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Old, Moss-Covered And in Demand

SINCE JANUARY, Maura Bulkeley has been looking for chipped stone, greenish-gray copper mirrors and a moss-covered marble bowl. She isn't a junk collector—she's trying to find the perfect pieces of antique garden furniture for inside her Manhattan apartment.

"The mossier, the better," says Mrs. Bulkeley, who paid \$6,900 at Doyle Galleries, a New York auction house, last month for a couple of weathered garden statues with missing parts. Now the 6-foot-tall statues decorate the apartment's entryway.

Homeowners these days are tripping over each other at antique shows and stores to buy up the oldest urns, fountains and cast-iron benches they can find, for both the garden and indoors. "Follow the lichen," says John Carpenter, who sells garden antiques in Boston, adding that he has actually heard customers shriek in delight at the sight of fungus. The trend even spurred a morbid crime spree in New Orleans, where ornaments were being stolen from the city's cemeteries and sold as antique garden decorations. (The city's now implementing new laws to deter such thefts.)

This spring, Marla Sassoon searched for weeks to find the perfect wrought-iron planters for the entrance to the garden at her new home in Bedford, N.Y. She ended up paying \$800 for a pair with a distressed look and worn paint. "If I had bought something new I would have had to leave them out to get that look," she says.

Fred and Joyce Lukas, who are furnishing their new home in Santa Barbara, Calif., say they've collected

enough traditional antiques over the years to fill the six-bedroom house. Now they're focusing on outdoor antiques: Mr. Lukas, chairman of Trident Data Systems of Los Angeles, paid \$3,450 for a set of four 24-inch-tall cast-stone figures representing the four seasons and \$920 for a painted cast-aluminum garden bench with berry-branches on the back.

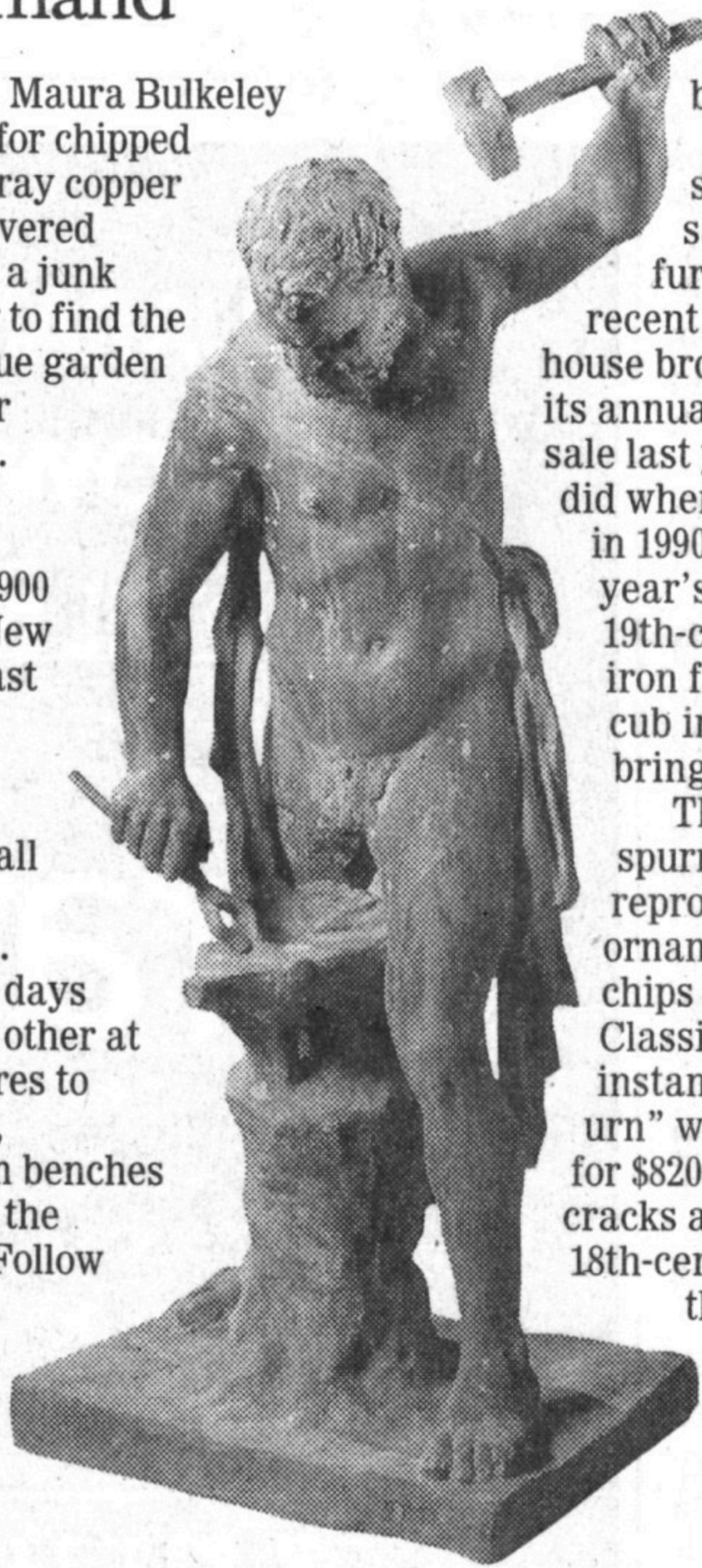
Elaine Whitmeier, a specialist at Sotheby's, says interest in garden furnishings has exploded in recent years. The auction house brought in \$1.2 million at its annual garden-furnishings sale last year, twice as much as it did when the sale was first held in 1990. On the block at this year's auction Wednesday: a 19th-century 8-foot-long cast-iron figure of a tiger with a cub in its mouth, expected to bring in at least \$25,000.

The demand has also spurred a market for reproductions of the antique ornaments, complete with chips and stains. Archiped Classics in Dallas, for instance, sells a "Versailles urn" with "an Old World finish" for \$820. It was molded—dents, cracks and all—from an original 18th-century French marble urn that sold as part of a pair for \$12,000.

Many collectors can't bear to leave the antique garden artifacts outdoors. "I wanted my apartment to look like the country," says Mrs. Bulkeley, who recently

moved to New York from London with her husband, Jonathan, chief executive of barnesandnoble.com.

Along with the garden statues in the entrance, an old ivy-covered urn and a copper mirror that has turned green with age stand in the foyer. "I've had one or two people come in and say, 'Well, you are going to clean it, aren't you?'" says Mrs. Bulkeley. But while the rustic look is what she's looking for, Mrs. Bulkeley has made some concessions to visitors: She added a painted wooden bench instead of making her guests sit on a rusty cast-iron garden antique.



Garden statue that sold for \$1,265 at Doyle auction.

—Rebecca Lowell