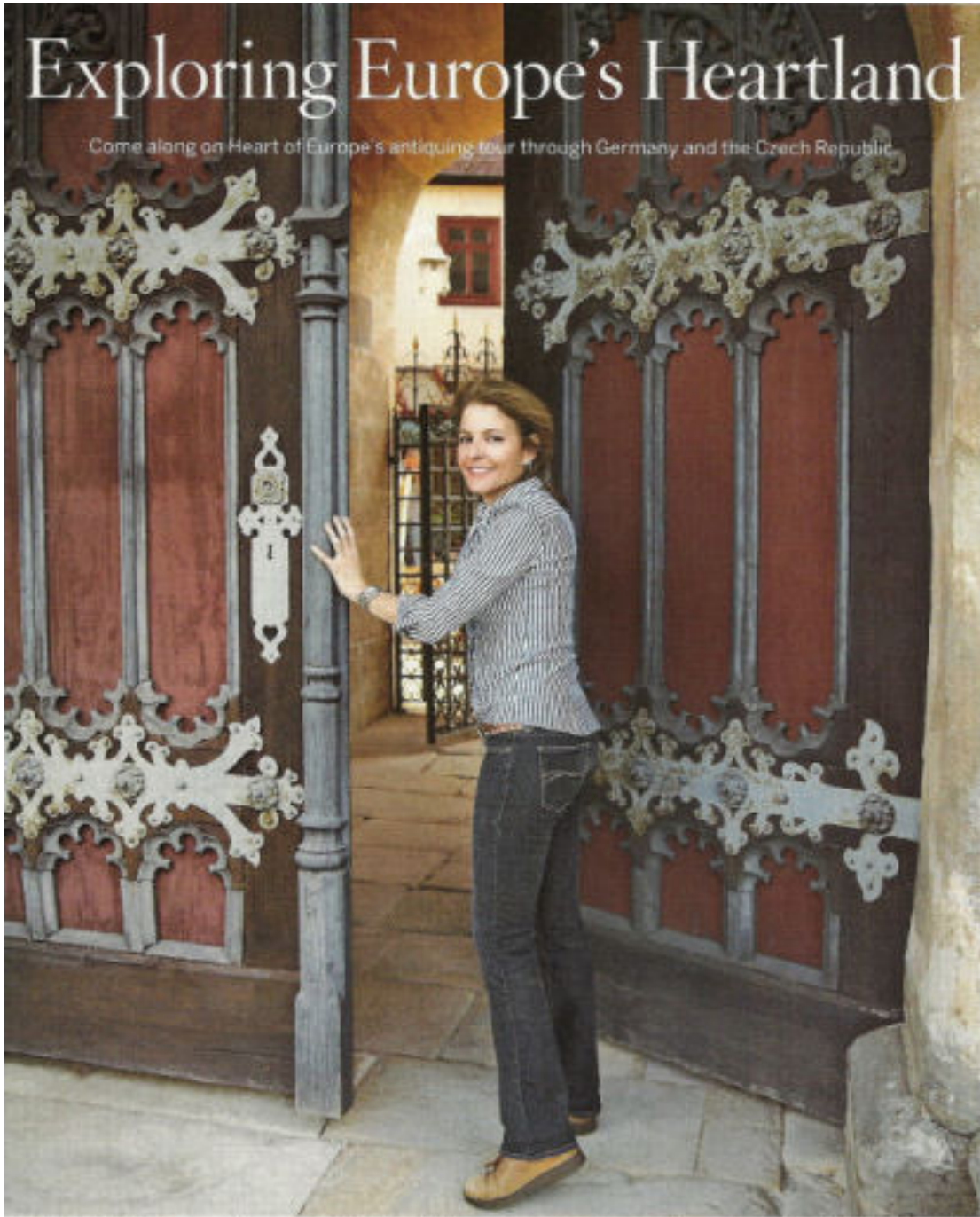


# Exploring Europe's Heartland

Come along on Heart of Europe's antiquing tour through Germany and the Czech Republic



The thrill of the hunt keeps antiquers motivated on Heart of Europe's whirlwind trips to antiques shops and markets along the back roads of Eastern Europe. Here, Senior Editor Monica Michael Willis enters Germany's Hohenstein Castle, which now operates as a hotel.



*“Our antiquing trips* are more like safaris than tours,” says Tom Conrad, the owner of Philadelphia-based Heart of Europe Tours. Several times a year, Tom offers guided shopping forays to Europe for adventurous antiquers who prefer to explore the roads less traveled. Recently, *Country Living* joined his trip to Germany and the Czech Republic. We started in Frankfurt, traveled the back roads to Prague, then wended our way through Belgium and Germany. We explored country villages, outdoor markets, and antiques shops, but we also visited remote private castles, crumbling Stalinist-era factories, hard-to-find warehouses, and old textile mills—most bursting with Eastern European inventory that hadn’t been available to American buyers since before the cold war. When we weren’t shopping, we overnighted at castles and monasteries, dined on savory local fare, and reveled in the ambience and culture of history-rich cities, such as Nürnberg and Prague.

IN  
PRAGUE,

fans of Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and Modernist furniture and accessories will have a field day. Prague was a center of activity for designers and architects of the respective movements, and the city’s antiques stock reflects that.

