

Antique Furniture Buying Tips

It seems that while so many of us are wonderfully absorbed with collecting antiques, we're really not all that clear on the meaning of some of the pieces of furniture that we do acquire. For instance, that 'dresser' in your room, would you call it a highboy, a chest of drawers, or perhaps a chiffonier? Why? Such is the sometimes dreadfully confusing task of classifying antique objects.

Before an explanation of highboys, let's first consider the difference between a sideboard and a buffet. Often, the two terms are used interchangeably, and for good reason, as they are more or less the same thing. As defined by the French, a buffet is a small sideboard for storing dishes. Maybe a sideboard might look a little larger than a buffet, but both serve the same purpose. Serving utensils and dishes can be kept below with a large flat surface above to display and serve food. Many have mirrored backs and shelf space, but some have no back at all.

Going back to the bedroom where lies the highboy-chiffonier-chest of drawers conundrum, you may now be awestruck: 'indeed, what do I have here?' Well, the answer might just be as confusing as the question. It seems a chiffonier is a high and narrow chest, whereas a highboy is defined as a tall chest with a legged base. Both of these are considered chests of drawers. So there you have it.

Advancing to the armoire... or is it a wardrobe? Well, both have a rod within them for hanging clothing on and again, both have doors. Here's something definitive though: a wardrobe often acquires a smaller, streamlined look while armoires tend to be larger and more ornate.

There are some English wardrobes that were designed for gentlemen which includes an area for hanging garments of one side and having labeled compartments for certain other articles. These particular pieces, mostly manufactured in the early 20th century aren't too big on decorative flare, but are definitely amassing popularity, as they are still inexpensively priced.

All in all, the clashing terminology for similar pieces aims to rely heavily on the seller's particular choice. The only thing that's truly important is that you do indeed love the piece of antique furniture you're buying, if that is so, the name of your piece doesn't matter at all.

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