



# Why Have Antiques?

By Thomas Jayne

It is not uncommon today, especially among my younger clients, to raise the question, "Why have antiques?" Some of them even begin our work together by announcing that they want nothing old at all. I offer that even in this modern age, there is great value in decorating with antiques: they add visual depth, texture, and personality to every type of room. There are other benefits, such as they are usually less expensive than comparable new furniture, and often, unlike their recent counterparts, retain value.

Furthermore, I am prepared to declare that there are very few rooms that are triumphs of design that feature only new elements. The best rooms mix the old and new, or as we say in our office, the ancient and the modern. The greatest rooms are often located within a historic building or place, or have at least some antique furnishings.

Perhaps this personal stance stems from growing up in a cradle of modernism, Pacific Palisades, California, where interiors were often filled with the new and modern. Many of my childhood friends lived in modernist houses, some of them revered case study examples by great architects, including Richard Neutra and A. Quincy Jones. Yet virtually all of them relied on antiques as part of their decoration. I got to know these houses long after their original architects photographed them showing a strict, didactic arrangement of contemporary, so-called mid-century style furniture, very often of their own design. Usually, soon after these photographs were taken, other types of furniture would make their way into these rooms. Those pieces reflected a diversity of styles and cultures, ranging from the Baroque to the Victorian and from countries in Europe, Asia, and Central and South America. One of the best examples of this type of style that preserves

that dynamic mix of old and new can be seen in the house of noted mid-twentieth-century designers Charles and Ray Eames; the structure is now a National Historic Landmark.

Even in my family's relatively simple mid-century house, one that did not have the benefit of an architect, I saw the essential role that antiques played in successful interiors. This became apparent to me when comparing the houses of my mother's sister Grace and our own. Aunt Grace started housekeeping with all new, so-called Danish modern furniture, which she kept during the course of her more than forty years of living in her home. She did relax its regimented appearance somewhat by gradually adding a few antique pieces: some old rugs, rare books, and paintings. However, to my eye, my mother created a more attractive and interesting house from the start. She furnished the place with an artful combination of antiques, both inherited and collected. Some of the pieces were neo-classical, but mostly they were Victorian in style, and they were placed along with contemporary furniture that provided function and artistic contrast. Mother, when explaining the difference between their two houses, recalled the slightly acerbic comment Aunt Grace made when she visited us for the first time, "Oh, I see you took all those old things..."

Today, most of the rooms I decorate use a mixture of old and new furnishings. I often start by placing comfortable upholstery arranged into relaxed seating groups around the room and then supplement with a few contemporary and durable pieces. These address the practical considerations first. Then the antiques usually sit at the edges to avoid hard wear, or I select particularly hardy models if they are going to have active use. I think this combination makes for the most enjoyable houses, those that are physically satisfying and visually interesting.

Two favorite rooms of my own design that employ this mix are a living room I decorated in a house in Southampton, New York and a dining room for a townhouse in Philadelphia.

In the Hamptons house, the upholstery is new, but the side tables are by the widely lauded twentieth-century Paris firm of Jansen, and the neo-classic consoles are nineteenth-century French. This furniture is juxtaposed with an early and artfully worn Axminster carpet and prints from Matisse's *Jazz* series. These two particular elements make the room memorable.

