



Antiques & Collectibles

By Linda Reece, *Extension Home Furnishings Specialist*

Antiques can be an enjoyable and profitable investment if they are selected or purchased carefully. Defining an antique is sometimes a little confusing, however. A 1930 law probably led to the popular belief that an antique must be 100 years old. An antique, as defined by the U.S. Tariff Act of 1930, is a work of art; collections in illustration of the progress of the arts; works in bronze, marble, terra-cotta, pottery or glazed and unglazed porcelain; artistic antiquities; and objects of ornamental character or educational value which were produced before 1830. This act only applied to imports for customs purposes.

After 1870, the United States required that the country of origin be stamped on certain ceramics, china and porcelain. Many foreign manufacturers already marked wares in this way for decades before this ruling.

Age is not the only qualifying factor for antique labeling. Historical or cultural significance is also considered when classifying an item as an antique. For example, autos that are 25 years old are eligible for special antique auto registration plates.

During the last few decades, a tremendous volume of items that have great appeal as curiosities of the past have become known as the "new" antiques or collectibles. Nostalgic longing for the "good old days" has resulted in such items of Americana as old license plates, pot-bellied stoves and toys of the early space age becoming trend-setting collectibles.

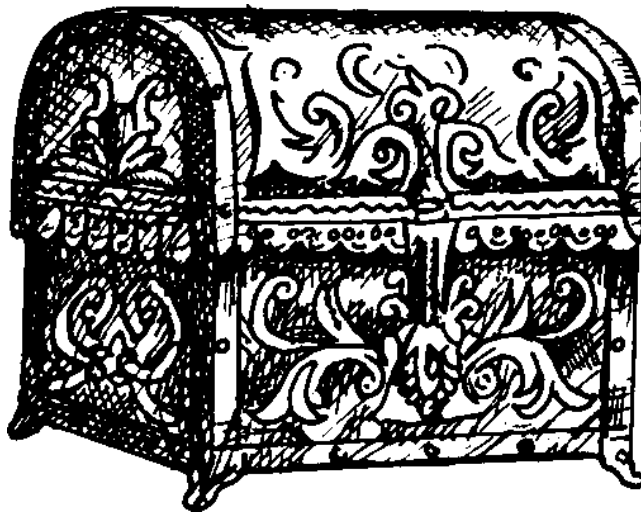
Prices of both antiques and collectibles have soared as increasing numbers of people have started attending auctions and visiting flea markets. Many pieces that often were placed in the trash a few years ago are now restored. The best of these are objects that have value for the collector because of their beauty, rarity or significance in popular culture. Other less valuable items are often collected because of a special interest or sentiment to the collector.

How Do I Know If It Is Worth Keeping?

"Why would anyone want that old junk?" and "My goodness, I have a trunk just like that in the attic. I didn't realize it was worth anything." Comments like these are often overheard at auctions or in antique shops. Deciding whether or not to keep old furnishings is always a difficult decision, but it helps to separate value from worth.

Value vs. Worth

The value of an object depends on the amount of money that someone is willing to pay for it. Both the investment and market price must be considered. Worth, on the other hand, relates to the importance or esteem in which the object is held. In addition to the dollar value of the object, worth includes the enjoyment, the memories and the family history attached to the object.



An item doesn't have to be antique or hard to find to be collectible. If the item can be useful as well, such as furniture or dinnerware, then it has a double value. For example, Grandma's rocker may not be a valuable antique, but it may be worth a lot to the granddaughter who enjoys sitting in it. When making decisions to keep things, it's important to consider the worth of an item as well as its value.

Whether you are in the market to buy antiques or are just trying to decide whether the items that you already have are worth keeping, it is helpful to know more about them. An apple-wood decoy made in 1880 may sell for \$875 at an East Coast antique auction, but that doesn't mean that you could get the same amount of money for it today at a local auction.

If you are particularly interested in collections, select a subject matter that you like. If you can't afford a large monetary investment, consider such items as calendars, autographs, shopping bags, matchbook covers, old postcards or lace. For more distinction, limit objects by size, material, maker or style, such as *red* pillboxes, *ivory* animals, *Art Deco* fans or *first-edition* mysteries. Some people limit their collecting to items manufactured in the year of their birth or to items associated with their profession, such as the physician who collects antique surgical tools or the barber who collects straight razors.

