

ORANGE COUNTY HOME

Antiques need not be antiquated

Craftsmen at Steven-Thomas Antiques in O.C. make old beauties useful again.

Not many men hang their hats in a hat cabinet these days. Nor do many women stash their clothes in an armoire. And not since the days of Lucy and Desi on black-and-white television has there been heavy demand for matching twin beds.

However, at Steven-Thomas Antiques in Santa Ana, owners Steven Shedd and Thomas Silk have found that such pieces can gain new life when they are modified to fit today's needs. In an expansive workshop, their team of cabinet makers, upholsterers and refinishers convert cabinets into entertainment centers and marry twin beds to create one king-size bed.

The company's 25 skilled craftsmen "use the same techniques that were used 100 years ago in furniture making," Silk said. Each piece is treated painstakingly by hand.

Before a piece is displayed in the 18,000-square-foot showroom, it goes through the workshop. The staff assesses each piece, deciding whether it needs to be conserved, restored or modified

to meet customer needs.

Because the owners are selective in choosing antiques on buying trips to Europe, most pieces simply require cleaning and waxing. Occasionally pieces require additional effort to bring them back to their original beauty.

Some pieces are modified to make them useful in today's modern home. Even so, respect for the old is paramount. With most pieces, the owners prefer conservation to restoration.

"The process of conservation involves doing repairs only when it would structurally necessitate it," Shedd said. In conservation, the original finish is preserved, any flaws or fractures are not hidden and the piece is kept intact, he said.

At the restoration level, modern methods are used to hide fractures or flaws in the finish or marble. Refinishing, or taking the existing finish off and applying a new one, is the most extensive restoration effort.

"Our experience has taught us which one to do," Shedd said.

The owners of Steven-Thomas Antiques joined business efforts in 1976. During the past 15 years, they slowly hired craftsmen and expanded the workshop. Recently, they began offering restoration services to the public for antiques not purchased at their store.

Steven-Thomas Antiques specializes in items from 1840 to 1940, imported from France, Italy, Belgium, England and Denmark. In addition to furniture, its inventory includes accessories such as



PHOTOS: ANDY TEMPLETON, FOR THE REGISTER

PRESERVERS: Seyfettin Arkan, above, chisels a piece of furniture in the workshop. At left, a wooden head awaits placement. Below, owners Thomas Silk, left, and Steven Shedd stand in their showroom, stocked with pieces that include many bought on trips to Europe.

mirrors, clocks, tapestries, porcelains, bronzes, marble statues and paintings - all styled in room vignettes by a staff interior designer.

What sort of pieces do collectors want? Demand is always high for classic pieces - those with quality wood like walnut, oak and mahogany with fine finishes and plenty of hand-carvings, they said.

Antiques appeal to customers who appreciate history and want one-of-a-kind pieces.

"When you buy an antique, you're one person in a line of owners, one of its keepers," Silk said. "You have to remember that the piece is going to outlive you."

RESOURCES

Steven-Thomas Antiques is at 800 E. Dyer Road, Santa Ana. Call (714) 957-3989 or go online at www.steven-thomas.com.

CONTACT THE WRITER: (714) 796-5020 or jbush@ocregister.com



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