



Objects of their affection

A couple finds the grass is greener, and so are its ornaments

Almost 12 years ago Beau and Nancy Kimball packed up all their belongings and checked out of the city for the country life on an 1830s farmstead in bucolic Woodstock. 🌱 They've never looked back. 🌱 Just one year later, son Addy arrived. And about four years later their dream business was born. 🌱 The old barn, spruced-up farmhouse and now landscaped grounds on 10 acres include 30 crabapple trees and a potager set in between. It is the charming headquarters for Kimball & Bean (Nancy's maiden name), a unique shop that specializes in period and antique architectural and garden elements including gates, planters, urns and fountains. There also are fireplace mantels, lighting, some furniture and assorted accessories. 🌱 But the two have become preeminent dealers in vintage garden pieces, showing off their wares in April at the Chicago Botanic Antiques & Garden show, then the next week at the prestigious New York Botanical Garden antiques show.

BY ELAINE MARKOUTSAS TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY BILL HOGAN



With watering can in hand, Beau heads toward the couple's potager, where plantings of vegetables, herbs and flowers coexist amidst containers, new and antique. Opposite: The Kramer Brothers urn (circa 1860s) is planted with verbena and petunias.

"We love collecting.
We find it, we touch it, then we let it go."

—BEAU KIMBALL



Nancy and Beau create armillary spheres, like the one here, from old architectural pieces they assemble into a new shape. The spheres originally were designed to determine the passage of the planets and stars in the sky in a particular location.

The move wasn't a huge adjustment because both grew up in the country. Beau's family actually relocated from Hinsdale to Woodstock when he was a boy so that his mother could have horses. Nancy grew up in Bloomington, in the central part of the state. Both moms dabbled in antiques.

Before refurbishing, it "was a wreck of a farm," says Beau. "There were beautiful old European larches in the circular drive, but junk cars, trash everywhere. The grass was chin-high. There were still tenants [and] a ring of about 30 keys."

But the Kimbells were not at all intimidated by a lot of elbow grease and DIY. They are, after all, creative and resourceful.

Their business was a logical segue. Beau started working at Salvage One in 1989 and, by the time he left, was a managing partner. Nancy worked for Polo Ralph Lauren corporate, then was director of consignments for auctioneer Leslie Hindman.

When Beau went on buying trips to Europe, he'd take Nancy. "She was more useful than some of the people I worked with and I saved on the hotel room," he joked. "We'd work hard, then spend our time looking..."

It was the European gardens they adored. Their itineraries always included country houses and famous gardens. They learned and observed.

When it came to starting their business, they scoured the countryside, putting their efforts into finds here in the U.S. "Nobody in the Midwest does what we do," says Beau. And they do the research, trying to learn about the provenance of every piece they sell, whether it's terra cotta or iron, by poring through antiques catalogs.

"Every city in America had foundries," says Beau. "But at the turn of the 19th Century, the foundries closed. We copied from Europe. These were not cheap knockoffs. They were made as well or better."

Consequently, many of their prime finds are made of antique iron that is hand-forged, pinned together as opposed to welded, has interesting casting work or unusual finials. And the prices, from \$400 to \$15,000, reflect that.

As dealers, they have an unconventional sales pitch. "We always talk people out of more," says Beau, whose advice is to buy one good thing rather than 10 mediocre.

Unlike many antiques dealers who begin as collectors, they are not "prisoners of our stuff."

"We love the act of collecting, talking with people during auctions. We find it, we touch it and then we let it go."

"It used to drive my grandmother crazy," says Nancy. "Every time she came over, the house was completely different."

That had a familiar ring to Beau. "We'd come home and find all our clothes on the floor because Mom had sold the dresser." □

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RESOURCES All antiques (and reproduction furniture on patio) through Kimball & Bean, 3606 S. Country Club Rd., Woodstock, Ill. (kimballandbean.com)



Clockwise from top: Iron urns create sculptural interest in the garden; Beau loves the iron fragments hung on the white barn siding; a fanciful plaster mirror in chinoiserie style (probably English, circa 1840s) is one of Nancy's favorites; Russian sage is a vibrant foreground for a 6-foot-tall sandstone carving; Nancy sets a table for al fresco dining under the shade of an umbrella.