Avoid the common mistake of buying things at random and ending up with odd pieces with no meaning or interrelationship.

Deciding on Value

Here are some guidelines that will help you make good decisions on the value of antiques and collectibles:

1. Study magazines, newspapers, directories, catalogs and other literature in order to trace the development of things now considered antiques or collectibles. Learn all you can about any item of particular interest. This is your best defense against fraud.
2. Make a continuous study of the kinds of antiques and collectibles that are available at auctions, flea markets and other sales.
3. Note the collecting trends from year to year.
4. Note the use of Americana as a theme in current national advertising in the media and motion pictures. What trends seem to dominate?
5. Look at books on any American historic theme at your local library. Do people seem to show more interest in specific areas?
6. Visit and study exhibits at antique shows, museum collections and historic homes.
7. Visit antique, second-hand and gift shops.

Note carefully if a major portion of inventory is devoted to certain items. Keep in mind your means, your storage capacity and your lifestyle.

8. Buy the best you can afford, and avoid damaged or repaired pieces.
9. Study the available price guides, but keep in mind that the prices usually represent the highest prices paid for pieces that are in excellent condition.
10. After two or three years of collecting, try a "dry run" and arrange to sell your part of the investment, either through an auction gallery or directly through a dealer's table at a flea or antique mart. Profits are, of course, subject to appropriate taxation.

Shopping for Antiques

Remember these three rules of thumb for buying antiques, and you will probably make a good investment:

1. Buy the best you can afford.
2. Be a comparison shopper -- look around first.
3. Know what you like and like what you buy.

Tools of the Trade

A few tools of the trade can be packed into a canvas duffel bag that has a shoulder strap. It's ready to go at a moment's notice (or keep it in the car trunk), and the strap keeps it handy while your hands remain free to inspect potential bargains. Contents should include a tape measure, a small magnet to identify solid brass that might be hidden under a coat of paint, a magnifying glass to look for hallmarks and signatures, a pocket knife to pry things open or scrape through paint, and bungee cords to secure unwieldy items to your car rack or trunk.

At the Auction Gallery

The auction gallery has always been a traditional selling site. In recent years more and more auctioneers are buying or renting buildings to which they regularly transport contents of home, attics, basements and/or garages. Individuals also bring in consignments or "lots," which range from "stuff" gathered up after a housecleaning binge to items owned by professional dealers in antiques and collectibles.

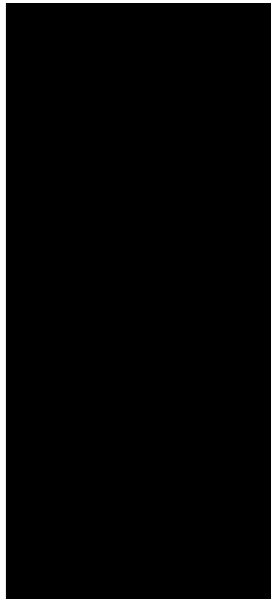
The spirit or mood of this environment is quite different from a house or farm sale. New items, such as furniture, appliances and hardware goods, are also sold. Prices are generally lower at these galleries than at farm or house sales, but selected quality items might bring high prices. The contrast in quality of items, such as a box of kitchen uten-

sils to a fine table or chair in excellent condition, may send prices soaring unexpectedly.

As in any auction, the wise buyer arrives early to examine the merchandise during the inspection period. Since some flaws and finishes may be detectable only with close inspection, look over the offerings as thoroughly as possible. Then you can decide what to bid on and how much to pay.

Set a price limit. After the auction has begun, listen carefully to the auctioneer's description of each item. He/she is obligated to point out any damage. If the item has been misrepresented, you are justified in returning it to the block. Most auctioneers will honor your complaint.

An auction is somewhat of a sporting event with few ground rules. The fast pace is one of the attractions of a good auction. This can be frightening to a novice, however. If you knowingly bid on something that you have misidentified, you have no recourse. The seasoned auction-goer takes such mistakes with good grace. Many experienced bidders have purchased a box for \$5, when the contents are worth about 50 cents. Accept this as one of the challenges of the auction game.



At the Flea Market

A flea market is the descendant of the early bazaar where all needed goods were gathered and sold. At today's flea market, you may find anything from sterling silver demitasse spoons to a wooden leg.

