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COLLECTOR

by **LUCY STRATTON** / photography **LANCE NICOLL**

NEW ORLEANS' CAST OF CHARACTERS COMES WITH BAGGAGE, LITERALLY



There's gloom and glamour to be found on the bayou, especially in a certain Louisiana plantation home. When not in New York, acclaimed artist Hunt Slonem moonlights as an avid collector of beautiful neo-Gothic perfume bottles. Each about a foot in height, the bottles are displayed together on a table, where their luminescent colors overlap and their stoppers create a cityscape of spires and obelisks: the lingering traces of a long-dead architectural movement. "I've been attracted to the Gothic shape," Slonem says. "It's reminiscent of the great cathedrals, like Cologne."

Inspired by medieval buildings that exuded ornamental "gloomth," the Gothic Revival period of the late 18th and early 19th centuries saw a surge in decorative patterns, lancet windows, and finial ornaments. These architectural styles seeped into the designs of everyday objects such as mirrors, furniture, and of course, perfume bottles. With tabernacles and arches decorating their metal bases and octagonal stoppers, Slonem's small glass and porcelain artifacts echo larger-than-life Gothic cathedrals.

While elaborate scent bottles were near-ubiquitous in the 19th century, they have all but vanished from today's antique world. Slonem spied each of his treasures at an auction, estate sale, or in another collection; every bottle housed at the Lakeside Plantation came into his possession by pure chance.

"When a perfume bottle turns up, it's like the Red Sea parting," Slonem says of his serendipitous collecting technique. "There's no choice! It can be years and years between finding them."

Since starting his collection 15 years ago, Slonem has amassed between 40 and 50 perfume bottles. Though he's made no additions for the past five years, the hunt is never over. The artist remains on the constant lookout for old Paris porcelain, Palais Royal bottles, and other unique finds.