite Maison outgrew its 300-square-foot space in just nine months. Less than a year later, the store was too big for its new 600-square-foot location. More than seven years ago, Cirimelli moved into the historic current space, which has more room for the general-store counters, pie safes and other oversize pieces she favors.

Cirimelli stocks a few new items at the request of locals (like soaps and candles), but the majority of her inventory is made up of vintage pieces she finds on picking trips across the U.S., England and France. Cirimelli is a friend of Mike Wolfe of *American Pickers* fame (Wolfe was a picker for Marty Hunt, a Leiper's Fork matriarch and Serenite Maison's landlord). Cirimelli appeared on the History channel TV show in the second season, helping to design a project for actor William Shatner, and the two share finds from their travels. Like Wolfe, she is drawn

to formerly functional pieces, and encourages her clients to reuse pieces for more than strictly decorative purposes.

"I only buy what I would be willing to bring home," she says.

On a recent visit to Serenite Maison, there were small-scale leather Art Deco chairs, a giant European clock face, a mammoth glass cabinet from a former pharmacy and jewelry displayed in antique medical cabinets. As the market for antiques has heated up, Cirimelli and her fellow pickers have become more focused.

"After you have owned as many general-store counters and farm tables as I have, you want to be able to get the next thing," she says, pointing out a table she found with a heart and initials carved into the top. "That right there was the nuance that sold that table to me."

Not all of Cirimelli's clients are antiques collectors. In fact, she loves to combine older pieces in otherwise contemporary settings. "I strongly believe each piece has its own soul," she says. "The process of placing them in a home, teaching the people that purchased them, is an ongoing love affair celebrating the history of each and every piece that passes through my store."—MARGARET LITTMAN **E**