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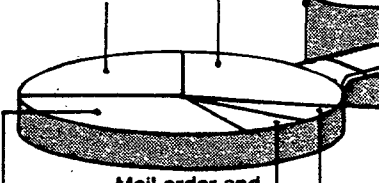
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HOMEFACTS

■ Where Americans buy housewares (1987 housewares market, including appliances, dishes, cookware and utensils)

Drug, grocery, hardware and variety stores 25%

Department stores 28%



Mail order and catalog showrooms 8%
Discounters 32% Warehouse clubs 7%

SOURCE: National Housewares Manufacturers Association

Copley News Service

Finding and displaying quality collectibles

By Sharon Williams
Copley News Service

Antiques offer expert craftsmanship and romance. Today designers may base a room on authentic period pieces or real meshed with reproductions. Or they may mix and match antiques and the new for an eclectic ensemble.

Start a collection, such as weather vanes or snuffboxes, or break the bank account over one unforgettable object, such as a Ming vase. Buy investment pieces guaranteed to appreciate quickly, or simply window shop until you fall in love with a Shaker rocker, china teapot or Amish quilt — then make your move.

But whatever your particular penchant for the past, don't enter the market wide-eyed lest a forgery be waiting for you at the next antique fair.

Read up on the subject through books, newspaper columns and magazines. Visit museums with furniture and objets d'art on exhibit; take an interior design course offered through adult education programs and universities.

Join an antique club or engage in frequent tete-a-tetes with a reputable dealer. Soon, you will be an expert in the periods and categories that interest you.

THRILL OF THE HUNT

If Portobello Road is out of the question financially, improvise by scouting out antique shops in your area — your best bet for finding hundreds of antiques under one roof. Watch your community calendar for antique fairs and shows that will be coming to your area.

If you have dreamed of bidding at Sotheby's or Christie's, check out antique auctions and estate sales. Be sure to study the catalog beforehand if one is available; it will give you a presale low and high estimate and a detailed description of the item with dimensions.

Once you have developed a real eye for antiques, move on to swap meets, flea markets and garage sales.

In these colorful settings, it's conceivable to find a treasure such as a 1920s flapper dress or

Gibson Girl calendar nestled between a black velvet painting and broken toaster — and at bargain prices.

Don't forget cash or traveler's checks, since most operate on a cash-and-carry basis.

No matter where you are shopping, make it a point to seek antiques that show the true signs of wear. Wood should be smooth, but uneven, handmade objects should show some irregularities and drawer tracks should be worn.

Don't shop empty-handed, say the editors of *Travel and Leisure* magazine. With a Polaroid camera, you can photograph an antique you are considering, then compare the picture with the real McCoy to assure authenticity before buying. Bring along a loupe to scrutinize identification marks, such as those found on antiques made of precious metals.

Real value varies with the antique. If it's an investment you're after, consult with experts that you trust before you buy. Objects such as bakelite radios and etchings may be worth acquiring simply because of their sentimental — rather than market — value.

PAST IMPERFECT

Little flaws are what give many antiques their charm and character, but broken glass, missing pulls or a garish finish can make some pieces impossible to live with.

The choices used to be limited: suffer with it as is, make due with what one could find at the hardware store or prepare to pay a small fortune to have the missing part custom-made. Or in the case of finishes, it was either tamper with the stain yourself with mediocre results at best, or hire a professional.

Today's antique enthusiast need not leave behind the object of his dreams simply because it isn't perfect.

The demand for restoration items has spawned hundreds of corporations that specialize in hard-to-find accessories and hardware.

Their merchandise, from fabric to porcelain knobs to pierced tin

—available through catalogs and specialty shops.

Revamping or restoring a finish can be accomplished with some elbow grease, especially when the antique is well-built, structurally sound and made of top-quality wood.

You can dissolve old varnish, lacquer or shellac without harming the patina with furniture refinisher, or strip the existing finish entirely with remover and apply a new one to the bared wood if the damage has gone too far.

In some cases, you might want to paint or stencil a piece of furniture, especially if it is destined for a room with a country or eclectic theme. Some painted-on finishes such as tortoiseshell mimic period techniques and fool the eye.

LIFE WITH AN ANTIQUE

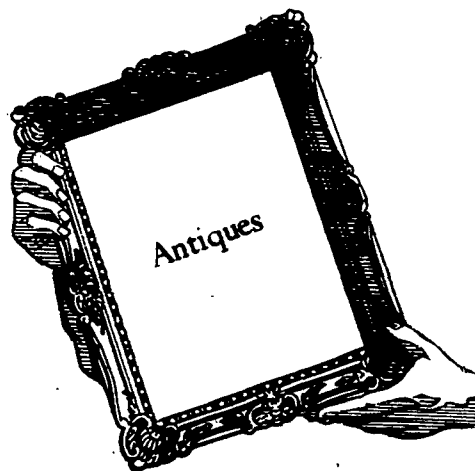
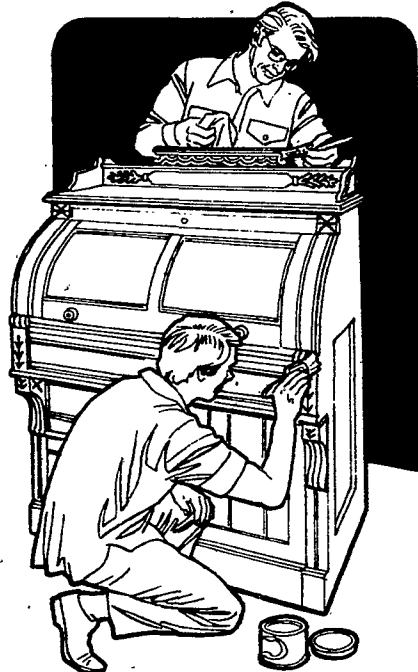
Once you bring it home, you might feel like roping off your new find a la museum to ensure its longevity.

But many dealers say living with an antique means using it as it was intended. Recover and refinish an antique cradle, add fleecy blankets and build a nursery around it, just as you would any other showpiece.

Why not hang 19th century watercolors on the wall and drape a pioneer quilt over a sturdy rocker? Even children can be taught to respect beautiful furnishings and use them with care.

Antique collections are oftentimes best displayed in groupings. Reserve a tabletop, shelf, wall or secretary for your fragile treasures, and further accent them with lighting and room design. Some display pieces, such as postcard and quilt racks and printer's boxes, are antique collectibles in their own right.

To make sure your guests' eyes don't glaze over as they peruse your vast accumulations, you might consider rotating collections. Check with museums and antique experts to find the best storage methods and equipment needed to keep some objects safely under wraps for a few months. The bonus: yet more room for a few more antiques.



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