

## Michael Bruno - Day 1

The online entrepreneur  
decamps to the Hamptons  
for Memorial Day weekend



MAY 28 2013  
MICHAEL BRUNO

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My love/hate relationship with the Hamptons is rekindled every Memorial Day weekend, a three-day holiday with Monday as the day to remember all of the lives lost in war. It's the moment when, for three months, the Hamptons goes from being a pleasant rural community two hours from New York City to a madhouse full of Manhattan's more entitled residents.

Although we live in Tuxedo Park, about two hours away in upstate New York, my partner Alexander and I are in the Hamptons most weekends during the year, so I like to think I can exclude myself from this group that the local residents loathe (thanks to the honking of horns and cutting-in lines at the market) and yet love (for the money that's spent).

This Memorial Day Monday morning I rise at 6am to get coffee at the Hampton Coffee Company and pick up the *New York Times*, *FT*, *Wall Street Journal* and *The Southampton Press*. *The Press* is a local weekly and is by far my favourite newspaper as it's full of the latest real-estate listings and sales. It also publishes a roster of all the people who have been arrested for drink driving. This list grows from two to three people a week early in the season to at least half a dozen all summer long. It's the local "secret" gossip news; everyone reads it.

I then respond to all the emails that can't wait, so I can disappear for a 90-minute yoga class and nobody will know I am MIA. On my way home I stop at the Halsey farm to pick up everything I need to make my organic green juice. The farm has been in the same family for 300 years and has been organic for as long as I can remember.

In the evening, we go for dinner at Sant Ambroeu, an Italian restaurant that is the only place we eat in the Hamptons once summer begins. They keep the prices just high enough that you can usually get a table without waiting a week, and it's by far the best food in town. Our dear

friend Ellen Ward Scarborough – an antiques dealer, socialite, protector of four-legged friends and wife of renowned New York City news anchorman Chuck Scarborough – joins us.

I had hoped to have a quiet dinner with Ellen to get some advice on raising the two new puppies that are due to arrive any day now, but, as I should have expected, Ellen knows everyone in the room. We don't get much advice but we do drink plenty of Villa di Capezzana Sangiovese.

Michael Bruno is the founder and president of 1stdibs, the online marketplace for antiques, vintage furniture and design, jewellery and watches, fine art, vintage couture and estates.

## Michael Bruno - Day 2

The countdown to both moving house and a 1stdibs launch is on... but puppy pampering distracts the online entrepreneur



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MICHAEL BRUNO

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Today starts early – at 5am – to make up for everything I didn't do on Monday.

At the moment I have two jobs, one as the president and chairman of 1stdibs, and the other as project manager for my two homes that are currently under construction in New York state. One is a sweet 4,000sq ft shingle-style house in Southampton on Lake Agawam, near the beach, which is now nearing completion. The other is my current love: a 14,000sq ft Georgian brick mansion built in 1900 in Tuxedo Park on the lake, with a boathouse. Having renovated at least a dozen homes in my career, I know that projects always take longer and cost more than expected, so I have stopped making budgets and timelines and just do what I think should be done as we go along.

The house in Southampton is about a year behind schedule and is costing double my rough estimate. Fortunately, the delay has kept me from selling my current Hamptons home, which has appreciated over the past year – more than the extra cost of renovations. I thought I would move in before last summer, but I am now scheduled to move in tomorrow.

Between moving into the new house and launching the new German and Austrian markets on 1stdibs, it's going to be a busy week. Somehow, two years of construction and six months' launch planning have aligned so both things take place on the same day.

Fortunately, the hard part for the new market launch has been done. Wish I could say the same for the move; it's never easy. To start, I have to make a list of all the pieces to be picked up by the movers in Tuxedo to bring to Southampton. I have five garages full of furniture that I purchased when traveling around Europe visiting 1stdibs dealers, and it's all so random.

