

Antique lovers change locations

By Judith Berns
staff writer

H. George Bickelmann appropriately lives in what may be the oldest farmhouse in Oakland County.

The antiques expert who recently shut down his Birmingham antique store to devote more time to appraisals has settled into the vintage yellow farmhouse on Walnut Lake Road in West Bloomfield.

The farmhouse was reportedly built in 1830.

"It isn't a matter of great comment whether it's the oldest," the cultured, animated Bickelmann said. "We just love it."

"We" is Bickelmann and his wife, Jean, a fashion illustrator, who shares his feeling for the house, its setting and the furnishings of many countries and periods collected over their 43 years of marriage.

"We've been collecting since 1939. It gets to be a disease. Everything has been shared," he says with feeling.

"I detect authenticity. Jean decides if it goes in our home," he laughed.

"I have the instinct, he has the knowledge," Mrs. Bickelmann agrees.

Their taste could be called eclectic, in that there is no inclination to furnish rooms in one style or time period.

An American federalist-style mirror (1815-1830) is flanked by 18th century Italian candelabra in the dining room which is dominated by a 19th century French wrought iron chandelier.

"If you like it, you have it," Mrs. Bickelmann says. "Beautiful things go together."

FOR BICKELMANN, the appraisal business is merely the next stage in his full life.

Born in New York City, he became a

photographer just like his father, his grandfather and his grandmother. He met Mrs. Bickelmann when he was drawing them for Bloomingdales.

World War II brought them to Detroit, where Bickelmann was chief tool engineer at DeSoto, working on dive bombers. He re-entered the photography business after the war, then opened H. George Bickelmann Antiques in 1969.

He closed the store in November, transferred his efforts from the Birmingham to the West Bloomfield Historical Society and went full tilt into appraising.

"This is one of the most interesting phases of my life," he says.

Bickelmann's specialty is furniture — Renaissance furniture to the present — and any form of art except non-objective. He has a particular knowledge of candlesticks and Delft china.

He generally refers people to others who know art and cut glass, weapons, guns and jewelry.

Bickelmann will share his knowledge with the community in a talk entitled "Dollars and Sense in Collecting Antiques" set for 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 8 at the Orchard Lake Community Church, 5171 Commerce.

He will also determine age and verify authenticity on objects no larger than a chair for members of the audience. The evening is sponsored by the Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society. Donation is \$1 per person.

BICKELMANN HOPES to make a positive contribution to the Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society.

He likes communities like Birmingham, Plymouth and Northville where vintage homes have been preserved to display local artifacts and present a sense of past community life.

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