Unlike auctions, items usually have a price tag, although there is often room for bargaining. A simple "What will you take for this?" or "Can you come down a bit?" will usually result in a slight discount. Unless a dealer has clearly indicated with a sign or notice that "prices are firm," most expect to "dicker" a bit. Sometimes the mere act of picking up an item for examination will bring a better offer from the dealer.

Most flea markets include a wide range of sellers, including both the professional dealer and the first-time seller who just cleaned out the basement or attic. Some craftspeople, too, have found the flea market to be economically rewarding since many markets either offer free space or charge a smaller rental fee than craft fairs or festivals.

Outdoor flea markets usually offer greater variety and more turnover in dealers than indoor flea markets. The same dealers are more likely to return week after week to an indoor market where space is sometimes rented on a long-term basis. Prices tend to be fixed, since dealers might be able to leave their goods set up. The outdoor dealer must leave at dark and might be more willing to part with an object at a lower price rather than having to repack it.

Not all flea market items are bargains. Prices vary so much that guidelines are impossible to establish. Some dealers buy at auction, while others buy contents of attics, garages and basements. Prices charged must, of course, include the investment plus the costs of hauling and rental fees. That is why the same coffee grinder or lamp may sell for different prices at two different tables.

The only guideline is the amount you are willing to spend for that teapot or gate-leg table. Inspect the items carefully. Be sure that you do not buy a set of glasses in a brass holder for more than the price listed at your local department store!

Jewelry can be misrepresented. Know your products well. For example, during the late 1800s, wedding rings (made in England) were stamped 18K gold. Unfortunately, not all rings were really gold. A test recently showed one of these to be a brass alloy. You must be knowledgeable when you buy jewelry because you don't have much recourse if you're dissatisfied.

If you are considering a purchase that involves a sizable investment, buy from a reputable dealer who is accessible in the event an appraisal shows the item has been misrepresented.

If you are annoyed at having to pick your way through piles of used books, cast-off clothing, old tools, detergent bottle dolls and contents of kitchen drawers to discover a "find," look for "antique flea

markets” or antique shows and sales. These “carriage trade” events are loosely monitored so that only antiques and collectibles are permitted.

For those just learning about antiques, the sheer volume of interesting items is overwhelming. Often these events are lively museum places that are attended by “curators” who love to talk about their specialty and knowledgeable “visitors” who love to talk about theirs. Listening, as well as looking, is a good experience for the beginning collector.

Dealers settle into certain areas of specialties. Old cameras, primitive cooking utensils, wooden carpenter’s planes and routers, quilts, coverlets, rockers of every description, tin toys and old books offer a three-dimensional history lesson. Tables of coins and stamps are tended by dealers, and buyers are easily identified by their jewelers’ eye-piece.

While prices can be lower at an auction, the opportunity that flea markets offer to examine an article and think carefully before buying it is a great advantage. Visit a flea market early in the morning. Dealers tend to buy heavily from each other at the start of the day, and bargains may be available. The end of the day is also good, since tired dealers are sometimes willing to reduce prices to avoid packing and hauling.

Living With Antiques

Considering Furniture Styles

Furniture design has changed dramatically over the years. When selecting antiques, knowing a style or styles that you like can help in the decision process. Review furniture styles and note similarities in line, shape and visual weight as a help in selecting compatible pieces of furniture. (See Extension publication HE4-116, *Furniture Mix & Match...A Look at Eclectic Design* for more information.)

Styles of furniture reflect social history. Forces influencing the lives of people also affect their furnishings. These forces are what makes each style distinctive.

As you look at the different furniture styles, think about the people who used them. The styles reflect social history and make each style distinctive. Did women wear skirts with lots of crinolines? Were their homes showcases for entertaining or simple work spaces? How do the styles relate to

your own life style? Sturdy, rugged Early American furniture goes well with growing families and today’s “country-look” decorating, but delicate Adam-style furnishings that often have dainty molding and gilding are more suited to a more formal setting.

Using Antiques

Antiques in your home indicate an interest in history and the past, a desire to preserve and live with rare and cherished objects and a commitment to share this interest with others. Antiques can be used as accessories and conversation pieces or for their intended, practical use. Sturdy furniture, dishes, vases, flatware, quilts and tapestries can often be used with care. Old kitchen tools, woodenware, toys or spinning wheels should be used as art objects or pieces of sculpture for their beauty of form and finish.

