

# Bruce Rosenbaum



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Bruce Rosenbaum has been dubbed the *Steampunk Guru* by the Wall Street Journal and *Steampunk Evangelist* by Wired Magazine. Bruce and his wife Melanie's functional art Steampunk House has been featured in the Boston Globe, The Chicago Tribune, The New York Times, CNN, Huffington Post, NPR and featured on MTV, A&E, Discovery and HGTV. You can take a virtual tour at [www.modvic.com](http://www.modvic.com).

Bruce's company, ModVic, works with clients all across the country to take personal, meaningful objects, creatively combining them with relevant and cool period objects and machinery to transform the ordinary into incredible Steampunk functional art. The Steampunk art and design process celebrates history, while setting a path for a re-imagined better future -- telling the personal stories of individuals, families, organizations and places.

He also now travels the country, not only educating others on how to do Steampunk design, but how repurposing and the 'combination of opposites' creative problem solving can help repurpose and transform our own lives with meaningful connections to the past, present and future.

### ModVic Exhibitions/Seminars 2014

STEAMPUNK SPRINGFIELD: REIMAGINING AN INDUSTRIAL CITY, March 21 through September 28, City wide: Springfield Museums, Springfield Armory, UMASS Amherst, Central Library, City-Stage Theater and Springfield Symphony – Springfield, MA

STEAMABLE: THE STEAMPUNK WHEELCHAIR PROJECT – Florence, MA

### ModVic Exhibitions/Seminars 2013

MODVIC'S WORLD OF STEAMPUNK ART & DESIGN, RIVERFEST – Assembly Row, Somerville MA

STEAMPUNK: NATURE & MACHINE, Lockwood Mathews Mansion, Norwalk CT

DESIGNING STEAMPUNK, CreativeMornings Boston, Boston MA

TIME MACHINES: ROBOTS, ROCKETS AND STEAMPUNK, Shelburne Museum, Shelburne VT

VICTORIAN EXTREME: AMERICAN FANCYWORK AND STEAMPUNK, 1850 – NOW, Bennington Museum, Bennington VT

STEAMPUNK DICKENS AND HIS VILLAIN HEADS, WaterFire Festival, Old Stone Bank, Providence RI

PLASMA LIGHT ART AND STEAMPUNK DESIGN, International Assn. of Lighting Designers, Charles River Museum, Waltham MA

MODVIC'S WORLD OF STEAMPUNK ART & DESIGN, Watch City Festival – Charles River Museum, Waltham MA

STEAMPUNK @ PIER SHOW Pier 94 – Chelsea, New York NY

STEAMPUNKINETICS RUBE GOLDBERG EXHIBITION, Northeast Arc, Danvers MA

STEAMPUNK HOUSE TOURS, Groupon, Sharon MA

20,000 LEAGUES STEAMPUNK GALA, 5 Wits, Foxboro MA

### 2012

HOW TO ARCHITECT STEAMPUNK INTO YOUR DESIGN - STEAMPUNK FOR ARCHITECTS, ArchitectureBoston Expo (ABX), Boston MA

STEAMPUNKINETICS GALLERY SHOW, AFA Gallery – SOHO, New York, NY

LIVING STEAMPUNK, Boskone 49 – Regional Science Fiction Convention, Boston Westin Waterfront, Boston MA

MODVIC'S WORLD OF STEAMPUNK ART & DESIGN, Watch City Festival – Charles River Museum, Waltham MA

LIVING STEAMPUNK, Dickens Festival, Salem MA

STEAMPUNK DICKENS AND HIS VILLAIN HEADS, Pollard Public Library, Lowell MA

STEAMPUNK @ CRAFTBOSTON, World Trade Center, Boston MA

STEAMPUNK @ METRO SHOW, New York NY

MODVIC'S WORLD OF STEAMPUNK ART & DESIGN, Steampunk Industrial Revolution Festival, Nashua NH  
LIVING STEAMPUNK, FaerieCon, Baltimore MD  
STEAMPUNK SOIREE STEAMER AND EXHIBITION, Revolving Museum, Lowell MA  
STEAMPUNK FORM & FUNCTION SHOW & EXHIBITION II, Charles River Museum of Industry and Innovation,  
Waltham MA  
DESIGNING STEAMPUNK, DESIGN East, Boston MA  
STEAMPUNK @ ANTIQUE CITY, Schaut's Fun Fair, Bethlehem PA  
STEAMPUNK @ BRIMFIELD ANTIQUE SHOW, Brimfield MA  
STEAMPUNK HISTORICAL HOUSE TOUR, Sharon Historical Society, Sharon MA



