



MERRY KITSCHMAS

Christmas wreaths, created by York's Liatra Sage, are kaleidoscopes of kitsch.

BY KAREN HENDRICKS



Liatra Sage has found her niche with kitsch.

"Some people would describe kitsch as borderline gaudy or tacky, but it's really fun to me," said Sage, of York.

Kitsch was king in the '50s, '60s and '70s—decades of yesteryear that are now treasure troves of mid-century modern and vintage baubles.

"Marketing was more colorful then," Sage said. "Now, things are not as colorful, not as fun. I'm not sure what the strategy is behind that, so a lot of people gravitate toward kitschiness because it's what they grew up with."

And if there's one time of year to be kitschy, it's Christmas. Just as Perry Como croons, "There's no place like home for the holidays" on now-vintage records, it's brightly colored, kitschy Christmas treasures that evoke the cheer and warmth of Christmases past, celebrated in friends' and families' homes.

FESTIVE FLAIR

Sage enjoys thrifting and sifting through old holiday décor at thrift stores, flea markets and church rummage sales throughout the year. With a keen eye for kitsch, she gleans a sparkling stash of décor. There are feisty Santas, doe-eyed reindeer, ornaments gleaming with satin, sequins, glitter and glitz, plus aluminum tree reflectors glinting silvery, minty aqua and frosty pink.

There are even vintage kitschy elves.

"Isn't that funny?" Sage asked, wondering if those long-legged, flexible figures—with winking, grinning expressions—were the granddaddies of today's popular, mischievous elves on the shelves.

But the biggest key to Christmas kitsch? Putz houses. They're the glitter-encrusted cardboard houses—complete with colorful magenta, gold or turquoise cellophane windows—that once sat under 1950s-era Christmas trees, creating a magical little village under its boughs. Today, smaller putz houses are valued at \$10 to \$20 apiece, with larger, embellished versions fetching as much as \$50.

Sage gives them new homes, nestled within crafty and colorful holiday wreaths that shine and sparkle—because everything old is new again.

"Putz houses are often the focal points," said Sage, describing her creative process. "I put flocked trees on either side, then build from there. It's pretty organic, not according to design or plan."

The wreaths often sell organically too—as soon as Sage posts them on social media or hangs them in her

business booth, within a York barn housing antique and vintage treasures. Online, her Instagram accounts feature "all things vintage, kitsch and curious" and "fresh vintage picks" to a combined 22,000 fans. In person, her wreaths of kitsch do a brisk business at American Daydream Antiques & Miscellanea.

Like the glittering snowflakes they often contain, no two wreaths are alike. Each one's eclectic collection of kitsch is anything but cookie-cutter replicable. Most are priced in the \$150 to \$200 range—or higher, depending on its unique vintage value and festive flair.

VINTAGE, IN VOGUE

You might think Sage's obsession and livelihood—based on all things vintage—is surprising, considering her young age of 29. But she's far from alone. Vintage is in vogue.

"You wouldn't think there would be so many younger people into vintage, but they are," Sage said. "There's a big following."

If Sage's appreciation for all things vintage makes her an old soul, it has also driven her sole source of income for the past three years. That's when Sage describes her hobby turning "hard core" amid the realization that she could make a living from thrifting and repurposing.

"It's probably my grandma's fault," said Sage with a laugh. "I grew up going to flea markets and yard sales with my grandma in my hometown area of Dillsburg. A lot of people say it skips a generation—and my mom wasn't that into vintage—but I've always been drawn to it, the style of it. I love vintage Halloween too."

So, what does Sage's grandma think about her kitschy success?

"She discouraged me from going into business at first—she warned me that it could become a money pit. But now, she's proud of me," Sage said. "My friends and family are always calling with tips about where to find vintage things."

Year-round, her booth at American Daydream Antiques & Miscellanea showcases kitchen items with—no surprise—oodles of kitsch. There are Formica tables with matching chairs, aqua kitchen canisters, novelty salt and pepper shakers (including classic Thanksgiving pilgrims), and plenty of Pyrex cookware—a treasure trove for anyone dreaming of a retro kitchen. A punch of panache is served up, thanks to rotating seasonal décor accents, including Sage's wintry wreaths.

Salvaging, it turns out, provides a lot of satisfaction.

"It's not reselling—it's creating—because with the wreaths, it's also about being crafty and artsy," Sage said. "I like being able to thrift because so much gets thrown away, and it's great to bring new life to it."

Sometimes, it's the little things that spark the biggest joys of the holiday season.

"For most people, seeing these wreaths evokes a sense of nostalgia, or their childhood, something along those sentiments," Sage said. "I know some people might view them as tacky or over-the-top, but I just love the idea of kitschy maximalism." **B**

For more information, check out Liatra Sage's Instagram accounts: @thriftkitschwitch is her personal account, and @roadsidevintageta showcases vintage treasures available at her booth at American Daydream Antiques & Miscellanea, 3790 E. Market St., York.

Photos courtesy Liatra Sage