

Pimp My Gravy Boat: Maniacally Ostentatious Décor on Display in S.F.

Wed Oct 17, 2007 at 08:30:21 AM

Meet Jacopo Strada, the man who put the "co" in rococo.

By Joe Eskenazi

Forty years ago, Janis Joplin implored the Lord for a



Mercedes-Benz. But 440 years ago, Janis may have caterwauled for a ridiculously ornate and scandalously expensive gravy boat like the one you see here. And instead of praying to God, she'd just have to tap Jacopo Strada on the shoulder.

You probably don't know any more about Strada than you know about any other dead 16th-century Venetian goldsmith. And that's okay. But when someone is the best there's ever been in his or her field, it warrants a look — no matter how arcane that field may be. When you put a quill in William Shakespeare's hand, he became the greatest playwright in the Western tradition. And, if you tossed Strada a quill, you'd find there was never anyone before or since who was such an expert at designing ludicrously flamboyant household knickknacks to stoke the fires of conspicuous consumption among the obscenely wealthy.

Located in the heart of the Union Square shopping district ...

amongst the Cartiers, Wilkes-Bashfords and Gumps of the world, the Serge Sorokko Gallery is a fitting place to peer at the schematics for the Renaissance equivalent of today's bejeweled dog collars and ostrich-skin purses. And, unlike the objects Strada designed, a trip to Sorokko's is free.



And yet it grows even more absurd. For while Strada's artistry was world-class, these were, to put it bluntly, crappy utensils. The gravy boat and

eggcup/salt-cellar designs you see here would have done a poor job pouring gravy or holding eggs and salt — and no family would ever have thought to actually use it. Instead it would sit atop a mantelpiece, as untouched as Nigel Tufnel's prize guitar.

In fact, while Strada's blueprints still exist — and cost \$35,000 to \$50,000 apiece — gallery associate Laura Perry noted that not one example of his work can be found.

And, as I descended into the world of miniskirted, fur-booted shoppers toting Neiman Marcus bags, this gave me much rich food for thought. For the wealthy families who indulged in Strada's pricey knickknacks were probably forced to melt them down when the going got tough.

Just try doing that with your Jaguar.