



## Treasures in the Garbage

**When I lived in the States, I was a garage sale freak, and almost every weekend I'd be prowling around in other people's old junk.**

*Rick Gush*

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Photo by Rick Gush When I lived in the States, I was a garage sale freak, and almost every weekend I'd be prowling around in other people's old junk. Here in Italy I've not even seen a single garage sale, but people do leave some pretty interesting stuff in the garbage.

I find a lot of bicycles abandoned next to the garbage bins. I've got a bunch of free used parts on my own mountain bike, like the fancy seat and the baskets, but I imagine some of the nicer bikes to be perhaps stolen, so I usually take them to the police station. After a year or so, if nobody claims the bicycles, then the city sends me a letter telling me the bicycle is now legally mine if I want it. So far I haven't re-claimed any, but I don't really need another bicycle.

It surprises me how many chairs people leave in the garbage zones. Lots of perfectly good chairs and a whole bunch of chairs that need just minor repairs. Many of the chairs are interesting styles, and some of them are reasonably spectacular.

Photo by Rick Gush I'm sitting on an office chair as I write this that was left in the garbage. One of the wheels had come out of the socket, but I just pushed it back into the leg and I've been using the chair for probably four years now. One of the pieces of art I have on exhibit around town uses an old chair I found in the garbage, and I have two other recycled chairs in my office. I've often thought of collecting all the good chairs and sending a shipping container filled with old chairs over to the U.S.

Italians aren't in general interested in recently used stuff. Bella Figura, or making a good impression, is awfully important here, even for the lower strata. Having your own new stuff is much preferred. There are some rare thrift-stores in Italy, but I'll bet there aren't more than ten in all of northern Italy.

My wife would seem like a perfect used-clothes wearer, but no, she's not interested in having anything used except antique furniture and old family jewellery. The "we could re-upholster that and use it in our own home" argument has never cut any ice with her.

My favorite things to find in the trash are the fiasci, or raffia-wrapped bottles. I have a fair collection, with everything from the big 15-gallon jugs to funky straw-wrapped bottles obviously home-made by some poor farmer.

I also collect odd bottles, like the Corsica-shaped bottle in the photograph. I've got a whole lot of this charming dust-covered stuff stashed around in the nooks of my office and I think that it would be perfect for decorating an Italian restaurant in the states.

If you ever see a shipping container of old Italian bottles being sold on eBay, it'll probably be me.

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