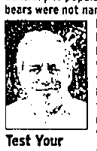
Restoring a teddy bear helps its value

True or false?
Contrary to popular belief, teddy bears were not named after Teddy Roosevelt. Teddy bears made before 1930 were typically stuffed with horsehair. Restoring a teddy bear reduces its value.



Test Your Antiques IQ

Answer: A. All the statements are false.

Terry Hamburg

Consider this irony. The soft, cuddly teddy bear is named after the most macho (he had his own boxing ring in the White House) and militaristic man ever to be elected president of the United States.

On a hunting trip, President Theodore Roosevelt refused to shoot a sickly old bear tied to a tree. Through the influence of a popular newspaper cartoon, the old bear was transformed into a cub and the incident became an immediate legend.

At the same time, Steiff & Company in Germany was test marketing a line of stuffed baby bear animals. Back in the United States, the soon-to-be Ideal Toy Company, inspired by the incident, made some brown plush bears and got permission from Roosevelt to use his name. Soon these hug-gables were being called Teddy Bears, and rest is history.

Germany, United States and Great Britain were the leading manufacturers. Each country tended to produce its own version, and the general body style of a particular teddy bear can be a way of identifying country of origin.

Teddy bears also changed over time. As a rule, older ones had longer arms and snouts, and some sported a little hump on the nape of the neck. Padded paws and feet were typical of vintage bears, but this feature persisted into the 1950s.

In various periods, manufacturers used slightly different methods or materials, as well as different company markings. An expert should be able to take one look at a teddy bear and provide a pedigree.

Antiques collectors want pre-1950s examples; some covet the authentic Victorian look and don't own a teddy bear made after FDR was elected. The average bear from the 1920s in decent condition would sell retail for $250-$500. The most desirable names, such as Stieff or Ideal, go higher.

It's not uncommon for dealers to price pieces using a so-much-per-inch guideline; for example, pre-1912 Steiff, long pile gold mohair, about $200 an inch, or Made in England, 1930-50, $35-$40. These prices assume very good condition. Until recently, teddy bears were not made for display. Kids hugged and tugged these creatures into a variety of conditions. Those that survived, especially pre-1920 examples, are usually worn, if not dismembered.

To restore or not to restore? A torn arm or ear should be sewn back. To replace facial features, pads, fur and mohair is more complicated. Some believe there is a mystique about the naturally aged appearance of teddy bears. Condition is very important in determining price. While a purist may value the dated look, she will also want to buy the piece for less. There is, however, a general willingness to tolerate more wear and tear than in doll or toy collecting. When restoration is done professionally, most collectors approve, and such work increases the market value.

Old bears are fragile. The typical straw stuffing has high acidity, textile coverings dry up with age, and common dust will wear down the fur. Gentle vacuuming through a net is recommended. Don't display a piece in direct sun or fluorescent light. If you sleep with your teddy bear, try not to crush it.

Terry Hamburg is a writer and antiques dealer in the San Francisco Bay Area. He can be reached at tcham@pacbell.net.

This mohair teddy bear with movable arms and legs was made in Germany, circa 1930. He could be "adopted" for about $150.

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GARDEN CALENDAR

Hedges

Learn about selecting, planting and growing plants as living walls for outdoor "rooms" - whether you're starting from scratch or rejuvenating older hedges - in Hedges, a class offered by the Michigan School of Gardening. The class will take place Wednesday, June 18, at 29429 Six Mile in Livonia, just west of Middlebelt in the Milo Shopping Plaza. Fee is $40. Register early. Seating is limited. For more information, call (248) 4-GARDEN or visit www.michigangardening.com.

If you have an item for the calendar, please submit it at least two weeks in advance of the date it should be published. Send to Ken Abramczyk, At Home editor, Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009 or e-mail kabramczyk@oe.homecomm.net.

TOUR

FROM PAGE C1

"Especially treasured is the recent acquisition of a 75-year-old peony donated by William and Ellen Kahn from their Franklin Cressbrook estate," Schiano said.

"It produces unusual single raspberry-colored flowers around mid-June and will be known as the Cressbrook Peony."

The Broughton House Garden has been designed, supported, planted and maintained by the Garden Club as a beautification and educational gift to the Franklin community. All of the work was overseen by four hands-on gardeners: Suzzanne Krueger and Toni Grinnan of Beverly Hills and Mary Sue Ewing and Segliinda Pritchard of Franklin.

Many hundreds of hours have been invested since 1999 making this the most ambitious public planting project of the club's 50-year history, Schiano said. It has received top awards from Keep Michigan Beautiful in 2001 and the Woman's National Farm & Garden Association in 2002.

One garden is in Franklin and has been connected to the club for 50 years, Schiano said.

Another is located in Bingham Farms, which Schiano describes as "truly one of the most exquisite gardens in Michigan" and rarely open to the public.

Another is located in Bloomfield Hills near Cranbrook.

That garden features 600 named hostas, 500 daylilies with about 1,500 daylilies hybridized, and more than 150 different conifers. There are 80 different perennials and 20 dogwoods.

The garden has been featured on several national tours.

That home is a former home of C.E. Wilson, who became president of General Motors and later secretary of defense under President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

"All of the gardens are large and all are quite astounding," Schiano said.

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