

Yesterday's furniture makes a comeback

By Barbara DeWitt
Copley News Service

The home furnishings market has gone nostalgic.

Proving that everything old is new again, furniture designers have brought back ornate Chippendale chairs, claw-footed and cabriole-legged tables, iron beds, Victorian wicker settees and Oriental art.

For those who follow the fads, it's merely part of the '60s craze that has hit the United States.

Miniskirts, convertibles and Annette Funicello movies have made a comeback and, from the looks of various companies' offerings, so has that decade's interest in romantic antiques.

In stark contrast to the pale pine and simple Santa Fe styles of recent years, the elaborate, extravagant designs of Thomas Chippendale (1718-79) are holding a high profile. Furniture inspired by many of Chippendale's periods are back, but it is replicas of his Chinese period that seem freshest.

Referred to as Chinese Chippendale, this style of furniture is made of dark mahogany and features ornamental fretwork that gives an open, airy feeling to a cabinet or chair back, as well as added richness.

It and similar furniture from the Victorian and Georgian peri-

ods are in abundance, notably in chairs with gold satin jacquard-covered seats and dining tables on pedestals and brass-footed legs.

In true Victorian form are massive tables with lion's claw-and-ball legs and marble-topped dressers, in addition to ornately carved armoires and bed frames. Softer looks, such as gentle Queen Anne tables with cabriole legs are also popular again.

In addition to English-styled furniture, often with an Oriental flavor, there are furnishings copied from authentic Chinese furniture. Not the sleek, contemporary black lacquer styles of previous years, but elegant furniture inspired by the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

Look for brass poster beds, high-backed chairs with softly curved Chinese lattice, wall-size murals, tasseled silk throw pillows and screens of Oriental figures and flowers.

As for Oriental art, offerings include Samurai statues with verdigris (antique green) finish and hand-carved and hand-painted wood sculptures from Thailand.

While dark furniture seems the newest trend, look also for pickled and pastel-stained pine in a Pennsylvania Dutch theme and a refreshing update of romantic white wicker.

Wicker isn't just for the garden

WICKER TIPS

If you're shopping for vintage wicker:

- Educate yourself. Read books on antiques so you know what you're looking for. One helpful book to consider is "Collecting and Restoring Wicker Furniture" by Richard Saunders (Crown). There are numerous styles, including the whimsical Victorian, the closely woven Cape Cod silhouette, a less-expensive Bar Harbor design, which features a very open weave (both circa 1900) and the angular, straight-lined Mission style of 1915.

- Avoid fakes. Make sure it's authentic by careful examination. Fakes usually have flimsy, circular-woven reed seats instead of cane seats with wooden frames, and they are lightweight due to bamboo frames instead of wood. Authentic antiques are flexible, while fakes are often brittle.

- Understand value and quality. Stores such as Pier One Imports, Cost Plus Imports and the Antique Guild sell complete sets of reproduction wicker (without a hardwood frame) for about \$400, while a single piece of Victorian wicker may cost the same. Prices for old and new wicker will be based on design, finish, condition and quality of workmanship.

- Know your brand names. Leading American brands, which will be more valuable and expensive, are Heywood Brothers, Wakefield Co., and the Lloyd Co. Lesser-known companies include American Fiber, Bolton Willow, Boston Willow, Bielecky Brothers and Heywood-Mor.

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or sun porch, however. Glamorous Victorian settees, chaise lounges, ottomans and rocking chairs have been designed for formal settings. Wicker also is incorporated into elegant, traditional hardwood furniture — as a facade on solid wood frames of china cabinets, dressers, beds and TV-VCR cabinets, for example.

People are buying both antiques and reproductions.

Besides white wicker, there's a big interest in the dark, painted pieces.

While many think antique wicker is too fragile to withstand another generation of wear and tear, it's often a better buy than the reproductions. Victorian wicker was always made with a hardwood frame, and often the seats were wood or wood-framed with a cane seat, while some of today's furniture (which is made entirely of wicker) will quickly sag and break.

Since furniture has made a sharp turn to elegant nostalgia for spring, light fixture and accessory companies also have changed directions. Oriental-theme ginger jar lamps, Tiffany lamps and crystal chandeliers are back.

In accessories, there is also an Art Deco mood. Statues of glamorous women with pedigreed hounds on a leash grace a Victorian mantle or a faux marble portable column.

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