

PAST PRESENCE | ANTIQUES FOR THE HOME

story **autumn rhea carpenter**
photography **mathew sturtevant**

Collecting antiques is no longer a hobby reserved for grandmother types who spend their days dusting Victorian couches, mismatched tea sets, and aged lace doilies. These days, a broad spectrum of people are getting in on the action by personalizing their homes with unique finds and learning history in the process.

Decorating your home with antiques takes some skill. Pay attention to quality and detail, educate yourself, trust your instinct, and remember to have fun.

Home decorating considerations begin with color, light, texture, and design. Antiques add character to a home and maintain a separate set of rules. An antique must be at least 100 years old. Value is determined by its patina (the sheen on an object's surface layer as a result of aging), workmanship, detail, and condition.

"There has been a shift in the last ten years in the kinds of antiques that people are collecting," said Douglas Galloway owner of B. Douglas Fine Art & Antiques. "During the 80s, people collected specifically Victorian or French antiques. Now, clients are mixing styles and periods and are developing truly eclectic collections."

In the past decade more young people have shown an interest in antiques. "If you read an issue of Architectural Digest or Better Homes and Gardens there are always examples of modern homes that are accented by antique furniture, accessories, and lamps," said Francisca Tung, owner of Lotus Asian Art & Antiques. "Asian antiques go well with contemporary designs because of the clean lines. That simple style has made a comeback."

While decorating with antiques has gained popularity, finding the utmost quality is always paramount. "Quality antiques are harder to find than they were ten years ago," said Ann Attal, owner of Austin Galleries. "The prices of antiques have also drastically increased. They are a great investment and I think people that can afford antiques will keep on buying them."

When designing with antiques, scale is an important element to

>>

facing page sampling of premium denim lines available at hem



consider. “If have a large living room and buy one small object, it will get lost in the room,” said Tung. “It is important to consider where the eye is drawn and think about proportion and space.”

Contemporary homes can sometimes seem cold, and antique furnishings may add warmth. “Simply placing an antique chest in a modern room makes the space more inviting,” said Galloway. “Placing modern chairs around an antique table mixes time and place. Our lives require simplicity and cannot withstand rooms crammed with antiques anymore. You have to get creative with your antique usage.”

Decorating a modern home with antique accessories has become a popular notion, according to Jack Wheeler, owner of Wheeler Jack & Kate Art & Antiques. “We specialize in antique silver and have seen an upsurge in decorating with the precious metal,” he said. “Contrary to popular belief, the upkeep for

silver is minimum. I also encourage buyers to use the items and not just display them.”

For those clients daunted by the task of decorating, there are various solutions to consider. “Visit museums and discover which displays catch your attention,” said Tung. “Educate yourself, especially if you are going to invest in a high-end item. Spend money on one high quality piece that you really like and can afford. It is more important to invest in an antique for its quality workmanship, rather than to go for the cheap deal.”

Galloway continued. “In the land of antiques, there are no consumer reports. If you’re interested in a table, learn how it was constructed, what materials were used, and in what era it was designed. Learn everything you can about the item.”

Whether your decorating style includes Tang Dynasty 19th-century pottery horses, Huang Huali wood tables, Scottish snuff horns, or royal silver from the reign of King George

V, antique dealers are trained to locate their clients’ desires.

A buyer should always purchase antiques from a reputable dealer to ensure that quality standards are met. “I do not want to fool anyone because I do not like to be fooled myself,” said Wheeler. “These days sophisticated designers know what to buy, but are looking more at the item’s design rather than at its value. Clients should know that antiques are an investment. I never sold a piece that is worth less today than when I first bought it. I cannot say the same about the stock market.”

People purchase antiques for various reasons. “Determine whether you want the piece to house something, hide something, or serve as a showcase that tells a story,” said Wheeler. “Decide where you want the drama and focus your energy there. You can spend

this page sampling of premium denim lines available at hem

>>





\$100 or \$15,000; it all depends on your style and budget.”

Tastes in antiques vary according to the buyer’s style, budget, and the season.

“Textiles displayed as art are big now,” said Tung. “They create such a beautiful, contemporary look.”

Decorating trends often depend on the season, according to Galloway. “During the holidays, the dining room is the focal point and we sell more chairs and tables,” he said. “During the summer, there is more attention on accessories that tourists take home from their Austin travels. It really depends on the time of year.”

Attal added that paintings are always in

high demand. “We sell a lot of 18th-century antique paintings,” she said. “We once sold a French tapestry that was framed and padded for a headboard.”

Allowing customers to take antiques home to test out the feeling is also a common approach, Attal added. “We encourage our clients to take pieces home and live with them for a few days to make sure they love the piece.”

“I get protective and want to find the perfect buyer,” said Wheeler. “The piece and the person should make a connection, and I like to know that the buyer really appreciates the find, not just for its value, but also for its history.”

Antique dealers revel in discovering that special find. “I found a large 1850s caseement that housed Our Lady of Mount Carmel,” said Douglas. “The saint was carved out of wood and dressed in a beautiful gown. The Holy Spirit even floated above it. The woman who bought the piece collected saints, and her mother had actually been a patron of the Carmelite Order: the last check she had written before she died was to the order. There was an immediate connection for the woman, and it seemed like a divine process had happened. That’s really the magic of working in antiques.” **AC**

this page sampling of premium denim lines available at hem

GD



GOODNITE & DRAPER

AUSTIN’S PREMIERE SOURCE FOR MID-CENTURY MODERN FURNISHINGS

Art • Lighting • Sofas Extraordinaire
Offering Complete Design Services

Kathryn Goodnite
512.619.8737

Stacy Draper
512.431.1455

1201 W. 6th Street, Suite D, Third Floor • Austin, Texas 78703