

How to Determine the Value of an Antique

There are certain steps that should be taken when determining the value of an antique.

Identification

The first step in determining the value of the antique is to identify it.

1. Ask the seller about the item.
2. Check for maker's marks, manufacturing stamps, or signatures. These are usually found on the underside of the piece.
3. Make note of the details.
4. Invest in a good antique identification guide.
5. Research the item on Google or other search engine.

Determine the Age

With some experience, you will be able to decide which decade something belongs to simply by observing the details of the item. A china teacup marked Japan will have been made between 1891 and 1921 while a teacup marked Made in Japan would have been from the years between 1921 and 1941.

- Do the carvings look machine made? If they are too "perfect", you may be looking at a reproduction.
- Check the way the drawers are put together. Handmade dovetail joints indicate a piece made before 1870. Later drawer joints were made in the pin and cove style until the 1890s. After that, furniture was mass marketed and most was made by machine and the joints are perfectly matched with no signs of hand carving.
- Does it look old?
- Staples were not used until late in the 1900s
- Are the materials right for the age of the item? While an antique chair might have leather on it, there would be no vinyl.

Determine the Maker

It can be hard to decide which company made an item, especially if there are no maker's marks.

- Sometimes you can find a serial number that can be traced to a certain manufacturer.
- Look for serial numbers on the underside of furniture, or stamped on metal plates somewhere on the item.
- Some items can be identified by the unique design that the maker used or a particular pattern.

Condition

Take a quick look at the condition of the item. You will need to turn the item over or get underneath it to determine condition.

- Check the joints and fittings to see if they are tight.
- Look for chips, cracks, or repairs.
- Are all the pieces intact?
- Is there excessive wear?
- For books, is the spine separated from the pages? Are there tears or stains? Is the dust jacket in place?
- Look for brown spots called *foxing* on pictures and ephemera.

Is It Rare?

- Check price guides for rarity.
- Use identification books that include good pictures to identify rare antiques.
- When in doubt, have an appraiser evaluate the object.

Provenance

Provenance has to do with where the item came from. You will need some kind of proof that the item did belong to an important person.

- Does the item have a certificate of authenticity?
- Autographed by someone important?
- Can you prove that it is historically significant or belonged to someone important?

Compare

Once you know more about the antique you can:

- Search on the Internet and compare your antique to other, similar antiques on eBay, Ruby Lane, Tias, or other online antique store.
- Check online price guides to see if your item is listed and what value has been assigned to it.