

“MORE THAN OBJECTS OF ART”

by Karen Ott Mayer, Desoto Magazine, March 2010 issue



Some might say that Eric Nielsen does nothing other than collect junk, parts of dilapidated buildings and pieces of yesteryear. Others, however, may disagree. Nielsen, a FedEx pilot, has been salvaging old items since his teenage years when he became fascinated with old trunks. “I started with refinishing trunks, finding them at estate sales and auctions,” says Nielsen. His business, South Front Antiques, which he co-owns with his father was founded in 1971, and it became a clearing house for his finds. He admits to owning more than 20 trucks and another 25 that are currently for sale.

Calling himself an “architecturologist,” Nielsen is like a modern day Indiana Jones, except the treasures he seeks are visible, and sometimes, right near his own home. He has dismantled buildings and houses destined for demolition, saving those rare architectural parts that are all

but extinct in today’s construction world.

Nielsen is always on the hunt, even at the most unexpected times. He points to the large column bases supporting his kitchen table and remembers their origin with humor. “I was on a double date and we went to a Memphis home where the owners had changed the front of the house, removing the columns.” The columns lay in the yard, and while many would have walked right by, Nielsen had another idea. “I asked if they would sell them, and they did. I eventually sold half of them and kept this one.”



Nielsen has not only furnished his Harbor Town house with his finds, but has also furnished an Ozarks cabin as well.

Nielsen realizes the need to protect and save the artistically crafted parts and pieces. His preservationist spirit and creative eye lead to unique uses for old items. In his living room, he points to heavily carved candlesticks. “These were old piano legs that we just turned upside down,” says Nielsen. A large Danish trunk flanks the couch and holds a particular fondness for Nielsen, who is Danish. In fact, Nielsen cherishes the Danish works of art that hang in his house. Besides trunks, Nielsen is

fascinated with capitals, the decorative parts found at the very top of columns. “I love the wood,” he says.