Use a dry sink to display an old wash bowl and pitcher set. Old crocks are great for holding wooden spurtles or dried flower arrangements, since they were designed to “hold” things. A copper kettle looks uncomfortable with objects protruding from its top; it was made to pour! It could be used as a decorative accent as is, however. Use the same design considerations (color, texture, line and shape) when selecting and arranging these items as you would for any other furnishing for the home.

Respect Your Purchases

Respect antiques for their history, construction and character. Don’t alter a piece that is old and rare if you can avoid it. For example, a round oak table is ruined if the base is cut down to make a cocktail table. When these tables were inexpensive, it was fashionable to make this change.

Round oak tables now command incredible prices, and those that were cut down have lost much of their original value. When a piece of one object is combined with another to make a complete whole, it is known as “cannibalizing.” Using parts from different pieces to make a whole decreases the value enormously.

If you’re looking for a dome-lid trunk, wait until you see one that fits into your decorating plan. Don’t buy a fine old trunk and then paint it to fit.

Visit museums and historic villages to see how antiques are used in designing interiors. Try to work toward using your treasures so that they look natural and not contrived. Even if you don't spin, a spinning wheel can look charming in a room simply by placing it in a nook, corner or near a fireplace with a basket of colorful balls of yarn or even a basket of unspun wool. A coffee grinder in the kitchen or dining room looks more natural than in a bedroom or living room.

Above all, learn what your pieces are, what they were used for and where they best fit into your home. Furniture, draperies and appliances are standard, but accessories reflect your character and that of your family.

Restoration vs. Refinishing

The purist approach to the care and feeding of a fine antique is to clean it gently and leave it alone. The extreme is to sand it down to the bare material, fill in all holes and cracks and have an almost-new piece. The first approach is the most basic restoration, and the second is the most complete, refinishing.

The financial value of an antique or collectible is in direct proportion to its original condition. Generally, it is best to retain the original finish of any wooden or metal object, painted or not. Simple cleaning with a soft cloth moistened with lemon oil and wiping with a clean cloth are best for furniture, tools and painted items in good condition. Nicks, scratches and dents are signs of age, and most efforts to eliminate them will alter or destroy the resale value of the piece. Repairing or replacing a damaged part is still considered restoration and may be necessary in some cases, but this, too, alters the value.

A Shaker rocker which shows some signs of wear but with the original finish intact will be worth far more than the mint-condition Shaker rocker with one or two parts replaced. A copper tea kettle tarnished with age is worth more than the same kettle buffed and sprayed to prevent tarnish. To a real antique buff, character is part of the intrinsic value of a piece. Above all, do not paint iron antiques with flat black spray paint. Iron can be kept gleaming and rust-free by applying a mixture of beeswax and turpentine and then buffing. Other metals, such as copper, brass, pewter and precious metals, should be cleaned with appropriate cleaners. (For additional information on preservation of furnishings, see Extension publication HE4-112, *Family Keepsakes*).

Tips on Furniture Care

Wood is a natural material that reacts to light, heat and humidity (or lack of it). The finish on wood furniture is only a few thousandths of an inch thick but helps to protect the wood underneath from stains, scratches, spills and other mishaps. To protect this finish, dust frequently, wax and polish as necessary, and be prepared to give first aid to furniture for any minor accidents.

Dust acts as an abrasive and can scratch or become ground into the finish. Use a few drops of quality furniture polish on a clean, lint-free, absorbent cloth to help pick up the dust instead of just pushing it around. Always wipe **with**, not against, the wood grain.

Proper wood furniture care depends on the finish of the piece. Natural wood finishes fall into four categories: high gloss, low gloss, painted and oil. Paste wax offers excellent protection on frequently used surfaces and brings the shine to a high gloss. Paste waxes must be thoroughly buffed because thick, underbuffed wax will collect dust and dirt. If your furniture has a low-gloss finish, use a low-luster emulsified cream wax or cleansing wax.

Painted finishes that have been sealed can be cared for with paste wax or any liquid cleaning or dusting wax that will give the desired amount of shine. Read the label of any product first to be sure that the wax or polish won't discolor the paint finish.