## 2011

BACK HOME TO FUTURE EXPO, Greater Philadelphia Expo Center, Oaks, PA  
MOBILIS IN MOBILI: AN EXHIBITION OF ART & APPLIANCE, Wooster  
Street Social Club (NY Ink), New York, NY  
MODVIC'S WORLD OF STEAMPUNK ART & DESIGN, Watch City Festival – Charles River Museum, Waltham MA  
NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM GOES BACK TO THE FUTURE WITH STEAMPUNK NIGHT, Norman Rockwell Museum,  
Stockbridge MA  
STEAMPUNK BIZARRE EXHIBITION, Mark Twain Museum, Hartford CT  
STEAMPUNK FORM & FUNCTION SHOW & EXHIBITION, Charles River Museum of Industry and Innovation, Waltham MA  
MODVIC WITH EAST COAST PARANORMAL RESEARCH TEAM, Benjamin Stanley Freeman House, 390 Mount Hope  
Street, North Attleboro MA

## 2010

MODVIC STEAMPUNK ART EXHIBITION, Steampunk World's Fair, Piscataway NJ  
STEAMPUNK @ BOSTON ANTIQUE & DESIGN SHOW, Shriner's Auditorium, Wilmington, MA  
NEMO'S STEAMPUNK ART AND INVENTION GALLERY, 20,000 Leagues, 5-Wits Attraction, Foxboro MA  
STEAMPUNK @ PIER SHOW, Pier 94 – Chelsea, New York NY

## Boards

CHAIRMAN OF SHARON HISTORIC COMMISSION, Sharon, MA  
TRUSTEE, CHARLES RIVER MUSEUM OF INDUSTRY & INNOVATION, Waltham, MA

## Projects

### 2012 – 2013

STEAMPUNKINETICS – BUILDING ART INTO SCIENCE, Steampunk as Art Therapy for Kids with Autism,  
University of Massachusetts – Lowell MA  
STEAMPUNK BEDROOM MAKEOVER, Make-A-Wish, Boston MA  
STEAMPUNK QUANTUM WHEELCHAIR DESIGN, GrabCad, Cambridge MA  
STEAMPUNK MECHANICAL WHALE, The Nantucket Hotel, Nantucket MA  
STEAMPUNK OFFICE FOR PATENT ATTORNEY, Foley & Lardner, Prudential Center, Boston MA  
SHERWIN WILLIAMS STEAMPUNK DAPPER DEN' Boston Design Center, Boston MA  
STEAMPUNK HOME THEATER ROOM, Audio Concepts, Boston MA

MANSION

GURU | BRUCE ROSENBAUM

# THE MAN WHO MAKES STEAMPUNK

A craftsman turns antiques and cast-offs into custom furniture, clocks and even a mechanical whale—all for practical use

BY MEGAN BUERGER

**BRUCE ROSENBAUM LIKES** to turn old objects into useful things. That is how he started steampunking before he knew what it was.

The term “steampunk” tends to conjure up images of bookish adults in Victorian costumes, daydreaming about time travel and quoting Jules Verne. But for some, the science-fiction subculture is less about histrionics and more about history.

“In its purest form, it’s history, plus art, plus technology,” Mr. Rosenbaum says. “But function is key. Real steampunk art includes purposeful mechanics, not just random doodads. It has to perform.”

Mr. Rosenbaum, 51 years old, and his wife Melanie, 55, own a design company in Sharon, Mass., called ModVic that repurposes salvaged, often antique, furniture into functioning, modern pieces: a desk fashioned out of an old bandsaw, an iPod dock that resembles a phonograph. The company name is a combination of “modern” and “Victorian”—the essence of steampunk design.

They complete about 100 pieces every year that range in price from \$5,000 to \$250,000, sometimes more. Among some of the most bizarre pieces Mr. Rosenbaum has created are a back tattoo machine for the TV show “New York Ink,” and a Tom Sawyer paint jetpack for the Mark Twain Museum in Hartford, Conn. The museum enlisted ModVic to participate in an art show based on questioning what it would have looked like if Mark Twain had modern technology.

Recently, he completed a 6-foot mechanical whale for a hotel in Nantucket, Mass. Its activation button is housed in an old ship compass and, keeping utility in mind, a hidden security camera is tucked into the whale’s mouth. Mr. Rosenbaum’s voice rises with excitement when he talks about the project. “It caused a stir when we installed it because it’s a little James Bond,” he says. “But now, it’s the hit of the island.”

For materials, Mr. Rosenbaum combs East Coast thrift shops and art auctions. “You know how some men’s watches expose all the inner gadgets? That’s my whole house,” he says.

