

GEARS — SUBCULTURE CHIC



This guitar has been redesigned with steampunk in mind and is available at www.steampuffin.com.

Whether consumed by its romantic charm or simply a casual fan of its Victorian sensibilities, there's a growing interest in all things steampunk lately. From books, television and films to music, art and design, the desire to 'reclaim technology' is getting closer and closer to mainstream pop culture. Wherever you find steampunk, you'll undoubtedly find a gear or two not far behind.

The term 'steampunk' was coined in the 1980s, by author K.W. Jeter. The term, added recently to the Oxford English Dictionary, describes an alternate reality where both the Victorian and Industrial Age coexist with modern technology. Its roots stem from the works of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells and can be found in everything from television shows (*The Wild, Wild West*), films (*Sherlock Holmes*) or graphic novels (*The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*).

Bruce Rosenbaum, owner of Modvic, a home restoration firm in Massachusetts, didn't find steampunk—it found him.

"My wife and I launched a venture in 2007 to buy and restore old Victorian homes," Rosenbaum says. "As we began redesigning our own kitchen, we liked the idea of combining Victorian design and craftsmanship with modern functionality. People began telling us about this steampunk subculture and it opened a whole new potential audience."

According to Rosenbaum, the steampunk movement has fans from young children to adults in their 70s or 80s. Its ideals go back to a time when inventors and engineers simply wanted people to appreciate their craftsmanship—a time when mechanical components like gears, pulleys and levers were exposed in mechanical devices.

"These machines were open so you could see exactly how they worked and more importantly, you could understand them," Rosenbaum says. "Today, everything is in a black box. There's this alienation when it comes to how things work, and we no longer feel connected or appreciate how things are made. You can watch mechanical devices with gears and you start to understand the logic. That's not the case with technology today."

Rosenbaum has incorporated gears into many of his own designs and recommends artists such as Dale Mathis (www.theartofdalemathis.com), a sculptor who combines surrealism with mechanicalism for steampunk-inspired work.

"There's the fantastical side of steampunk, the role-playing games, the goggles, the costumes, etc., and then there's the aesthetics and design of combining Victorian elements into our modern world," Rosenbaum says. "I'm trying to build a bridge between the two, so to speak."

In addition to Modvic, Rosenbaum runs www.steampuffin.com, a website that offers unique architectural salvage and antique items that are inspired by the steampunk culture, many that feature gears prominently.

"Steampunk is becoming much more mainstream today for sure," Rosenbaum says. "I'm trying to bring these different worlds together to reinvigorate some of these artifacts from the past. It's thinking in larger terms, it's looking at something old and outdated and finding something useful for it in today's world. It's very liberating."

For information on sponsoring The New England Steampunk Festival at the Charles River Museum of Industry and Innovation, contact Bruce Rosenbaum at (781) 784-0250.



The Executive Desk, created by Dale Mathis, has working gears under its surface. The piece costs \$27,000 and is available at www.steampuffin.com (all photos courtesy of Bruce Rosenbaum).