Oil finishes should be washed periodically with mineral spirits, then treated with an application of boiled linseed oil. Use a pad, rub vigorously, and wipe away all excess oil with a clean, soft cloth. Remember that an oil finish has no gloss.

Wax and polish furniture only as necessary. Too frequent waxing simply waxes the wax and can dull the finish. Frequently used surfaces, such as table tops, need waxing only if they appear dull. Seldom-used surfaces need rewaxing only two or three times a year. A thorough cleaning, including removal of old wax with a mild solvent such as mineral spirits, may be done about once a year.

Antique Accessories

Accessories add the finishing touch to interior decorating. Collectibles are often an affordable way to include antiques in your home as well as express your interest in history.

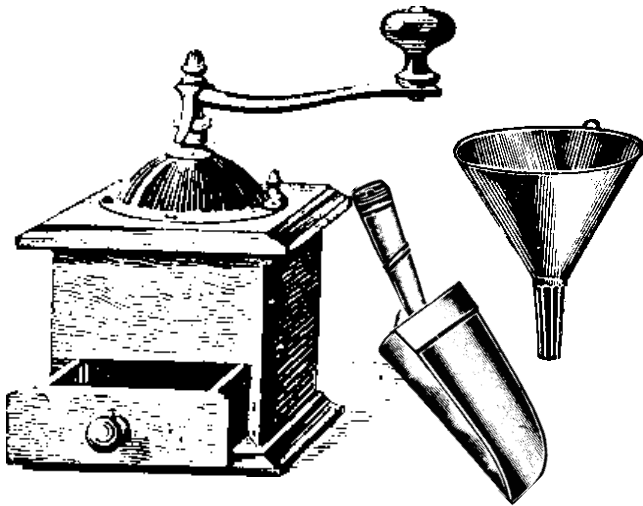
Think about how you will use your antiques and collectibles. If you are a collector of a single item (clocks, teapots or paper-weights), plan a

place to use or store them. Without adequate planning, a hobby that starts out as fun can end up overwhelming you and your surroundings. Even furniture can begin to crowd you out of a room. For example, straight chairs may be light-weight and easy to carry home from auctions, but too many in a small space can be a burden.

Without planning, clutter can reach major proportions before you know it. Objects may become an irritant when dusting. Or you may need to remove some things from a room to provide moving-about space. Ample, attractive and accessible closed storage is one way to prevent objects from cluttering a room.

Built-in storage along one wall or portion of a wall can be a "home" for many collectibles. Group similar things together, and plan shelf height and depth for the size of items stored. These collections may become the focal point of the room if the wall unit is painted the same color as the walls.

Once storage is provided, the hard job is done. These antiques and collectibles can function as part of the interior design. Change your room occasionally by selecting a few favorite items from the storage area and arranging them in the room. After you have enjoyed them for a time, return and exchange them for other items that you want to display and enjoy.



Kitchen Antiques

Kitchen tools, dishes and containers are good choices for beginning collectors. Types of dishes range from silver tea sets to pottery bowls. Collect items you can use first. After you have become familiar with objects that are available, you may want to read more about antique glassware or silver and collect items of value.

Photographs and Frames

Collecting and using old photographs can be lots of fun. Those photos of your own family are usually best because they are a connection with one's own heritage. The discovery of a box of pictures in the attic can lead to hours of enjoyment. Not only is it a challenge to identify the faces, but using them as part of your decor is delightful.

Select either antique frames or simple ones that do not detract from the photograph itself. Plan wall arrangements carefully to avoid an unbalanced look. Collections of small photographs in self-standing frames on a dresser or end table add a nice decorating touch.

Clothes

Antique clothing can be fun to wear, but it can also be used in the interior design of your home. Set off a bedroom wall with a collection of hats. Create a conversation piece by arranging antique clothing on a dress form placed in the corner of a room. Feathers, jewelry and fans can be displayed in shadow boxes or deep panels. They can even be hung on the wall as display objects or arranged on a dresser. Collections can also be enclosed in glass top coffee tables for enjoyment and security.

Quilts

Quilts are often used as home accessories. If the quilt is in good condition, it can be used for its original purpose as a bed covering. In the summer quilts can be hung on a rack at the end of the bed to add color and pattern to the room.

