



Treasures from the past

Stuart Grannen rescues pieces of old buildings and sells them at Architectural Artifacts

By DEBORAH DONOVAN
Daily Herald Staff Writer

Great architecture — as we in the Chicago area know — makes our spirits soar. It whispers to us across the ages, moving us like all great art. And buildings are so permanent.

Until they've torn down. That's where Stuart Grannen comes in. Grannen, owner of Architectural Artifacts in Chicago, says he has been collecting and selling pieces of demolished buildings and other antiques for 31 years — since he was 10.

That means he possesses a treasure trove of souvenirs, knowledge and stories. To share some of these, Grannen is purchasing a larger building for the store and a new museum of Chicago architecture. He plans to display items that would not fit in the typical suburban living room, such as an 8-foot golden lady from the Granada Theater that stood at Sheridan and Devon and a marble fountain from a mansion owned by the McCormick family.

Grannen has already made a contribution to the museum world by giving pieces donated by his favorite architect — Louis Henri Sullivan — to an exhibit that runs through May 30 at City Museum in St. Louis.

The main business at Architectural Artifacts, 4223 N. Ravenswood Ave., is buying and selling vintage building fragments and furniture coveted for today's homes and gardens.

In recent years, Grannen has diversified with European artifacts as well as American. Furniture from both continents also abounds in a neat and easy-to-navigate shop. This, the pair of French art deco velvet chairs for \$1,750 sits under the sea of chandeliers — not far from an oak mantel for \$1,200 and a huge mahogany one costing 10 times that amount.

Any decorative item by Sullivan — known for his terra cotta and intricate metal ornamentation — is valuable in Grannen's world. The architect that Frank Lloyd Wright called "the master" designed several Chicago buildings, including the Auditorium Theater on Michigan Avenue and the Caron Pirie Scott store on State Street.

But the magic words for Sullivan fans



Stuart Grannen relaxes in a French art deco chair in his store, Architectural Artifacts in Chicago. Grannen loves antiques and old buildings, especially anything designed by the legendary Louis Sullivan. Daily Herald Photo/Mark Black

are Chicago Stock Exchange, built in 1893 and demolished in 1972. It is venerated for three reasons, in Grannen's opinion.

"The stock exchange building to many was Sullivan's premier building," he said. So renowned is its stenciling, stained glass, terra cotta and ironwork that its main room has been reconstructed in the Art Institute of Chicago.

Secondly, he said, "it was one of the first buildings that preservationists made a big effort to save. It took on a bit of mythic proportions."

And finally, Richard Nichols, legendary photographer, preservationist and collector of architectural artifacts, died when the building collapsed during demolition. If you want a decorative piece from this storied structure, Grannen has some available.

A stained glass window measuring about 2 feet square is priced at \$6,000. Grannen also proudly displays balusters or spindles from a stairway — delicate geometric designs in cast iron covered with copper overlay. The dealer has each mounted into a base like the piece of sculpture it is, and he would part with one for \$4,800.

If these are too expensive, Architectural Artifacts offers some battered chunks of terra cotta for \$600 each.

Grannen's stories start with how he got some of his stock exchange wonders, which also include a staircase and land-



Treasures include the \$250 cigar sign, a \$4,800 stairway baluster from Sullivan's famed Chicago Stock Exchange building and a golden lady that once graced the Granada Theater. Stuart Grannen would like to create a museum of Chicago architecture to display salvaged items.



This large terra-cotta medallion of a knight that once hung on the Sheridan Theater is for sale for \$1,700.

