



TIPS FOR BUYING FINE FRENCH FURNITURE FROM MARY HELEN MCCOY

CHARLESTON, S.C., October 15, 2008 – Collecting fine French Antiques can enhance your home, provide you with a lifelong, fascinating pastime, a lucrative investment and a legacy for your heirs. Yet many people are intimidated by the complexities of identifying what's real and what's not and what is a fair price. Mary Helen McCoy, president and founder of Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques, one of the nation's premier sources for fine and unusual, period, 16th- to 19th-century French furniture and decorative arts and based in Charleston, provides some guidelines:

Look

“Learn to notice if the carving is crisp,” Mary Helen advises. Be like the experts. Examine pieces from every angle, upside down, inside and backs. Train your eye by looking at fine examples of French antiques. Study authentic pieces found in museums. Among the many museums in this country that have collections are:

- The Cleveland Museum of Art
- Detroit Institute of Art
- The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Frick Collection in New York City
- The New Orleans Museum of Art

To see more fine French decorative arts visit the leading shows where dealers are vetted to participate. These include:

- The International Fine Art and Antique Dealers Show, New York, N.Y.
- Palm Beach Fine Art & Antiques Fair, Palm Beach, Fla.
- The San Francisco Fall Antiques Fair, San Francisco, Ca.
- Winter Antiques Show, N.Y.

Notice

It is natural for antiques to show signs of wear. Do not expect the same symmetry you see in a manufactured piece. Learn to notice if and how a piece has been repaired. Beware of nails and screws as screws were never used in the production of antique French furniture and hand-forged nails only occasionally. At that time furniture was mortised and doweled. “We are the stewards to keep antiques alive,” Mary Helen says. It is O K if something has been repaired as long as it has been done in keeping with the “way it was born,” she explains.

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Touch

Run your hand across a piece. Edges become smooth from dusting and use. An 18th century chair will have a handmade back, while 19th century pieces (made after the industrial revolution) may have a machine-made back.

Read

When you visit antique shows you will find an abundance of books and magazines to help guide you on your quest for knowledge. Also check the Internet. Some of the best books on antiques may currently be out of print but are available second hand on the Internet.

Beware

In France in 1751 *La Communauté des Maîtres Menuisiers et Ébénistes de la Ville, Faubourgs et Banlieu de Paris* (The Community of Master Joiners and Cabinetmakers of the City, Suburbs and Municipal Areas of Paris) was formed. This society appointed jurors to see that unaccepted craftsmen did not work and deceive the public with defective materials and inferior quality. The jurors visited the master four times a year to oversee their work. Each master had a special stamp for marking his work. But beware, a stamp is not sufficient proof of a piece's authenticity as these stamps have often been forged. Quality of design, craftsmanship and condition are more important than evidence of a mark.

Be selective

Quality is your best investment. Be careful with whom you deal. The Syndicat National des Antiquaires (SNA), the Confédération Internationale des Négociants en Oeuvres d'Art (CINOA) and The Art and Antique Dealers League of America all evaluate their members on a regular basis, so membership in one of these societies is good evidence of a reputable dealer.

Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques is one of only 15 dealers in the United States to be a member of the prestigious Syndicat National des Antiquaires (SNA). It is also a member of the esteemed Confédération Internationale des Négociants en Oeuvres d'Art (CINOA) and The Art and Antique Dealers League of America for which Mary Helen serves on the Board of Directors. Mary Helen also serves on the Board of Trustees for the Birmingham Museum of Art.

Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques is located at 120 King Street in Charleston, S.C., and is open Monday to Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information, call 843-577-6445, fax 843-577-6447, e-mail MHMcAntq@aol.com or visit www.maryhelenmccoy.com

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