

The Curse of the Corner Cupboard

Written by Libby Holloway

Wednesday, 12 October 2011 10:15



I receive a lot of calls from new residents to the area who have more furniture than they need. Many times these folks have wonderful antiques to sell. Now, everyone realizes that the current market for anything, except gold, is not very lively. Items deemed “non-essentials” have suffered the most. Some misguided souls have even lumped beautiful antiques and art into this black hole. The good news? If you are fortunate enough to have extra money lying around, this is a great time to buy.

I’ve attended many auctions in the last few weeks where sterling silver did very well, due to its reflected glory from its cousin gold and the memory of high market prices over the summer. But auctioneers were seen shaking their heads sadly as piece after piece of good antique furniture, oriental rugs and even contemporary art sold for bargain prices. The dealers and collectors who have money to spend were the only joyful ones in the room... certainly the sellers looked glum. I did get a chuckle when I saw a very respected and elegant looking dealer practically running from the room with a “vahze” clutched in her arms, mumbling about getting a steal.

To add to the woes of dealers everywhere, there are certain types of furniture that are currently out of fashion. This idea of being in and out of fashion is not new, just faster moving than in the past. Fashion can be driven by political factors, such as the poor response to Persian rugs or French pieces, as we fall in and out of love with those countries. Consumers will buy items of questionable quality if someone famous touts a particular designer. Any dealer in the business for more than five years can point to examples of collectibles that are popular after a decorating magazine shows them to advantage until another issue comes out with something else featured. Then there is the influence of television shows with people running around poking through barns and attics getting excited over various rusty-dusties.

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Oops... got sidetracked, now back to being out of fashion. Fall or drop front desks were once a treasure, but have been out of fashion since the advent of home computers. The popularity of laptops has allowed a slight recovery, which I think will continue. Anything oak is also unpopular in this area and most of the Southeast. When looking for insurance replacement values, I have to shop where these pieces are available – in the Midwest, where oak emporiums make oak look truly “golden.” When those same pieces go on the market here as part of an estate they are selling for less than half the replacement value. The cost of gas to ship them to where they’re appreciated prohibits that plan. The surge of good-looking designer rugs in oriental patterns has severely depleted the number of homeowners buying real Orientals (as in not made in India or China). These manufacturers arose when it became unpopular to buy from middle eastern countries during the 1980’s, and they haven’t lost their hold on market share since.

Now to my title piece, the much loved but unfortunate corner cupboard. So many people bring wonderful examples with them when they move to the Lowcountry, only to realize that we don’t have corners here. Of course we have corners in the rooms, but walls of windows make deep corners for deep cupboards rare. Hanging corner cupboards are the worst victims of all. Because people are wary of blocking light or having the back of a piece of furniture visible, they are not buying pieces, dealers won’t take them on, and many are left propped on blocks in garages and storage units. One last cautionary statement to those of you hoping to sell family treasures is this. Larger size does not mean larger price tag. Smaller homes and less wall space, even in huge homes around here, make the larger pieces white elephants in more ways than one. I hate seeing huge sideboards with all that lovely storage being shunned on the sales floor.

Smart dealers are constantly thinking of ways to repurpose these out-of-fashion items to keep the interest in them up. I’ve seen large wardrobes in kitchens and massive sideboards made into bathroom sinks. If I can just come up with a few great ways to repurpose corner cupboards, I’ll let you know.

Libby Holloway is a Certified Appraiser of antiques and residential contents. She is a member of the International Society of Appraisers where she is currently serving as Secretary of the Board of Directors. She is also a partner at Antiques and Such in Beaufort, SC. Libby can be contacted at www.LibbyHollowayAppraisals.com

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