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Clever

A Young Collector's Cool, Colorful Chinatown Loft

Photographer Madde Pontin turns her lens to her own stuff, again

By Hannah Martin - Photography by Madde Pontin - July 10, 2020

"I've always collected objects," says the New York-based photographer Madde Pontin, on a Zoom call from her Chinatown loft, where she has been quarantining with said objects for the past three months. She introduces a few: a Cico egg cup from Alessi: "I remember being at that store with my parents when the collection came out. I still have it; still use it." Some plates she bought as a kid. A penguin lamp that she brings with her whenever she travels and places by the bed. "I love being at home, wherever I am," she explains.



Ettore Sottsass's Treetops floor lamp creates a bold color palette in Madde's living area, which stars Dimes chairs by Sam Stewart, tables by Ana Kras from Matter, and an orange Lunar Convertible sofa by James Irvine for B&B Italia.

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She's used to moving around a lot—mostly between Massachusetts and her father's native Sweden. And on the day we talked, most of her home was in boxes, headed north to Rockport, Massachusetts, for the summer. In the seaside town, she and her mother, Laura Novak, would launch Pon The Store, a mostly digital general store—hawking everything from Hay jars filled with gummies to Gaetano Pesce vessels, to fancy stationery—that will go live on July 15.

But she'll be back. After moving to New York to study photography at the School of Visual Arts, Madde is finally setting down roots. Four years ago she snagged her dream loft in Chinatown (which she photographed for Clever during quarantine), right across the street from her favorite restaurant, Dimes, which she has been steadily filling with collectible design. Much of it was sourced from the cult favorite Lower East Side design shop Coming Soon, where she works.



When Madde hosted a Halloween dinner party last year she needed more seating, so she combined two tables (one is Peter Shire's Peninsula Desk; another, a framed photo of that desk, perched on legs) into one, gathering around an eclectic mix of chairs that includes a Harry Bertoina side chair, a Champ stool by Visibility, Nendo's Heel chairs for Moroso, and more of Sam Stewart's Dimes chairs.

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In 2018, after Madde's parents cleaned out and sold their house in Massachusetts, she began thinking more about her own stuff. She started photographing and cataloguing her possessions, creating 2D copies of everything from her Sam Stewart Dimes chairs to her Miele vacuum (she draws the line at disposables, like pantry items or toothpaste). "I wanted to preserve all of these objects so that even if the object isn't with me anymore, it still exists in a photographic form," she explains. The index of objects later became her thesis project, and she playfully installed the photos in her apartment alongside the real thing for a show called "What are we going to do with all this FURNITURE?"



A Dimes chair by Sam Stewart is pulled up to a vintage desk from Coming Soon, topped with an Ettore Sottsass Tahiti table lamp.

The still-evolving project lives online, and it reads a bit like a biography: the Nendo heel chairs she bought when she first moved in, to use around her makeshift desk turned dining table. The mushroom-shaped lamp that glows pink, purchased

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at Coming Soon. The Donald Judd chair that she casually calls “the divorce chair—I mean, why else would I have gotten such a nice gift?”

Meanwhile, her actual apartment is eternally evolving, those catalogued items mixing in with acquisitions that come and go. “My friends joke that every time they come over everything has been moved,” she says. Part of that is because she loves to throw parties: Pre-quarantine, she threw an “awful party,” and before that, a Halloween dinner party, in which she pulled two tables together for more seating—she liked it, so she left it that way.



Madde at home in Chinatown.

What gives a piece staying power in Madde's world? “I’m drawn to objects that function as ideas,” she says “Objects that have a sense of humor. Like, I have a white sofa in here right now. It’s comfortable and it functions well in the space, but it doesn’t make me feel anything.”