Photograph by William Waldron



Old and new elements are blended to create a distinctive room in the Hamptons



A modern table is partnered with antique chairs for a striking presentation

Photograph by Pieter Estersohn



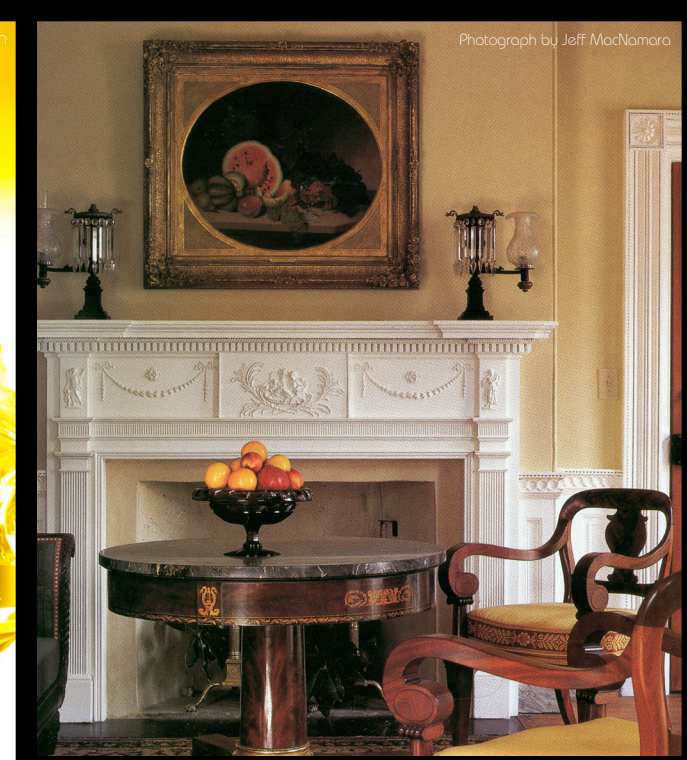
The Hudson River is a dramatic backdrop for this eclectic collection of furniture and art

Photograph by Anthony Catsifas



Photograph by Pieter Estersohn

Jayne's loft is a brilliant room of contrasts



Photograph by Jeff MacNamara

A historical perspective in Charleston

Another example of my work on historically accurate rooms is a bedroom within a house in New York State. It is seemingly from the nineteenth century with painted floors, period curtains, bed hangings and wonderful nineteenth-century portraits. In this instance, the combined period details produce a kind of up-to-date feeling.



Period details highlight a gracious bedroom in New York State

Photograph by Pieter Estersohn

A mixture of old and new furnishings is physically satisfying and visually interesting

As you visit this august antiques show and consider the array of beauty and utility, take into account the value of antiques in today's rooms and the many ways they can be used. It is worth noting that my mother's, and later my aunt's, choice to use old things in their houses was vindicated by the dispersal of their material goods: much of the new furniture went to charity and "those old things" maintained their value and live on in our family houses. ■

In the dining room of the Philadelphia house, a 1970s table by Karl Springer, lacquered bright blue, visually plays against a very handsome set of Portuguese chairs from the eighteenth century, a pair of Italian commodes from the early nineteenth century, and eighteenth-century French paintings. If the chairs chosen were of the more typical, clean-lined modern variety, the room would not be as dynamic and engaging.

In especially stark modern rooms with large proportions, I like to place antiques in artful groupings that rely on their sculptural qualities as well as their texture for effect. This type of arrangement is very effective in an apartment I decorated in a Richard Meier building overlooking the Hudson River in New York. Key to the design of the room is the combination of objects, including a modern sofa and tables, a large collage on the wall by Robert Warner titled *Objects*, and a collage-like as-

Antiques add depth, texture, and personality to every type of room

sortment of antiques, including an oversize iron shoe once part of a window sign, a pair of large papier-mâché Aesthetic Movement jars, and a set of French Empire chairs.

I have composed a similar display in our loft. The dining area is centered on an American classical sideboard, a bust of George Washington, a pair of Italian mid-century vases, and sconces by sculptor Belinda Eade, all set against a wall of yellow mirror.

The third way we decorate with antiques is by creating so-called period rooms, with all the contents more or less originating from the same dates. I owe this skill from a lifetime of visits to house museums and to my fellowship at Winterthur Museum. We create this type of room for museums or clients who like the consistent visual harmony and connections found between objects of the same date. These clients are devoted collectors whose passions are defined by particular eras and settings.

We designed a period room in an early nineteenth-century house in Charleston owned by Rob and Jane Hicklin. The architecture was restored to its original appearance, and the American furniture is from the same date. Interestingly, even with all this historical accuracy, the sparse arrangement of furnishings and color palette give the room a contemporary feeling.