

A journey to the past

Investing in antiques can be a fulfilling passion – a pastime that is enjoyed by many enthusiasts all over the world. However, for novices, the world of antiques can be rather intimidating. Here are a few tips from local antique experts.

With mass production being what it is today, creating hand-crafted furniture and objets d'art is a dying art. It is because of this fact, that the popularity of antiques is an ever upward curve, as each piece is an expression of a person's character, is a decorative and often a functional object, as well as being an item of investment.

Antiques cover an exceptionally wide range of types, designs, historical periods and styles that may seem daunting to beginners who are not all that clued up about the subject. Generally speaking, when collecting antiques, it is not only important to choose pieces that appeal to you, but it is essential that you are as knowledgeable as possible about the various periods, telltale signs and elements that will make various pieces valuable. Here are a few pointers for beginners from two local antique experts – Marylou Bawden from the South African Antique Dealers Association, and Clyde Terry from Clyde on 4th Antiques and organiser of the Nelson Mandela Square Antique Fair:

How old must an item be to be considered an antique?

Marylou: The dictionary definition of an antique is something that is 100 years old or over. However, just because something is over 100 years, does not make it necessarily valuable. Antony Wiley, well known Johannesburg antique valuer, states that a quality piece from the 1930s is better than buying a second rate antique from the 1830s. He explains that the craftsmanship and quality is vital to the value of any piece of furniture and it must be known that not every antique is an investment.





How do you determine a piece's age?

Clyde: Determining age can be a tricky business – it all depends on what you are looking for. If it were a piece of furniture, you would look at the wood, the hinges, the joins and the quality of the overall item. Some pieces of china on the other hand, are clearly marked and make the task an easy one. For unmarked pieces of china, you would assess the quality of the paste, the weight of the work, as well as the art work. Silver can also be easily identified with the right books at hand. Some markings are rather difficult to identify and take a professional eye on all aspects of deciding the age of an item.

Marylou: Age is determined in different ways, depending on what it is. English silver is always fully hallmarked, from these marks one can identify the exact year it was made, the town it was made in and the maker who made it. A lot of porcelain is also marked where it is easy to date it to within just a few years. Most antiques, however, are not as easy to date. This is where buying from a reputable dealer comes in. A good dealer has spent years researching and learning about their particular speciality. Properties such as fashion trends, manufacturing techniques and natural wear and tear are all carefully scrutinised and from this, a dealer will determine the date of an item.

It is with this same experience that dealers can pick up when an item is a reproduction. Brand new reproductions are easy to see, as there is no wear and tear. It is when a piece is a later copy of an earlier design that it is not easy for an inexperienced person to pick up. This is where a member of the South African Antique Dealers Association (SAADA) can help you. For example, Maryanne Rowings of A.D. Antiques talks about two chests of drawers in her shop at the moment – saying that they both look like George III pieces, but while the first is a genuine George III chest of drawers dated circa 1790, the second, on closer inspection, is a turn of the century copy of an earlier example. Although it is still an antique in its own right, it is important to be aware that there is more than 100 years difference between the two and considerable difference in price.

Who is SAADA?

The South African Antique Dealers Association (SAADA) was formed in 1963 to further the interests of antique dealers and collectors.

SAADA is internationally affiliated through The International Confederation of Dealers in Works of Art (CINOA) and all members of SAADA have a proven reputation for integrity and honest dealing. All purchases are assured by a written guarantee.

SAADA is relied upon by the Department of Customs for certifications of imports. Only genuine antiques are not subject to import duty and members of SAADA are regularly asked by Customs to check containers that are brought into the country.

For more information, visit www.saada.co.za.