



Kissing with

When you think of antiques, do you conjure images of spindly occasional tables or untouchable museum pieces?

People who live with antiques take a different view. For them, bringing a new piece into the home is akin to welcoming a new family member.

"Antiques with artistic merit also can be utilitarian," says Michael Markley, whose Château des Bois Collection™ of French 18th- and 19th-century, solid wood, intricately carved furniture is on view at Carolyn Thompson's Antique Center of Texas, and on the Internet at www.mmarkley.com.

Markley advises homeowners to incorporate distinctive, one-of-a-kind pieces that fit their lifestyles. "Select antiques you will want to spend years with because they please you—they fit your personal style and the ambience in your home."

Texas homes with spacious rooms and high ceilings are ideal for antiques whose size, artistry and functionality work with casually elegant to very formal themes.

Decorating modern homes with antiques requires the careful blending of old and new.

"Eighteenth- and 19th-century French craftsmen did not make sofas or coffee tables," Markley explains. "You could pair an Italian leather sofa and a wooden coffee table carved in the Philippines—these combine well with a 19th-century oak cabinet and an 18th-century armoire."

For more inspiration, turn to Rienzi, the Southwest's most important collection of European decorative arts. Philanthropists Harris Masterson III and his wife, Carroll Sterling Masterson gave their home, Rienzi, to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, along with their exquisite collection.



Although Rienzi is closed to the public until November, you can look inside and see some of the collection's highlights online. Visit www.mfah.org to find Rienzi under "Destinations."

Rienzi has a wide-ranging collection of mid-18th-century English furniture; however, museum director and curator of decorative arts Katherine Howe reminds us that a beloved antique can be small enough to fit into your hand.



Howe grows animated as she tells of the Mastersons' adored collection of Worcester porcelain. A prized Worcester porcelain wine funnel was acquired at a West Coast auction. As she describes the hunt, and the quick, decisive action to purchase the prized object, Howe also reminds us that for a collector, the pursuit is at least half the fun.

When you take a virtual tour of Rienzi on the museum's Web site, you also can see a lovely gilded stool made for the Palm room at Spencer House, ancestral home of Diana, Princess of Wales. It is a beautiful piece, and knowing its distinguished history makes it all the more special.

In "antiques speak" the word for an object's history and ownership is *Provenance*, and it spells the difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary. A pen from the 1860s may be worth a few dollars. The writing instrument Abraham Lincoln used to pen the Gettysburg Address is worth vastly more.

To learn some of the lingo before your first auction, visit www.pbs.org and type "Antiques Roadshow" into the search engine. This Web site is a treasure trove of antiques tidbits and useful information. It also whets your

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appetite for the thrill of discovery that happens on almost every episode.

Another wonderful way to test the antique-collecting waters is to attend the Young Collectors' event at the Theta Charity Antiques Show on September 12 at Reliant Center. You only need be under 40 to be "young," or, says last year's chairman Linda Bloss, "young at heart."

"The Young Collectors' party is a very fun and comfortable way to learn, ask questions and see what appeals to your taste," Bloss says. "The dealers love to share their knowledge, too."

Echoing Howe's observation that fine antiques also come in small packages, Bloss says she enjoys collecting antique pitchers.

"With 55 dealers including outstanding Houston dealers as well as others from across America and England, the Theta show offers a wide variety of furniture, porcelains, paintings, tribal items, books, brass and more," Bloss says.



Although the items are old, the world of antiques is dynamic and ever-changing. Garden and architectural antiques are growing areas of interest, reflected in the increased number of items dealers have begun offering at the Theta Charity Antiques Show.

Cherished antiques are much more than mere objects. They are infused with family lore and shared memories. Martha Turner tells the story of the 17th-century Dutch chest (pictured on inside cover) her husband Glenn Bauguss found at an Antiques Show at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

"We knew it was old, but it didn't look like much," Martha says, shaking her head. "Glenn brought it home and had Mr. R. J. Simpson, restorer of fine antiques, clean it up and polish it. Only then could you see what a fine piece it really is. It shows you that collectors look for potential."

Smitten with their discovery, they hired Decorative Arts' Bee Morrow and Randy Jones to build a matching cabinet. Now the pair form the focal point of Martha and Glenn's living room.



Markley said his life with antiques began when he and his wife Meril, found themselves as newlyweds living in Paris, home of the world's largest wholesale antique market. Michael still remembers Meril's dismay at the first piece he brought to their Paris apartment—a 150-year-old Breton wedding cabinet, in chestnut, sporting carved gothic spires and the head of the bride and groom carved on the front doors. Caked in dust and covered with spots from being left out in the rain, it was a wreck. After a good cleaning and waxing, it turned out that solid construction and first-rate materials overcame years of neglect.

"As to the cabinet, we still haven't figured out which head is the man's and which is the woman's, but the piece has grown on us and we still enjoy living with it."

Photographs, left to right:
Worcester Porcelain Plate, c. 1813
Stool, attributed to John Vardy, for Spencer House Clock, nephrite, silver, silver-gilt, diamonds and enamel, by Peter Carl Fabergé, c. 1908-17
Worcester Porcelain cream pot, c. 1776
Small commode, attributed to Pierre Langlois, London, 1759-82
Photography courtesy of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Rienzi Collection, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harris Misterson III.

Titanic menu auctioned at Hart Galleries for \$72,000.
Photo courtesy of Hart Galleries.