ModVic’s typical clients are history lovers who pine for the craftsmanship and detail of a bygone era. They’re mostly men, Mr. Rosenbaum says. Leather, copper, iron and bronze are steampunk staples, as are nods to mechanics. Mr. Rosenbaum employs four people to handle the manufacturing at his home studio and works with about 50 local artists who specialize in elements such as ironwork and carpentry. He estimates about 70% of his business is commissioned works. Some clients come with a specific idea, he said, while others are open to experimenting.

John Lanza, a patent attorney in Boston, commissioned a ModVic desk for his office that incorporated a couple family heirlooms, including an old



**VICTORIAN INSPIRATION** The Rosenbaum home in Sharon, Mass., mixes modern technology with history. An old stove with a new oven is part of their steampunk-designed kitchen. Below, the desk in his home office.

**FORM AND FUNCTION** Mr. Rosenbaum combs thrift shops and art auctions looking for objects and antiques that can be repurposed. Recent works include a light fixture, a film device and a mechanical whale hiding a security camera.



bandsaw that belonged to his dad. It cost about \$10,000. Before long, they added a credenza and storage shelving to the space. Next up is a music player. By the time that is finished, Mr. Lanza will have invested about \$40,000 in steampunking the room.

“It’s partly about quality—but that desk probably weighs 1,000 pounds—but it’s more about personality,” said Mr. Lanza, who met Mr. Rosenbaum at a steampunk fair in Waltham, Mass., in 2011. “People walk by my office everyday and stop dead in their tracks.”

Gary Sullivan hired Mr. Rosenbaum to build a grandfather clock made from an 1880s clock case he found at an auction in Bellingham, Mass. Mr. Sullivan is an antiques dealer who specializes in early American grandfather clocks and appraises them for public television’s “Antiques Roadshow.”

The 7-foot-tall piece, which includes pieces of Victorian lanterns and a time capsule, took about eight months to build and cost \$30,000.

Mr. Sullivan says the art of steampunking has grown tremendously in the past five years. He credits it partly to an exhaustion with modern objects that have built-in obsolescence and partly to an increased interest in authentic décor customized to personal tastes.

“It’s my alter ego,” he says of his interest. “In my business, I deal with very wealthy clients with sophisticated tastes. My steampunk side is quirkier, looser, a little less serious—a lot less serious.”

Mr. Sullivan, like Mr. Rosenbaum, is a only moderate fan of science fiction. He once made a top hat with moving gears and a lid that puffs steam. (There is a video of it on YouTube.) He was drawn to steampunk, he says, for its sculpture art.

Mr. Rosenbaum credits growing up in Marblehead, Mass., for his appreciation of history. The harbor town north of Boston was established by Pilgrims who arrived on the Mayflower.

In the 1990s, he and his wife started a direct-mail marketing business targeting consumers based on major life events. (If you buy a home and then receive cable coupons in the mail, it’s likely the Rosenbaums.)

After a few years, Mr. Rosenbaum set up a workshop to explore his artistic interests. The first piece he made was a mission-style coat rack festooned with Victorian hardware and topped with a World War II clock. He had never heard of “steampunking,” he says.

In 2007, ModVic was born. It began as a Victorian-home restoration company. The couple completed only one project before the financial collapse. They relaunched the business, focusing on period furniture, such as clocks or arm chairs.

At the same time, they were restoring their own home, which was beginning to generate buzz for its quirky décor. Today, it’s a steampunk showcase and ModVic’s most effective advertisement.

Bruce Rosenbaum for The Wall Street Journal (5); Dave Berk (left); Maurizio Corbelli (middle)

# STEAMPUNK TIME MACHINE

## ANTIQUA MASTER BATHROOM COMPUTER WORKSTATION:



Early 1900s Rib Cage 'Needle' Shower and Copper Tub, Antique bathroom fixtures, plumbing pipes and connections, Samsung monitor, Dell Computer and Microsoft Webcam. An Antique Master Bathroom and Modern Computer Workstation – all in one! Designed and fabricated for the 5 Wits ([www.5wits.com](http://www.5wits.com)) - 20,000 Leagues Adventure Attraction in Patriots Place, Foxboro MA

## STEAMPUNK ANTIQUE 'CUTTING EDGE' COMPUTER WORKSTATION:



Dismantling a whole 1890s woodworking shop in Maine (found as a time capsule – still all intact) and repurposing much of the woodworking equipment and re-creating a whole office full of Steampunk furniture and equipment for a patent attorney, John Lanza, Foley and Lardner in Boston's Prudential Center. Featured is an antique 7 foot, 1,000 lb bandsaw transformed into a computer workstation/conference table. Also designed and fabricated 'lathe' credenza, vertical shaft and pulley display system, tool chest and file cabinet system, wood mold chair and more.

