

Antique expert will tell how to spot the fakes

By Kathryn M. Allen
special writer

"An antique is something which is handcrafted and no longer made," said antique expert George Bickelmann in a presentation at Orchard Lake Community Church.

Bickelmann, collector and antique dealer/appraiser, shared information about signs of age in furniture and metals with members of The Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society.

"Each antique is unique," said Bickelmann, "not a factory product."

In a slide show of antiques dating before 1830, he explained where to look for repairs and damage in furniture. Precautions should be taken to avoid buying a fake, he said.

"There aren't that many good fakes," he said, stressing the importance of close examination before buying.

WHEN EXAMINING a chest of drawers such as a Victorian highboy, Bickelmann suggested pulling out the drawers to look for natural wear on the edges. If the surface of a drawer is unusually smooth, it may have been machine tooled, rather than handcrafted.

Wood furniture should be inspected for shrinkage, a natural occurrence in wood over time. Minimal shrinkage might indicate the piece is more recent than claimed, Bickelmann warned.

To check for signs of age in wooden chairs, notice whether the posts of the chair backs and legs have signs of rubbing against walls and floors. They should, Bickelmann said.

"Aside from fakes, there are dangerous repairs that cause great devaluation," he said.

As he showed slides of furniture with mended legs, he warned the audience to watch for splices and wood added to the bottom of legs to make up for wearing down. Repairs such as these, he said, would change the value markedly.

"One can tolerate more repairs in older pieces of furniture," he said, exhibiting a slide of a stool from the late 1500s.

Bickelmann also discussed different types of saw marks.

"When he see a mark of a circular saw," he said, "we know the furniture was made at least as late as 1810."

Before high-powered circular saws,

pit saws and gang saws were used, leaving rougher marks in wood.

To examine a mirror for age, a person must look at the back of the mirror, he said. While new mirror backs usually are painted with silver or red, old ones have a silvery granular look.

Bickelmann also explained the use of nails in antique furniture. Some early furniture was made with handmade nails.

"Evidence of wooden pegs doesn't make furniture old," he said.

EVEN HINGES have signs of age, he said. While reproduced hinges are bent into a circle, the authentic old ones were solid cast into a circle.

After the slide presentation, Bickel-

mann invited people to put items on a table for his comments about their ages. He examined each piece and concluded, "Everything that's been used has to have wear."

Bickelmann, a West Bloomfield resident, is a board member of the historical society, which has 80 memberships including families and individuals.

"The purpose of the group is to encourage others to learn about the history of the area," said Frances Gadd, president.

The society offers four of five programs a year. They are open to anyone interested in historical topics.

Fitness class under way

Sopdance, a dance-fitness program, has classes started, now running from 10:40-11:30 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays in Mercy Center's gym.

The classes run continuously and women can join any time," said instructor Diane Forth. The instructor offers the first class without charge to newcomers. Fee for each four-week two-times-a-week session is \$16.

Participants must bring their own rug or mat. Babysitting is available on request.

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