

FOOD LOVER'S GUIDE TO THE 76 ALL-TIME BEST GIFTS

# FOOD & WINE

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## holiday special

66 delicious recipes  
from juicy roasts to  
easy desserts  
+ wines to match



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best restaurant dishes of 2006

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## DESIGN

# Shopping for Château Style

Hedda Gioia Dowd scours French châteaux for one-of-a-kind antique silver and linens for her Dallas-based company, Antique Harvest. Here, she describes some of her favorite finds for the kitchen and the table, such as an 18th-century *tournebroche* she uses to roast meat in the fireplace of her Texas farmhouse.

INTERVIEW BY JEN MURPHY

### How did you get into the business of antique French linens and silver?

My mom is from Strasbourg, France, so we've always rented a house in the area in the summer. While my mom shopped at the market, I'd talk to the vendors about their recipes. After a while, they'd want to bring me to their châteaux and show me their linens and silverware. People think royalty when they hear the word *château*, but these are just families who have inherited items that happen to have been in their families for 800 years. They would tell me they didn't want a set of silver anymore, or their kids didn't want it, so I started buying things. In 1998, three years after I started collecting, I had finally amassed enough to start a business—though I just went online last year.

### What kinds of antiques do you look out for?

All of the flatware I buy is oversize and heavier than anything you can find in America. Plate designs have grown so much in size over the past 12 to 15 years, and I think larger flatware looks better next to such big china. Also, I'll always buy up any silver in a *filet* pattern.



A fireplace Hedda Gioia Dowd brought from France to her Texas farmhouse, BELOW. She now sells them, too.

It's a classic, and there's lots of it available out there, so if you get a 12- or 18-piece setting, you can always add to your collection later.

### What are some of the most unusual silver pieces you've found?

Recently, I've bought several silver *manches à gigot*—basically, a holder you put around a leg of lamb so you don't get your hands dirty when carving it. I've found a few butter presses—you push the butter up from the bottom and it makes a shape. To keep the butter cold enough to hold the shape, the bottom of the press unscrews so you can put ice cubes underneath. I also have these great spoons with holes in them called *poudreuses*. You use them when you shake powdered sugar over a tart so it comes out like the design in the spoon.



PHOTOGRAPHS: NATALIE CAUDILL (DOWD), SCOTT JENKE (FIREPLACE, BARN)



Dowd looks for oversize antique silver flatware, Champagne buckets that can double as vases, far right, and embroidered linens, below.

**What's your favorite item to give as a hostess gift?** To me, the ultimate hostess gift is a fresh bouquet of lily of the valley in a gorgeous old Champagne bucket. My favorites are ones that were designed in the late 19th or early 20th century and had the stamp of Félix Frères on them. The buckets come in both big and small sizes and are nice and heavy. Whenever I find fabulous old wine buckets, I scoop them up.

**Why do you love antique linens?** In France, even 100-year-old linens can be in mint condition because the fibers are so strong. Back then, flax grew so tall, so the fibers are less likely to break. People in the United States are obsessed with thread count, and that has no meaning in France. Aside from that, the workmanship of the embroidery is incredible. Just because the monogram on a napkin may not be yours doesn't mean you shouldn't buy it. You're getting it for the craftsmanship. Some of the fabrics

I find are woven out of *chanvre* (hemp). *Chanvre* makes a heavier linen, so it's great fabric for pillows or upholstering small chairs. People who have country houses love to use it for tablecloths. *Chanvre* napkins are usually giant, so they're great as napkins for a more casual party outdoors or even as lobster bibs. People also like to use *chanvre* for polishing glassware or silver.

**What's a favorite recent linen find?**

Last year I discovered a collection of huge tablecloths, with up to 18 napkins each, from a château I go to often. The lady must have been quite a party-giver. Her husband was the president of a bank, so they entertained a lot, so much that she would number her napkins with embroidery. One corner had her initial, very small, and under that, a number—for a set of 18 she would have "18" stitched on every napkin—so she would know how many were in that particular collection.

**Any tips on the proper way to care for old linens?** The beauty of French linens is that, after they've been in the washing machine, you can put them on a bed and stretch them and then fold them down, and they will dry as crisply as if someone had hand-pressed them. New linens today wouldn't do that. Even with napkins, if you put them in the dryer



briefly—and I mean *briefly*—to take out some of the water, and then fold them, they will dry crisply.

**Tell me about the antique kitchen equipment you've found.** The first time I saw a *tournebroche*, a contraption used to turn meat on a spit in a fireplace, my heart stood still. It was a replica of an 18th-century one in a restaurant in Bordeaux called La Tupina (6 rue de la Porte de la Monnaie; 011-33-5-56-91-56-37). From that point on, I was on a mission. It took me three years until I finally found one to buy. Every *tournebroche* has something a little bit different about it, but they all have this whirligig—that's what I call it—at the top that's connected to a series of chains and weights, so the meat turns as it cooks. At a restaurant, every time a waiter goes by, he twirls the whirligig to help keep the meat spinning. In my Texas farmhouse, I have a huge



## DESIGN château style

fireplace and 24-foot ceilings, which are useful for a *tournebroche* because you need some height for hanging the weights. When I cook with a *tournebroche*, I start at 3 P.M. and let the fire burn down to coals. I'll roast four Cornish hens, and by 7:30 or 8 they're done and superjuicy. *Tournebroches* are really not for people who love microwaves.

**How did you find your outdoor fireplace?** I was driving by this garden shop in France in the middle of nowhere, and my husband was in the passenger seat reading the paper. When I saw the fireplace displayed outside, I braked so hard I thought he'd go through the windshield. I said, "Look at that piece over there. It's a fireplace you can grill on—I've got to have it!" The shop was closed, so I left a note on the fireplace saying, Please call—will pay anything! I went back the next day and met the owner and she told me the fireplace was not for sale; it was made by a German company called Buschbeck, and

**The 18th-century *tournebroche* in Dowd's fireplace uses weights and pulleys to keep Cornish hens turning.**



the French distributor had skipped town. I spent the next three weeks trying to find the company, and finally reached the American distributor. I love these fireplaces because they're really sturdy—they're made of concrete, quartz and steel. They come in both classic and modern-looking versions; I sell two of the styles and own the traditional "Scottsdale."

**What other antique things do you have in your farmhouse?** I have a lot of salvaged materials on my farm—I'm a big believer in recycling. When we decided to build a house from scratch, we started collecting materials. We built the fence from recycled telephone poles—eight miles of them. All the bricks on my floors came from the town square in Commerce, Texas, and other stuff came from the Dallas Athletic Club and the Adolphus hotel in Dallas. When the hotel renovated in 1980, we picked up things like doors, sinks and solid-brass railings. People look at our house and think it looks European because it has so many old things in it.

**What do you have planned for the future?** I'm going to open a restaurant next year in Dallas with Cherif Brahmî, a French chef I've known for 25 years, and Mark Maguire [a restaurateur]. It will be called Rising No. 1 and all we'll serve will be savory and sweet soufflés. What's critical about a soufflé is time—nobody wants to wait 45 minutes for a soufflé. So we found these amazing ovens that cook perfect soufflés in less than 10 minutes. And the restaurant—this sounds ridiculous—will offer only one type of utensil: a spoon. Something antique and French, in a heavy silver. ●

*Antique Harvest, 214-351-1425 or antiqueharvest.com.*

PHOTOGRAPH: SCOTT JENKE