Launching new markets is the most exciting part of my job; I get to visit dealers in person before we accept them as customers. Meeting them makes for a great trip, since antiques dealers love the finer things in life. I have found that they are an ideal source of local information. They always know the best places to stay and eat and which exhibitions to see. Most importantly, they advise me on which of their fellow dealers in the area I should meet as potential 1stdibs clients. They understand that if we feature all the best dealers in town, they will all do more business online.

The truck arrives long before I have made the list that should have been done days ago. I have been sidetracked by an email from Ellen Ward Scarborough with so much advice on raising puppies that I could launch my own advice column. I now know that the most important piece of information when it comes to owning a dog is to avoid all toxic cleaners on the floors and sprays in the garden.

As we load the truck, I decide to err on the side of bringing too much and plan to sort it all out later. I have walked through the house a hundred times in my head, visualising what should go where, but it never works out as planned. When the movers arrive in Southampton I'll have them unload everything in the drive, so I can play decorator all day. I am sure my friend, designer Windsor Smith, who is coming to meet me on Friday to finalise the plans for Tuxedo, will have a big laugh when she sees what I have done. She'll ask for a martini and rearrange everything.

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## Michael Bruno - Day 3

Moving-in day in the Hamptons is accompanied by chaos, inclement weather and... a dose of Kim Kardashian



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MICHAEL BRUNO

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5am on Wednesday. It seems like I am getting up before the birds every day at the moment. I hope today is the last time this week. Before I leave to meet the movers, I have my coffee in bed and read the Daily Mail online (my dirty little secret). I am obsessed with watching Kim Kardashian's train wreck of a life unfold. I have never actually seen her show and don't want to. I prefer just to imagine how annoying she is.

Now that I have been jolted awake, I need to check on the German-Austrian launch, which is mostly being managed out of our London office. Carmine Bruno, who is not my brother – but a very handsome and smart young man nonetheless – heads operations there. When we acquired his company Online Galleries a year ago, I thought it was worth it just to get somebody whom everyone thought was my brother or cousin. In the antiques trade they love families who do business together.

Knowing we are in good shape for the launch, I head over to meet the movers – who I am sure have been waiting for at least an hour. Upon arrival, I find the full construction crew in their work gear and wonder what they didn't understand about "We are moving in. The house is finished". All those projects I told them I was just thinking about had actually been started, and assured them two more weeks of work.

Knowing they have been working for me full time for nearly four years (between the last house remodel and this one), I knew if I didn't help them find more work they would never leave, so I found them a job at my friend Dru DeSantis's house in East Hampton, hoping they would get the message. Dru runs DeSantis Breindel, one of NYC's leading marketing and branding companies. She's been considering remodelling her house for years and fortunately decided to

move ahead just when I needed someone to hire my guys. The problem now is they think they can drag the two jobs out for months and months, and I promised Dru when I moved into my new house that the guys would be all hers. (I'm hoping she doesn't read this post.)

As my randomly purchased furniture is unloaded, I start to get nervous about how it will all look – since pretty much nothing was bought with this house in mind. And now, since so many friends have been asking to see the place, I have a cocktail party arranged for this Saturday night.

A steady rain has foiled my plan to unload everything in the driveway and then figure out where it can go. Instead, I try having the removal men put pieces where I think they might look best. As the truck is unloaded, we discover that we can't get anything of significant size up the stairs. We have to figure out how to hand things up and over a second-floor balcony rail... but then I decide to just unload them all and cram them into the living room and hall.

Fortunately, my friend and employee Michele D'Ermo – who travels with me to Europe – shows up and we play my favourite game of “what do you think?” as we move everything around. Before I realise it, the house begins to look just like a 1970s Malibu beach house, as my partner Alexander describes it when he comes to see what we have done. It isn't what I planned, but it has turned out better than I expected. I am in love all over again.

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## Michael Bruno - Day 4

A formidable to-do list stubbornly stands between the 1stdibs president and the first ocean swim of the summer



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5.30am: I wake and think about getting up to buy coffee. It's Thursday – the day the *Southampton Press* comes out. But I probably had one too many yesterday to celebrate the move into the new house, so I roll over and pretend to be asleep, in the hope that Alexander will get up and fetch the coffee. It works!

