



"The good thing about our beds is that they look good dressed and undressed," Pandora says of the approach she employs in making a bed with several light layers of covers and an assortment of pillows sized for a person's particular height and weight.

# Necessary Luxuries

*Pandora de Balthazar has weathered many storms in her quest to preserve gorgeous antique textiles and priceless old linens for use in generations to come.*



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Like many of her neighbors, Pandora de Balthazar still faces the challenges of rebuilding nearly a year after Hurricane Ivan washed her home into the Gulf of Mexico and damaged the historic building that houses her Pensacola, Florida, showroom. But she remains surprisingly undaunted, for it was a different hurricane, and a few personal storms, that revealed a way to make her passion her work.

Pandora spent thirty years as a successful financial planner until 1995 when Hurricane Opal struck the Florida panhandle. Her business was devastated. "Hurricane Opal changed my work and pushed my financial planning business right into the sand," she recalls. "That was an awakening. It created a new and adventuresome life for me."

She left the financial world behind, turning instead to creating a business from the fine antique linens she had collected for decades. "I grew up in Dalton, Georgia, a textile town," she explains. "All my life

"We live in a disposable society," laments Pandora, who uses only china, crystal, and silver set upon tables dressed with her favorite vintage linens for even the most casual gathering.



Pandora encourages her clients to put old linens to daily use in their homes as she does in her own. A collector for many years, she tries to save works that will never be seen again. "I don't buy a piece to sell it," she explains. "I buy it to save it."



"I've loved beautiful linens, textiles, and fabrics." During her five years of living in Budapest, Hungary, and five more spent commuting there from the United States, Pandora made exquisite additions to her collection. "I had the wonderful opportunity to travel, collect, and live with 200-year-old textiles," she says.

Yet another storm created more turbulence in Pandora's life, but this one was of a more personal nature: she was forced to undergo neurosurgery. Afterwards, she sought bedding that would provide the comfort and support she required during her recuperation. When her search proved fruitless, she had a line of pillows and bedding developed especially for her and soon began marketing them as the Decadence Down European Sleep System. "Only then did I realize that my prize collection of antique textiles, and especially the trousseau linens for the bed, could come alive in a practical and usable way. They are so fine, luxurious, and wonderful that most people keep them in drawers, but we're changing that," she says. "We're teaching others that personal luxury is an absolute necessity. That it's all right, and perhaps necessary, to nap, to rest, to recuperate in pure, comforting luxury."

Pandora's store, Antique European Linens, houses an astounding inventory of over three million pieces of textiles and linens. Some are over 200 years old; all are exquisite. And while many are of museum quality, Pandora insists that they are better used—and enjoyed—on a daily basis in more mundane surroundings. "You can live with old textiles," she declares. She and her staff work closely with their clients in choosing the perfect combination of linens to suit personality, purpose, and budget. "I try to match the textile to the right home," Pandora explains, "to find the right placement."

Another of Pandora's talents is her ability to recognize the versatility of a particular linen. "It doesn't have to be used as it originally was," she says. "A table cover doesn't have to be a table cover. It can be a window treatment. I want to expose people to thinking outside the box." Sometimes the textile piece can be easily adapted to a new use; other times it must be cut and reconfigured for its new purpose. A recent project, for example, used pieces of sheeting, some



“Everything we have on our bed is useful and comfortable,” Pandora says of her European Sleep System that includes three down pillows, a down mattress pad, and three sheets of different textures. “We only use the down of a goose raised for paté,” she says, describing the superior quality of the goods.

hand towels, and a tablecloth to create slipcovers for dining room chairs. “I take things apart and put them back together to make something different. I consider myself a recycler,” Pandora says with a smile.

Twice-a-month special store events, like a recent French flea market complete with wine, cheese, and a strolling accordian player, keep Pandora in close touch with her clientele and build the business that has grown by word-of-mouth. Twice a year she sets up shop beneath a sixty-foot tent at the Round Top antique show in Texas; at other times, she travels via motor home to markets around the country. Her goal is to teach others how to relax properly, comfortably, and in high style. 🌸

