

TAKING THE CHAIR

To highlight how the design of furniture has changed over the years, we asked five exhibitors at the upcoming South African Antique Dealers' Association Fair to each showcase a chair they feel epitomises the era they specialise in

DAVID PORTER ON GEORGIAN DESIGN: 1714 – 1820

David Porter, a specialist dealer in 18th- and 19th-century furniture, says that this mahogany elbow chair, circa 1795, by the English designer Thomas Sheraton, is a superb example of chairs of this era. "Even if you were able to replicate the exquisite craftsmanship of the period, you would never be able to find the same magnificent woods that they used then," he adds.

Design notes: The Georgian period which fell between the reigns of the three kings of England – George 1, 11 and 111 – is known as the Golden Age of furniture making. "This period is known as the time when walnut replaced mahogany," says David. This particular chair is made in a fine, straight-grained Cuban mahogany with a beautiful rich patina. Interestingly, Sheraton recommended the use of Cuban or



A fine example of a mahogany elbow chair, circa 1795.



Neoclassical-style Cape armchair.

Spanish mahogany as the straight grain "will rub bright and keep cleaner than any Honduras wood".

Typical Georgian design details to note on this chair are the finely tapered and reeded legs and slightly curved and reeded arms. The arm supports are elegantly swept – a masterful example of the cabinetmaker's art. In this instance, the back splat is shaped and has an oval inlaid panel.

Names to look out for: Some of the most famous designers of the time were Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Adams,

and in the mid- to late-Georgian period, Sheraton, who was known for the elegance, grace and simplicity of his designs.

David's buying tips: When buying a chair of this quality and age, it's essential that the chair is carefully checked for damage and restoration. Some restoration is inevitable and acceptable in furniture of this age, particularly as a result of reupholstery.

Expect to pay: In excess of R30 000 for a chair of this quality in pristine condition.



JO-MARIE RABE ON CAPE FURNITURE: 1785 – 1840

"Cape furniture appeals because of its honesty and provides a social document of our history," says Jo-Marie Rabe of Piér Rabe Antiques. "It's also indigenous and therefore truly 'green' as it hasn't been transported here from somewhere else in the world." She's chosen to showcase this Cape Patrician town armchair, circa 1795, which is in a neoclassical style. "Its simplified straight lines make it so easy to combine with modern 20th-century pieces," she says.

Design notes: Chairs from this period are characterised by straight lines and include architectural details such as reeding, fluting and stringing with some inlay work. They have slender tapering legs, undefined feet and may be reinforced with an H-stretcher (so called because the three supports positioned between the legs create the shape of an 'H'). Pieces were commonly made from stinkwood, sometimes with a yellowwood inlay.

TEXT DIANA WEMYSS PHOTOGRAPHS ANTHONY JOHNSON

That said, it's important to note that there are very distinct characteristics associated with furniture from different towns and regions. "For example, the furniture from the Riversdale area has inlaid legs, whereas Sandveld furniture is particularly distinctive in its simplicity and the use of fruit woods," Jo-Marie explains.

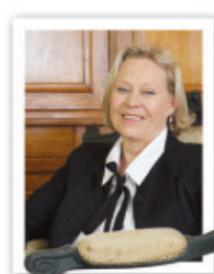
Names to look out for: "Very little is known about the makers of Cape furniture and we are continually following up clues and adding to our knowledge," says Jo-Marie.

Jo-Marie's buying tips: It's fairly easy to spot a good piece because the timber will be chosen without knots and the joints will be well done. Condition is vital to value; once a piece has been worked on or over-cleaned it can lose value. Good provenance always adds value, but this must be fully documented.

Expect to pay: Prices range from R10 000 to R35 000. The rarer a chair is, even if a single chair, the greater the value; this Cape Patrician town armchair is R35 000.

JUSTINE FERRIGNO ON THE NAPOLEON III PERIOD: 1852 – 1870

"I really love the Napoleon III style. Many pieces from this period were lacquered in black, which can make for a striking focal point in any room no matter what the decor," says Justine Ferrigno of Le Brocanteur, dealers



Napoleon III-style fauteuil in black-painted fruit wood.

in French furniture. "This armchair or fauteuil dates from 1860 and features black-painted fruit wood with a moulded, padded back, down-swept arms and turned, tapering stop-fluted legs; the arms and seat are upholstered in an Aubusson-style tapestry."

Design notes: Sometimes called the Second Empire, the Napoleon III period incorporated elements from all the preceding styles. There was a profusion of materials and a wealth of decorative motifs with a generous mix of 17th- and 18th-century styles. "This is what made it such an exciting and vibrant period," enthuses Justine.

The period is largely associated with the renovation of Paris under Baron Haussmann. Mahogany and ebony were commonly used to make furniture with inlays in box, holly, pear and walnut woods as well as porcelain, tortoise shell, pearl and ivory with ormolu (brass) ornamentation in the style of André-Charles Boulle, Louis XIV's cabinetmaker. This era saw the development of techniques that allowed chairs to become more comfortable with upholstery work.

