

Decor Score: It's worth the time, trouble to save Auntie's antiques

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: We are moving to my late great-aunt's house as newlyweds without much furniture of our own. Auntie had some nice antiques, but her taste was, understandably, not ours. We want to make our home bright, fresh and young, but there are two major problems: We don't have much decorating money; and the rest of the family would be appalled if we just got rid of her furniture. It's an awful bind for a couple just starting out.

A: Think of it instead as "starting over." Your great-aunt's things may be well worth saving, for more than sentimental family reasons. Even professional interior designers praise the high quality of the craftsmanship and materials that went into older pieces, as opposed to the "throwaway thinking" too often exhibited by contemporary manufacturers. The pros delight in combing thrift shops and auctions, looking for vintage sofas, chairs, chests and tables they can revive inexpensively by refinishing, slipcovering or going for all-new upholstery.

IT'S ALL RELATIVE - Bright with white and sparkling with mirrors and acrylics, a new take on teal updates a traditional room. CNS Photo courtesy of Thibaut Design. When the shapes are classic and the seating sound, it's not only worth the time and trouble, it's the most creative recycling around!

Check out the fresh and bright sitting room we show here. It's wall-to-wall in traditional design, from the arched marble fireplace to the Louis XIV chairs and white porcelain urn table lamp. But the net-net effect is new, and Now! thanks in large part to the surprisingly bright teal striped wall paper and fabrics ("Piedmont Stripe," from Thibaut, www.thibautdesign.com).

Enhancing the fresh effect, the large mirror over the mantel and the amusing clear acrylic cocktail table add sparkle that also lifts the traditional spirits of the room, proving that you can have your heirlooms and your New Look, too. Just be sure to alert visiting relatives not to expect antimacassars and old lace.

THE COST OF BEING ECO-GREEN

According to a survey taken earlier this year, some 76 percent of the American population believes it's important to buy earth-friendly products for their homes. Plus - here's a surprise - 72 percent of the sur-vees said they're willing to spend up to 10 percent more for furniture that's environmentally friendly.

The survey was conducted by the American Home Furnishings Alliance, a High Point, N.C., organization that's been working to bring more of its own products into the eco-friendly camp, says vice president, Jackie Hirschhaut. The alliance developed a voluntary environmental management system for manufacturers, known as EFEC ("Enhancing Furniture's Environmental Culture"), and is constantly on the look out for "greener" materials, such as foams and fibers, Jackie says.

It's one way the American furniture industry can counter the lure of Asian- and South American-made furniture, which has practically shut down what used to be a thriving manufacturing industry here. With cheap labor and few controls, especially concerning the environment, the furniture can show up on retailers' floors with sometimes dramatically lower price tags than pieces made in the U.S.

That's when the rub comes. Saying and shopping are two very different things. Caught between Mother Earth and mothering your budget, how many of you really would be willing to plunk down that 10 percent premium for made-in-America furnishings? Honestly, now. I'd like to hear from you at rose.gilbert@att.net.

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