



Mobile art

His cars get more than passing glances

BY KRIS CORONADO

When Clarke Bedford drives, he inevitably causes a scene. “You’re trying to pull out, and you’ve got it timed, and someone slows down to look,” says the 65-year-old Hyattsville resident. “You have to remind yourself that the flow of traffic may change.”

Not that he can blame drivers. Bedford’s automobiles are an amalgam of knickknacks, antiques and sculpture on wheels — known as art cars.

Bedford, a conservator of paintings and mixed-media objects at the Hirshhorn Museum, began transforming cars into retro rides in 2002 with a 1991 Saab 900 Turbo convertible. Seeking to make it look like a 1930s grand touring convertible, he added old bumpers and a wheel for the back. “In retrospect, it was very tame.”

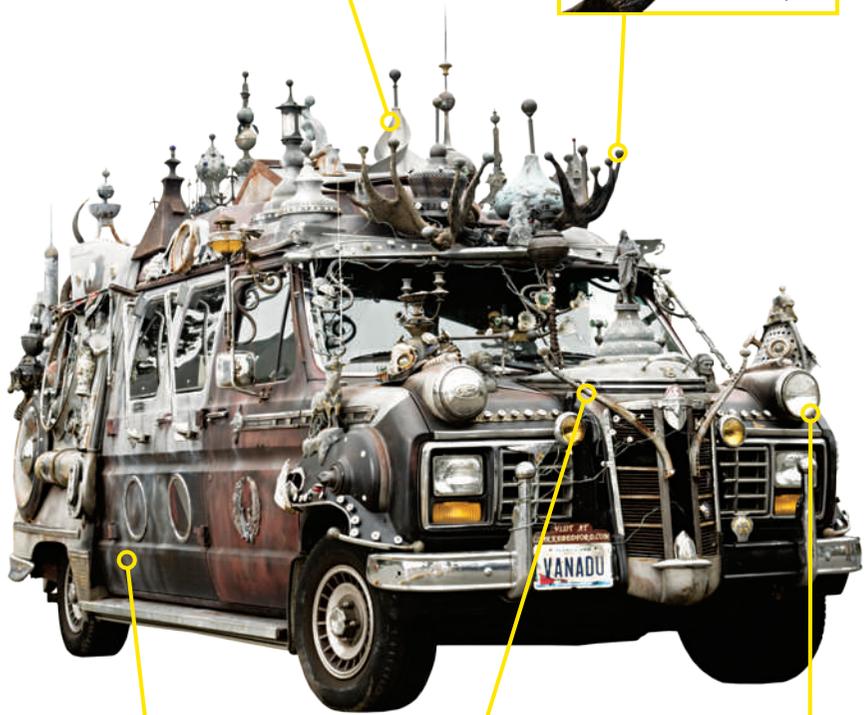
Four cars later, Bedford’s hobby has gotten more ambitious and eclectic. Take this 1988 Ford Econoline conversion van, which won first place in the daily driver category (cars driven regularly) at Houston’s 2012 Art Car Parade.

“You just keep going, and it gets more and more outrageous,” says Bedford, who also has appeared at local happenings, including the H Street Festival.

“I think I do like cars. I think I am also very bored with what cars look like. This might be overshooting the mark.”



A pipe funnels out the hot air and gas from a **kerosene heater** Bedford set up inside the van. “The idea is you could go camping in the winter,” he says.



“The whole problem is scale,” Bedford says. “The truck seems big, but it’s not that big. So the turrets and such, everything has to be miniaturized in order to look architectural.” This **turret** is an aluminum washing machine agitator, probably from the ‘30s, he says.

The **moose antlers** are from Massachusetts. The outdoors can be tough on them: “They’re getting really brittle,” Bedford says.

The **van**, bought in 2007, is named “Vanadu” in homage to Xanadu, from Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem “Kubla Khan.” “It’s about the vanity of materialism,” Bedford says. “So this is kind of a parody of the vanity of materialism. ... It’s grandiose in a very small way.”

The center of the van’s **hood** contains a composite piece that is made of a 1930s truck grille, a 1940s galvanized steel sled, shelves from a refrigerator and parts of salvaged steel horse collars.

This pair of 1940 Buick **headlights** were among the first items Bedford added to the van. He estimates there are 1,000 items on it. “At each point, you think it’s done,” he says. All of the vehicle’s accessories are bolted on; nothing has been welded, Bedford says.

Bedford bought this **stained-glass window** at an antiques mall in Maine years ago. “It’s a pretty nice window to put on a truck, but it really looks so great,” he says.

A **bike rim** covers the window. “The van has certain lines, and you have to work with those lines. ... That’s why things are stacked on things, so the final shape is more logical,” Bedford says.



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