I have so much to do today, but really I just want to head to the beach for my first swim of the season – a tradition to get into before the end of May. The water is still only 10°C, but today is supposed to be the first summer-like day.

Hmm. Since it's already sort of a holiday week, I see what I can get off my to-do list and what can wait...

- Launch Germany and Austria dealers on 1stdibs to create a strong import market for our global base of dealers – done.

- Lose 10lb by June 1 so I can pose for photographs all summer long – half done.

- Review and approve the 1stdibs special announcement to our dealer base – do this weekend.

- Review June's press and schedule – do today.

- Write thank-you note to the former ambassador to Denmark and his wife Sharon for having us over for a recital and dinner at their home – must do today.

- Get tennis court in Tuxedo resurfaced so we can play by June 1 – done.

– Purchase mattresses from Sleepy’s for new house – do today.

– Stock up bar for new house – do today.

– Apply to the Tuxedo country club – do today.

– Plant flowerbeds in Southampton – do tomorrow.

With everything on my to-do list for today done – except a conference call with the PR department (I’ll call them shortly) – I head to the new house to meet the electrician to install a pair of Poul Henningsen light fixtures for the front door and meet my oldest friend Jay Flagg, one of the Hamptons’ leading real-estate brokers. Jay and I met in La Jolla in the late 1980s. He is like a big brother that I follow around. Jay moved to San Francisco and so did I. Jay then took off for London and I went to Paris. It wasn’t until Jay moved to the Hamptons that I found the place I never want to leave.

Jay joins me for the inaugural swim, since we’ve been doing this for years. He arrives at my house to find me on the phone with Stacy McLaughlin, the head of 1stdibs PR. Once you are on the phone with Stacy, there is no way to get off until she gets what she wants. As usual, she has a list. I must commit to hosting an event for the top clients of AXA Fine Art Insurance at my house in Tuxedo this fall; meet a photographer at the old house in Southampton to get my photo taken for a magazine feature coming out this summer; and show up for a luncheon at the Museum of the City of New York. Since I am a trustee of the museum, I say yes. I also commit to host the AXA event *and* to meet the photographer, just so I can get off the phone and head to the beach.

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# Michael Bruno - Day 5

The 1stdibs president bids a final fond farewell to his beloved St Bernard



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MICHAEL BRUNO

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It was five years ago that my gorgeous St Bernard, Sampson, died at the age of 12. I will never completely get over him. I have kept his ashes on my bedside table ever since, waiting for the right place to lay him to rest.

From what my Tuxedo Park neighbours and the descendants of the previous owners of my home tell me, animal lovers have always occupied our house. This explains the sweet pet cemetery on the hill facing the lake where horses, cats, dogs – plus a few other species – are buried with headstones. I am sure Sam would like it there. You can see everyone coming and going, and the hill and trees get covered with snow in the winter. Sam lived for the snow; he used to push open the back door when it was snowing and lie on the floor just inside the house, letting the snow blow in on him.

The last snow Sam saw – the spring before he died – was on the edge of the property in the Hamptons in a spot that he never usually went to. I found him lying in the shade next to the very last patch of snow, licking it in an attempt to take it all in. I think he knew he would never see snow again. Sam died in my arms that summer. He lay on the floor in the entry hall for days because he loved to be where he could watch everything going on the house. For three days, Alexander and I took turns lying on the floor with him – until the vet said we had to let him go. I sent her away twice, but the third time she convinced me it was cruel not to.

This weekend we bury Sam on the hill, next to Big Horse.

We also go shopping for dog beds, leashes, bowls, food and toys because our two new babies arrive on Monday: a boy and a girl from the same English Retriever breeder – but from different litters. For the past five years I have said I wasn't ready to get another dog, and I am still not ready. I suppose you never are until they arrive.

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