If the quilt is one you would rather not use, it can be hung as a wall hanging or headboard. Use care to avoid damaging the fabric when hanging. Reinforce the edges or roll the top edge of the quilt around a board or dowel rod for extra support.

Insurance, Inventories and Security Notes

Insurance is an obvious safeguard for antiques and collectibles. Insurance should include fire as well as theft coverage. Remember, however, that insurance will never completely cover the value of a collection or an antique.

Small items can be stored in a home safe or in a safety deposit box. Protecting items this way can keep them secure, but most things are meant to be enjoyed. It is a good idea to keep silver and jewelry in a safety deposit box and get them out only when you use them.

Home alarm systems can also be used to prohibit theft. A central station type of alarm that sends out a direct alert to the police is the most effective security system.

Keep two records of your personal property, whether inventories, appraisals, photographs or videotape. One may be kept in a safe, convenient place such as a locked drawer at home or the office, a home safe or even a safety deposit box. Place a copy of the second one in an envelope, label it "Property Belonging to (your name)," and give this sealed envelope to your most trusted friend or relative to place in his or her safety deposit box. This way, in the event of a fire or burglary when your safety deposit key may be gone, you can still get a copy of important lists quickly.

Also, there can be a significant difference between an insurance and an estate appraisal. An insurance appraisal left in an owner's safety deposit box might mistakenly be used in an estate inventory when the content of the box is inventoried by the clerk of court during the probate process.

The reasons for making an inventory or record of your possessions include the following:

1. Helps you adequately insure your property,
2. Serves as a record of what you owned if your property is stolen, damaged or destroyed,
3. Provides sufficient descriptions to help in the recovery of stolen articles and
4. Provides descriptions and value guides for insurance settlements.

Start with four categories: furniture and accessories, silver, china and crystal. Then use a spiral notebook, individual file cards or computer program to list the name, description and value of the items (see example). Some people have dictated these details into a tape recorder to save time and then transcribed them into written form later.

Example

Article	Description	Appraised Value (Optional)
Foyer		
Chest of drawers	Chippendale style. Four drawers. Made by the Baker Furniture Company	\$950
Side chair	Antique. Carved rose at the top. Needle-point seat. Victorian. Inherited from the Rogers Family.	\$275
Fern stand	Reproduction. Round top, long pedestal, Queen Anne feet. Mahogany.	\$150
Living Room		
Lounge chair	Round back, loose cushion. Green and gold upholstery/ legs hidden by skirt.	\$500

Do not get side-tracked by cleaning, polishing silver or hunting for individual receipts or canceled checks. List the items you **know** about first and jot down values that you remember; then finish with the items that you **do not** know about. Place an asterisk beside the items for which you have bills of sale or canceled checks. Look for these **all at one time**. If values are needed for those items that are left, consult a qualified appraiser, or study magazines and books on antiques for approximate values.

Supplement your inventory with photographs or videos. Begin by making four corner shots in each room. Open closets and cabinets for interior photographs. Photograph collections both as a group and individually. Photograph all items of antique value individually. Take close-up pictures of furniture details and of each type of china or silver item to show important identifying marks and styles. Make sure chandeliers and rugs show up in your four corner photographs.

When photographing individual pieces, such as a vase or figurine, place a ruler in the front left corner to help indicate proportion and size. Include pictures of attics, basements, storage rooms, and lawn, porch and patio furniture, as well as tools, appliances and home entertainment equipment.

If using a camcorder, follow a standard sequence for each room, much like using the still camera. An added advantage of video taping is that you can "talk" a family history by telling how and when you purchased or inherited pieces. Start with a general shot from a doorway, and go in one direction around the room. Reposition the camera as needed, continue until you reach the starting doorway, and overlap the starting shot a little. Show details on individual pieces, such as leg turnings, stretchers, labels, repairs, blemishes, etc. Fill the video screen fairly fully with each item.

For sets of china, silver or glassware, arrange a place setting or display showing one of each item. Narrate onto the tape the number of complete sets in the collection and the number of extras included in the group.

After you have inventoried and insured your possessions, you will be able to have greater peace of mind and truly enjoy selecting, arranging and living with your antiques and collectibles. Enjoy the thrill of the hunt, the love of a "find" and the joy of having a sense of place by using antiques and collectibles in your home.

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