Germany



FRANKFURT

Czech Republic



NÜRNBERG



BUŠTĚHRAD



"BUTTON CAPITAL"

JABLONEC



CHARLES BRIDGE

PRAGUE

### WHAT TO EXPECT

Our action-packed 11-day Heart of Europe trip included dozens of stops along the country roads and cities that formed the loop we traveled from Frankfurt to Prague and back. A comfortable minibus served as transportation for our group, which was made up of guests from California, New York, Pennsylvania, and Canada. We visited scores of under-the-radar shops, markets, and private dealers, many of whom have had minimal contact with Americans. Because of this, everyone netted out-of-the-ordinary finds at good enough prices to more than offset the dollar's dismal exchange rate.



**ORNAMENTS** First made in the 19th century by glassblowers in the German village of Lauscha, glass Christmas ornaments became the rage in America when F.W. Woolworth first exported them in the 1880s. We saw lovely examples, such as these Lauscha Santas, on our trip.

**TEXTILES** Eastern Europe has a vibrant tradition of weaving, lace-making, embroidery, and home-based textile arts. One woman scored two trunks of fabulous estate linens during our visit to a private collector. Prices for bed linens, samplers, shams, and homespuns were very good.



1 In Germany's Franconian country side, we rummaged through antiques at Wildenroth, a private castle not ordinarily open to the public. 2 Directoire style chairs and a settee at Heck Antiques Furniture Center in Germany. 3 The outdoor market at Buštěhrad in the Czech Republic. 4 One of many half-timbered buildings in Mittenberg, a Bavarian town east of Frankfurt. 5 A 1930s child's tea set. 6 Larger items were tagged to facilitate shipment later.





**ephemera** Antique paper goods have a much different feel and graphic sensibility than similar period items in America. These colorful playing cards, which were likely made in the late 19th century by the Vienna company Ferdinand Platnik & Sons, cost \$4 in Horoměřice in the Czech Republic.



**trinkets** Made throughout Central Europe for local watchmakers, these enameled watch faces (about \$1 each) were uncovered in a tiny Jablonec shop, which brimmed with inexpensive vintage "dead stock," such as glass buttons and beads, rhinestone jewels, rosaries, and chandelier crystals.



**thonet** German furnituremaker Michael Thonet pioneered the techniques required to create the bentwood chair, now ubiquitous in cafés worldwide. We saw many examples of the company's sought-after work. This intact label was on the underside of a smart-looking chair in Prague.

ILLUSTRATION BY JON CANNELL/CLAIRA ROGERS STUDIO



## ON THE ANTIQUES TRAIL IN EUROPE TOUR INFO & MORE

**details** "Since we're antiquers ourselves, we share our clients' interests and passion," says Heart of Europe owner Tom Conrad. "Our trips are customized adventures to off-the-beaten-path venues that guests probably wouldn't find themselves." This December, Heart of Europe visits Germany's Christmas Markets. In 2008, seven trips are planned, including Germany-Czech Republic (Feb.), Italy (Feb.), Belgium (April), and France (Aug.).

**price** Fees start at \$2,900 and depend on length of trip and locale. Our trip cost \$3,695, which included airport transfers, 11-nights accommodations, minibus transport, welcome dinner, and shipment of purchases from Europe to America via container. Your guide and driver will also serve as translators, negotiate prices, schlep

purchases, and arrange inter-Europe transport of large pieces to the container.

**who goes?** Heart of Europe's trips attract dealers, designers, and avid antiquers who thrive on finding great new sources and shopping from dawn to dusk. If you crave a lot of downtime, look elsewhere.

**shipping** As an added value, Heart of Europe handles shipping details (excluding France), such as preparing shipping manifests and clearing customs in Europe and Philadelphia. Once purchases are State-side, it's the shoppers' responsibility to pick up their goods from Philadelphia.

**to learn more** For 2008 trip prices and schedules, call (215) 991-9892 or visit [heartofeuropetours.com](http://heartofeuropetours.com). To view a slideshow from the trip, narrated by our guide, Tom Conrad, visit [countrvllivn.com/europe](http://countrvllivn.com/europe).



TOP: Smaller purchases were stored in the trailer. ABOVE: Guide Tom Conrad with a Communist-era sign he bought in the former East Germany.



7 The shopkeepers at Antik Centrum in Kothbela, Czech Republic.  
 8 A hand-stenciled (Spritzdekor) enamel pail. 9 We saw teddy bears, including ones by venerable German maker Hermann, at Trampel markt in Nürnberg as well as Buttšbrad, home of the Czech Republic's largest outdoor antiques market. 10 A 1930s Modernist chrome tube chair at Prague's Holesovické Market. 11 Antique violins at Spomysl Furniture in Spomyšl, a pretty village in the Czech Republic's Bohemian Highlands. 12 Vintage treasures picked up for a song near Jablonec, the cradle of Bohemian glass as well as the Button Capital of the Czech Republic. 13 Klapka Buttons, a wonderland of glass buttons and beads. 14 Antik Centrum sells cuckoo clocks, antlers, and farmhouse furniture. 15 An old cupboard with new paint at Antik Decadenza in Haroměřice. 16 Nürnberg's old town market.

