

INTERIOR MOTIVES

'Early American' not always authentic



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LEVY

If one visits a furniture store and asks to see some Early American bedroom furniture, is one going to REALLY view Early American? Of course not!

One may be shown a matched "suite" of a bed, night stands, a chest or chest of drawers and a "triple" dresser — all with a ponderous look. All of these are a manufacturer's interpretation of Early American, but a far cry from anything authentic. On the night stands could be displayed a pair of imitation oil lamps with very ruffled shades. I deplore ALL of the above. Please don't ever select a matched "suite" of anything. No worthwhile interior designer would consider such purchases.

To place an identifying date on "Early American" is hazardous. The first settlers of the colonies brought some possessions with them from Europe, but transporting these was difficult. Therefore they made much of the simple pine furniture themselves, with some pleasing results. These austere forms were often washed with thin paints — and subsequently repainted during their lifetime — not always the initial color. If you are lucky enough to locate one of these very early pieces, it will have an incredible patina.

As cabinetmakers increased their skills the settlers also became more affluent and sophisticated in their tastes. Huge open fireplaces were the cooking center of the home. There wasn't a real so-called "kitchen" — architecture wasn't applicable. Obviously the unskilled and primitive aspects were soon abandoned. Soft pine gave way to harder woods, maple and oak. Singular storage cabinets, without ostentation, made their appearance to accommodate bowls, dishes and mugs. These often hung from their handles. Racks were designed to lodge spoons and cutlery. These were festively painted.

Eventually walnut and mahogany

were imported and furniture became more stately and distinguished, no longer to be classified "Early American," merely "American." Where is the line of demarcation? Obviously somewhere between primitive and worldly. The awesome names Townsend, Goddard and Affleck paralleled their English counterparts Chippendale, Adam and Hepplewhite.

Let us return to and execute that "Early American" bedroom I decried earlier, never to be MATCHED. A good bed is the first requirement. It could be brass or wrought-iron. It could also be a wooden "Jenny Lind" or four-poster. Any of these would happily accept a tasteful quilt with great color. The Amish "Square Within a Square" is a definite favorite — or perhaps a Log Cabin or a Mosaic. There are a number of books about quilts illustrating American coloring.

The night stands needn't be a pair, but they should be very similar in height. Washed pine? Super with any of the suggested beds. Remember there were no triple or even double dressers in the history of furniture. For storage I might suggest a painted cupboard. This could now accommodate a television set above with drawers below. It is true there were no televisions in Early American, but we LIVE in the 20th century and they are a necessary evil. For additional storage in this room, add a four- or five-drawer chest with an eagle mirror on top.

A Windsor chair would be welcome. Tie on a cushion for extra comfort. Accompany the chair with a wrought-iron, two-candle (electrified) candlestand. Small lampshades in a mini-print of either fabric or paper will add charm.

If one is fortunate to have stained hardwood floors it will add to that "look" to use either brightly colored hooked or braided scatter rugs. Are you getting the picture?

The window treatment should be short curtains, even two-tiered. Perhaps they can be hung from tabs on wood or iron rods, refined and tasteful. Oftentimes the crown moulding and chair rail

as well as the other woodwork is painted Old Red, Old Blue or Old Mustard Yellow.

Collectibles such as an earthenware pitcher and wash basin, some glorious colored handblown glass, pewter and brass accessories will further enhance this room. Our children don't realize that pierced brass warming pans were an integral part of comfort before central heating. Our forefathers warmed their beds with coals using this long-handled pan. Then they climbed in!

As the frosting on the cake, gather together a modest number of eye-catching antiques. Mix them with GOOD reproductions and you will achieve a tasteful

and subtle environment. On the walls you could assemble a series of silhouettes in black frames. Primitive watercolors of fruit or flowers in birds-eye maple frames are to be found in antique shops, all of the above appropriate to Early American.

Naomi Stone Levy, a Franklin resident, is an interior designer and a former secretary of the American Society of Interior Designers. You can leave her a message by dialing (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then her mailbox number, 1897. Her fax number is (810) 644-1314.

Miniature workshop set

The focus is on classes for children, dollhouse wiring and exteriors, a Queen Anne four-poster bed and lace-trimmed coverings in the summertime schedule beginning June 24 at Miniature Makers' Workshop in Royal Oak.

Owner Criss Goad announces the daylong visit Thursday, Aug. 31, of an artisan of the International Guild of Miniature Artisans, Barbara Graff of Windsor, Conn. Famous for her dolls, Graff will instruct her students on making a poseable soft-sculpture toddler on the miniaturist's scale of one inch to the actual foot.

For information or a flier with complete class details, call or visit Miniature Makers' Workshop at (810) 649-0633 or 4515 N. Woodward.

Walter Schutter of Sterling Heights will conduct a one-day class on cutting out and making a four-poster Queen Anne bed Wednesday, Aug. 9. A class on dressing a bed complete with dust ruffle, lace-trimmed sheets and coverlet will be taught Saturday, June 24, by Sue Jaques of Farmington Hills.

Dollhouse wiring will be covered in a lecture Wednesday, June 28, and Saturday, Sept. 9, and an all-day wiring workshop Saturday, Aug. 19, at which students are invited to wire their dollhouses with assistance from instructor Ted Goad of Clarkston. Dollhouse exteriors will be covered 10 a.m. to noon Wednesday, Sept. 13.

Special children's classes will feature a sandbox 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, July 8, with adults welcome, and a duck pull toy 1-3:30 p.m. Monday, Aug. 28.

Children are welcome at sessions on making a wicker planter Monday, Aug. 7, and geraniums for the planter Monday, Aug. 14. Other classes will cover foods, a picnic basket, a lighted fireplace log and miniature needlepoint for the beginner.

Tuition prices vary according to class length and materials furnished. Reservations for classes should be made a minimum of two weeks in advance. Miniature Makers' Workshop will be closed for vacation July 10-30.

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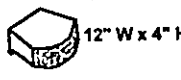
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