

A full-page photograph of William Laman, a man with short grey hair, wearing a blue cable-knit sweater and blue jeans, standing with his arms crossed in a shop. In the background, there is a large window, a wicker chair, and a display of gift boxes. In the foreground, a large dark vase holds dried floral arrangements.

William Laman with the most recent offerings of some 50 annual sourcing treks to England, France, Italy, and Belgium.

William Laman:

The story behind one of the world's most beautiful shops



IN

2023 AND AGAIN IN 2024, INTERIOR DESIGN magazine *Veranda* crowned just 24 (27 in 2024) retail emporiums across the globe, “The World’s Most Beautiful Shops.” From Paris to Palm Beach, Greece to Jaipur, places and spaces chockablock with ceramics, fabrics, even several fine London antique dealers were included. One notably fine and cozy pick, tucked inside a 1,750-square-foot board-and-batten cottage in Montecito’s Upper Village, was Santa Barbara’s very own William Laman, Furniture Garden Antique, opened in 1995.

There’s plenty to be discovered amidst a treasure trove. You’ll find: Contemporary artwork, such as an abstract sculpture displayed with a Louis XIV mirror. Rows of “blue and white” Delft china, a Laman favorite. Chinese porcelain and even 19th century Spanish ceramic pieces. A mahogany server from the British West Indies made of one

piece of mahogany. A versatile Scandinavian mechanical table that goes up and down. Organic birch sculpture by Paul Shick.

It goes on and on. From garden items and hand-fluted glassware for the bar down to tissue covers for the bathroom vanity and blooming paperwhites, all add to the eclectic mix.

William Laman, owner of his namesake boutique in Montecito’s Upper Village, almost took a completely different life path. The 66-year-old grew up in Elmwood Park, a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. Laman majored in economics at Western Illinois University and Illinois State University. Thanks to meeting legendary interior designer Bruce Gregg some 40 years ago, he was saved from a much less interesting (at least to him) life of finance. Thinking he would go into banking, Laman discovered that it “just was not for me.” After college, Laman returned to Chicago before moving to Santa Barbara to open his retail space — with Gregg. International buying trips and hobnobbing with clients, some world-famous, have filled Laman’s dance card.

Laman’s exposure to Gregg’s elegant, timeless world of design (his projects have appeared in *Architectural Digest* more than three dozen times) helped the shopkeeper develop a love of antiques and home furnishings and how they could be incorporated into indoor and outdoor living spaces. The dynamic duo shopped in Europe this past fall, the most recent of some 50 annual sourcing treks to England, France, Italy, and Belgium.

“I really like design that’s classic and not trendy,” Laman said. “Good design never goes out of style and is timeless. I also like a mix of styles and periods. A mix gives the look ‘personality.’ When Bruce and I go on a buying

William’s Favorite Things!

FAVORITE ITEM IN YOUR STORE: A British colonial mahogany server, circa 1820.

FAVORITE STORE (LOCALLY) BESIDES YOURS: Eider Studio, Upper Village.

FAVORITE PLACE TO GRAB LUNCH OR DINNER: Lunch at Montecito Coffee Shop, dinner at The Stonehouse at San Ysidro Ranch.

FAVORITE PLACE TO SHOP (INTERNATIONALLY/TRAVEL): South of France

FAVORITE MUSIC: Disco!

LAST BOOK READ/WHAT’S ON NIGHTSTAND: “All the Light We Cannot See” by Anthony Doerr.

trip, we purchase with the intent to resell. However, we only buy what we like and hope that other people relate to our choices. Still, it’s a gamble!”

Being in business for more than a quarter of a century in the same spot has given Laman a unique perspective on changes in the neighborhood where he and Gregg work and live.

“Montecito has a storied history,” he said. “I think of John and Jacqueline Kennedy at the San Ysidro Ranch. I think of the titans of industry and magnates like the McCormicks from Chicago, who lived here. Montecito does seem different post-COVID. Some people are threatened by change, but I like the diversity and the opportunities that come with it. However, I do not want Montecito to lose the special charm that exists here. Sometimes, status quo can be a good thing. It’s a privilege to live here and be part of this great community.”

Laman concluded with his appreciation for our area’s physical beauty: “The terrain is so incredible. Between the mountain and ocean views, the Mediterranean climate, the laid-back lifestyle, who wouldn’t consider it a dream to live here?”

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