



## [Home Decor: Collecting the Odd Home](#) [Decor: Collecting the Odd](#)

By [Cynthia Pelayo](#) on [May 31, 2011](#)

Feature photos by [Pandora's Parlor](#)

I have green streaks in my hair, and no I am not a teenager. So, sometimes when people meet me and see the green streaks, the black nail polish, and the pale skin I can already detect a hint of judgment. They're probably thinking, 'Oh, that poor dear, she probably never grew out of that goth phase and now what can she do?' Well, let them think what they want. I hold a respectable title for a global marketing research firm, as well as two master's degrees.

I don't fall into some hyper-stylized, campy, or theatrical sub-genre of goth. I am an artist, a mystery/horror writer more specifically. The style I tend to enjoy is more that of literary, Gothic horror. The Gothic novel was born in 1764 with Horace Walpole's [The Castle of Otranto](#). Elements within Walpole's developed eventually into what is modernly considered as horror. So, think Edgar Allan Poe, or HP Lovecraft, and then think about ghosts, folklore, vampires, nightmares, curses, churches and castles and well...those are the literary elements, and styles I am fond of.



When my husband and I started searching for a home, I was excited because I would soon have my own private office. Finally, a quiet place to write! Therefore, I needed to start collecting items for which to decorate my writing room. The first piece I wanted to acquire was a raven, and no, not a living raven, a taxidermied raven. I know what you must be thinking ‘How dare you want to even purchase a taxidermied animal? Are you disturbed?!’

Recently I spoke with Skye Rust. She and her husband Adam, are owners of [Woolly Mammoth Antiques, Oddities & Resale](#) in Chicago. Rust, who is also an educator, agrees that sometimes people may think collecting taxidermy is odd. At her shop, where they sell taxidermy, oddities, and even medical antiques, people do stop in her store not knowing exactly what they sell. Often, her customers are baffled by the store’s selection. Yet, she looks to these pieces for their educational value. “I love the animals that come in. I learn from them,” she said.



I have always looked at taxidermy like this: it is an art form. I am a vegan and do not condone hunting an animal for the sole purpose of using it for decoration. However, I do acknowledge that there are people, in various parts of the world, that have been decorating their homes with hunted animals for years. I personally take a greater interest in older taxidermy, the kinds of specimens that were used more for learning than decorating.

After an exhaustive search, I eventually ordered my taxidermied crow, not raven (as ravens I found were much more expensive). I named him Eddie. My husband and I finally purchased our 1902 Victorian frame house and I was ready to move Eddie into his new space.

The ideas for my writing room's décor quickly began to swirl in my head. I could picture antique typewriters, porcelain creepy dolls, black and white portraits, and maybe medical antiques such as old potion bottles, or maybe (if my husband let me) a medical skeleton. When I approached him about the medical skeleton his mouth dropped. "This horror writing thing is serious, huh?" He asked. I told him it wasn't just being a horror writer that drew me to these objects, it was their history. It was just fascinating to picture into a world in which these items existed.

Diane Armitage loves collecting vintage and antiques. She has a stall, Pandora's Parlor, in the [Old Barn Antique Mall](#) in downtown San Juan, Capistrano in California. Armitage says that everything she buys for her collection to sell are items that she too would want to own.

Whether those items are taxidermied cats, antique ventriloquist's dolls, or cemetery sculpture, there are people who are interested and there is a growing demand for such items. "I found that the competition is getting stiffer," she said. When I asked why she thinks demand has picked up Armitage said acceptance has grown, especially among couples. A story that Rust told me echoes her sentiment. Rust said that when she and her husband first met she knew that they were meant to be as they both came from antiquing families, and because each had a pair of false teeth in their personal collection.

Collector television shows have probably helped drive interest. Discovery Channel's [Oddities](#) is a reality program that follows the day to day collecting, selling, and customer service involved at [Obscura Antiques and Oddities](#). They have had customers in search of anything from an embalming table, to a straight-jacket, and even an electric chair. The show has quickly become my favorite.

In talking to Armitage, I admit I was quite jealous of her wonderfully magical collection. I probably spent way too much time on her website searching through objects wondering what would fit best in my room. We talked about our similar tastes and we both agreed that the reason why collecting of what some deem macabre has increased because people are ultimately in search of mystery in their lives. I feel as we have become more and more advanced as a society we have slowly dismissed the power that earlier populations imbued in objects. Something about how valued even a medicine bottle, how delicate even the label on the front was designed, made it feel like something magical. Even with my search for a medical skeleton, I have always been so fascinated with the health-care industry and how what we know was derived through slow and painful research, through people who donated their bodies and through trial and (often) error.

Suzette Field works for [The Last Tuesday Society](#), and they have a curiosity shop stocked with stone skull sculptures, mummified rats, and religious antiques. She believes people have always been interested in such items. "Well I think curiosities have always attracted the interest of the public at a steady rate. For example, PT Barnum and Mr. Ripley have consistently managed to pull large crowds for over a century on this basis. Although, I do believe that a recent trend for collecting taxidermy has emerged. I believe this to be an extension of interest in the retro market...without the guilt attached basis," she said.

Over the past few months, I had been quite busy with repairing the old house and finishing my last semester of graduate school that I had not had much time to decorate my writing space. Then, one day a package arrived from London. My husband told me to open it in my room. As I tossed the packing peanuts out of the box I spotted a black feather. I dug my hands in and pulled out another taxidermied crow. I turned to give my husband a huge hug when he practically fell backwards out of my room.

"I just got used to Eddie. I need some time to get used to this one." "Right, I said." Right then I named him Roderick.