Names to look out for: Although pieces were seldom signed, the important names of the time are Bellangé, Beurdeley, Cremer, Dasson, Grohé, Diehl, Gordin, Fourdinois, Linke and Sormani.

Justine's buying tips: A fine patina and good proportions are the things to look out for when buying. The paintwork can be worn but should never be reapplied.

Original upholstery work is rare, but modern fabrics are acceptable as long as they are in keeping with the original look and style.

Expect to pay: Prices for a Louis V-style chair by Gordin would be around R24 000. This chair by an unknown maker is R8 900.



GEOFF BURR ON ART NOUVEAU DESIGN: 1875 – 1910



This Marjorelle chair epitomises the sinuous styling of the Art Nouveau period.

Geoff Burr of Burr & Muir Antiques, who specialises in the Art Nouveau period, picked this handsome chair designed by French designer Louis Majorelle (1859 – 1926). "It's a functional piece of furniture that appeals to the masculine sensibility, in spite of the fact that Art Nouveau is such a strongly feminine style," he says.

Design notes: Chairs designed by well-known Art Nouveau designers all have nature and, more specifically, plants and their components as a dominant theme. The arms and >

VISIT THE SAADA FAIR AT KIRSTENBOSCH

The South African Antique Dealers' Association (SAADA) Fair is taking place at Kirstenbosch in Cape Town on Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 February from 10h00 – 17h00. Entrance is R30 per person. For more info, call 021 422 1319 or visit www.saada.co.za

legs are carved to look like the twisting or interlacing lines of creeping stems and marquetry is sometimes used to adorn the backs of chairs, although this type of decoration is most commonly found on the flat surfaces of tables and cabinets.

Furniture from this period was most often made from mahogany, although walnut and rosewood were also used. While pieces may have been made from exotic woods like pear, teak, ash, maple, palm and jarrah, these types of timber were mostly used in the marquetry decoration.

Names to look out for: Majorelle was undoubtedly the top cabinetmaker of the Art Nouveau period, producing the largest range of furniture between the years 1898 and 1906. He worked in Nancy, but marketed his wares all over France and exhibited at all the Paris salons, receiving worldwide acclaim for the quality and beauty of his creations.

Other noteworthy French designers were Émile Gallé, Georges de Feure and Hector Guimard. Outside of France, famous cabinetmakers included Victor Horta in Belgium and Antonio Gaudi in Spain.

Geoff's buying tip: Sometimes pieces such as cabinets and tables are signed with a designer's name. There are quite complete catalogues of the work of the

best-known cabinetmakers, so if not signed, an item can often be found in one of the many books on the subject.

Expect to pay: R25 000 for a single side chair and up to about R50 000 for an attractive armchair.

JUSTIN KERROD ON MID-CENTURY MODERN DESIGN: 1933 – 1965



Danish Teak Model 71 dining chair designed by N.O. Møller in 1951.

For Justin Kerrod of Kerrod Antiques, who specialises in Mid-Century Modern (MCM) furniture, the chair that best sums up the design aesthetics of this era is this Danish Teak Model 71 dining chair, which was designed by Danish furniture designer N.O. Møller in 1951. "It's superbly constructed with a clean design and a deep, curved backrest that's hugely comfortable," he says. "Many similar looking chairs have been produced in this style over the years, but none have come close to the perfect marriage of simplicity, aesthetics and utility as this."

Design notes: "The appeal of MCM furniture is simplicity; there was great attention to detail in the design and

manufacture of each piece and there was no reliance on ornamentation to create beauty," Justin explains. "Strictly speaking MCM should include only 1950s post-war design, but as this now includes the influence of, for example, the Bauhaus movement, the MCM period is now considered to be roughly 1933 – 1965."

MCM design from the '50s is more organic and less formal than the Modernist style (from early 20th century), but still rejects unnecessary applied ornamentation. The materials used tend to be more natural, including wood (teak and rosewood were favourites), leather, rattan and paper cord; Danish furniture was finished with oil rather than a synthetic 'varnish'.

Names to look out for: Famous 1950s designers include Finn Juhl, Ole Wanscher, Kaare Klint, Percival Lafer and Sergio Rodrigues. Pieces by earlier designers such as Eileen Grey, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe are very sought after.

Justin's buying tips: Whether mass-produced or handcrafted, there are levels of expertise and craftsmanship; there is no harm in buying mass-produced designs, as long as they are sold to you at mass-produced prices. Always be sure that what you are buying is authentic and buy from reputable dealers who know their game as some traders sell local designs as Danish classics.

Expect to pay: In excess of R5 000 for a single MCM named chair. Justin has teamed this chair from a set of six with a N.O. Møller dining table and two Model 77 chairs, which sell for R50 000. A set of six Frystark chairs from the same period would be about R6 000. **GH**

SOURCES

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