

Dog Tales: South China For Salvage and Reproductions

An occasional column by Mike Whiteside, co-owner of Black Dog Architectural Salvage, chronicling his adventures while in search of salvage.

When I last left you, I was preparing to board a slow boat to China. Well it was a 747 but it might as well have been a junk. I will spare you the painful details of the trip over to south China but it did include planes, trains, high-speed ferries, and bad cabs.

Our main reason for the trip to Guangzhou was to go experience the largest trade show in the world, or at least that's what the brochure said, and because we're always looking for the next great deal and know that China is setting the pace for reproduction. Now I know that I just said a word that all you pure salvage/antique purveyors run away from but admit it, we have all bought and sold these repros. If I could find a container of antique iron or marble urns at a price my demographics would support, I would buy it, but we live in an economy that wants old but without the old price. The Black Dog still sells the architectural castoffs of our society. We supplement our inventory with high quality repro, both foreign and domestic, that fills a void.

What Robert, Black Dog's co-owner, and I found was an eye opener. In the iron and marble garden products I think Michelangelo would have been envious of these carvings and cast. The hurdle to buying in China is quantity. You ask the price and your jaw drops and all you can think of is how you do it for that. Then they ask you how many containers of this beauty you want. We come crashing back to reality. Now we try and justify a container of these fabulous finds. The only thing that makes sense is to buy a container load and mix it up with different items from the same factory. Now all we have to do is sell it. I knew there was a catch. It's never hard to buy so long as you know your customer and are ahead of the trend because lead time on anything from China is three to four months once your order is placed. I've been asked if would I go back and the answer is yes, but with a better focus and in business class, I hope.

Our trip wasn't lost on the new stuff as we did find actual antiques some 100 miles out of town with the help of a local collector who took us on a day trip. Wonderful items including 200- to 300-year old cupboards, altars, chairs, herb cabinets and a 500-year old rickshaw, all stored in a 1000-year-old temple. I'm not making this stuff up. I think a container load will find its way to the Dog for spring sales.

Chow for now and happy treasure hunting!

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