



TINI:

NEWFANGLED VINTAGE

BY MICHAEL ANTHONY



TINI has come to L.A., and we're not talking about an overpriced Santa Monica Boulevard martini. We're talking about the latest in SoCal online and storefront shopping, a budget-conscious vintage furniture find on Fairfax Avenue. The store's philosophy is best summed up by its playful URL, *ThisIsNotIKEA.com*. The 2,200-square-foot mega-shop boasts "one-of-a-kind vintage design treasures at a price point and high level of style that would make most big box furniture retailers blush."

Brought to us by two consummate curators of vintage artifacts, co-owners Tom Whitman (one of L.A.'s busiest nightlife promoters) and the fabulous Alexis Hadjopoulos, TINI offers it all—everything from stunning mid-century Danish modern furniture to kitschy '80s Janet Jackson album posters. Says Whitman: "For the same amount of money as a piece of disposable furniture from a big box store, you can own a beautiful, unique piece of furniture. But buying vintage is also the ultimate green way to shop. You don't increase your carbon footprint through manufacturing. You are recycling, in the best sense of the word, because that beautiful '50s lamp doesn't end up in a landfill."

We sat down with co-owner Hadjopoulos to get the ins, outs and all abouts on TINI and the eclectic uniqueness it's bringing to L.A.

The biz is called TINI, which playfully stands for "This Is Not IKEA." We love that! What's the story behind the catchphrase?

I came up with it around five years ago. After talking to my cousin for hours about business, I was trying to explain to him that I wanted to show people that [TINI] was the opposite of mass-produced furniture, and how the 'unique' factor was so important to me. I asked him, "How do I tell them that this is not IKEA?" He said, "Just like that!"

Tom has long dominated L.A.'s gay entertainment world as a promoter—how did you two hook up as business partners?

Well, we dated. After coming with me to garage sales and flea markets, he thought it was fun and quickly realized that it was good business idea—[and] a year later we opened the brick and mortar version of TINI.

Dish! What's it like working with Tom?

[Laughs] You don't wanna ask me. We argue quite a bit—[and] it's a lot of fun to watch. We love each other, we just tend to disagree, and we're both so passionate about everything we do. He's extremely smart, focused and dedicated, and I really don't know too many people that work as hard as he does. I get tired just looking at his schedule. But he's great!

The collection is colored with vintage artifacts. Why are you drawn to these, and tell us more about the furniture offered at TINI.

I've always liked weird stuff. I love color too. Sometimes people are afraid to add those pieces that will make a statement. Vintage pieces have a lot more character than the stuff you get from a catalogue. And that's what we do at TINI—try to help you find those things that speak to you and make you think outside of your design comfort zone. Like using a big 1950s Mickey Mouse mask as decoration in your living room, or using astroturf instead of a rug in your bedroom. Stuff like that—

mixing it in with a cool mid-century credenza or an industrial lamp!

The products are described as green-friendly. What makes them so?

Most of the stuff we have at TINI has been around for decades. We are recycling, just like what you do with plastic water bottles. There's a lot of amazing furniture that was built before we were even born, so we don't need to be making more furniture. Save a tree, buy vintage!

Just a stroll down Fairfax or Robertson and your wallet aches! Yet the items at TINI are extremely trendy and budget-conscious.

We figured what we needed to do [was] keep our prices as low as possible, which means I just have to hassle a whole lot more when I'm buying

these pieces. So if you're having a garage sale and I stop by and you see me bargain like crazy, I don't mean to be a pain, [but] I need to lower that price for the person that's gonna buy it from us.

The website is updated every Tuesday with new weekend finds—and navigating it is just as fun as shopping in the store! Your purchasing philosophy is kind of like brick and mortar meets the World Wide Web, right?

Yes, that's something we're very proud of! We do update the website all the time, with maybe a couple hundred new pieces every week. [You] can go vintage furniture shopping at 3 a.m.! It's great to have the store as well—that way people can first see it online and then come to the store knowing what they're coming to see.

TINI items can be found online at thisisnotikea.com, or customers can visit the store, located at 515 S. Fairfax Ave., L.A. (323) 938-9230. All items are available for shipment nationally and internationally.