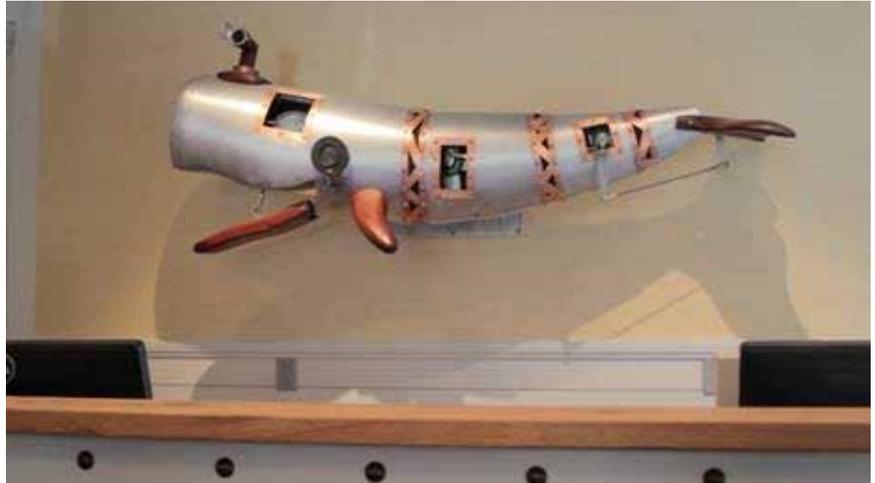
## STEAMPUNK ANTIQUE 'CUTTING EDGE' COMPUTER WORKSTATION:



Industrial modern retail point of sale station infused into a late 1800s clockmakers lathe and table. Developed for Wooster Street Social Club as part of their retail clothing and merchandise area within the tattoo studio.

## STEAMPUNK MECHANICAL WHALE

SteamWhale. Whale has mechanical, pneumatic and other technological components built into the body (gears, cams, shafts, cranks, wheels that turn such things as the mouth, fins, tail, and other auxiliary features). Observers can see and directly activate certain kinetic features, that are viewable through open components in the whale. Designed and fabricated for the lobby of 'The Nantucket' ([www.thenantuckethotel.com](http://www.thenantuckethotel.com)) – an historic hotel on Nantucket, Massachusetts.



## JULES VERNE STEAMPUNK HOME THEATER SHOWROOM:



Designed full Steampunk Home Theater Showroom and built into a Boston MA state-of-the-art, voted #1 home theater company in the country – Audio Concepts. Repurposed Victorian mirror frame and fireplace mantle, log holder subwoofer that compliments the fireplace home theater. Unique pulley and shaft vertical shelving system and railroad lights housing speakers. Also wood mold gears were shaped and fastened to the handsome Ekornes Stressless chair and ottoman set.

## STEAMPUNK WEDDING TIME CAPSULE GRANDFATHER CLOCK:



The 7 ft body/case of the Grandfather clock is from the early 1800s and is outfitted with Victorian parts and pieces and contains a 'countdown' clock feature that will act as a time capsule lock/unlock. After a predetermined amount of years (i.e. 25 years) - the countdown clock will activate a switch to open the contents to the family. The Wedding Steampunk Time Capsule is a way for new couples to start their lives out with love, promise and hope for the future. The Steampunk Time Capsule infuses modern technology into period and personal objects to create a living, functional piece of artwork for their home and home for future generations. The Time Capsule will record and archive a family's past, present and future in one single object that can be displayed and preserved for children, grandchildren, great children and beyond. Personal letters and objects can be added annually and will not be able to be accessed for a predetermined period of time from the wedding date. Designed and fabricated for 'Steampunkinetics' - a major Steampunk art show featuring 15 artists in SOHO NY in June 2012.

## STEAMPUNK 'BACK' TATTOO TO THE FUTURE:

## TOM SAWYER STEAMPUNK PAINT SPRAYER JET PACK



What if Mark Twain lived today and knew about all of our modern technology and appliances - how would his stories change? What if Tom Sawyer had a hi-tech paint sprayer to white wash his aunt's fence - what would that look like and how would the arc of the story change? Our Steampunk Paint Sprayer answers those questions. Designed and fabricated for the Mark Twain Museum - Steampunk Bizarre Exhibition.



Tattoo viewing device for clients getting back tattoos to see the tattoo as it is being inked by the artist. Display reinvented and repurposed out of a 1907 industrial gas pump for Wooster Street Social Club, a popular tattoo shop in SOHO NY and the tattoo studio of TLC's 'NY Ink'. Appeared in 'Steampunk Party' episode in 2012.