



History Buys

GEORGIE LANE-GODFREY
EXPLORES HOW THE CURRENT
TREND FOR TEXTURE HAS
REIGNITED OUR LOVE OF ANTIQUES



PEOPLE ARE STARTING TO REVISIT ANTIQUES AND RECONCEPTUALISE THEIR AESTHETIC MERITS

In the sleepy world of antiques, something is stirring. What was once exclusively the domain of the middle-aged middle class has suddenly become cool again. Open any glossy magazine and you'll spot them in the adverts, nestled amongst the season's haute couture. It's a duality which has become increasingly compatible, juxtaposing the old and the new. But it's not just happening in the world of fashion – the decorative arts have also followed suit. All of a sudden, people are starting to revisit antiques and reconceptualise the aesthetic merits of historic objects.

Forget 18th century ormolu cabinets and heavy mahogany dressers, we're not talking about Granny's furniture here. Instead of polished perfection, the focus has shifted onto historic objects which show their story through their imperfections. 'What's popular now are the kind of objects which have texture and character, the kind of things which make you want to touch them,' claims Robert Young, owner of Robert Young Antiques on Battersea Bridge Road. 'A textured surface attracts your aesthetic attention because it denotes a narrative of use. It is both engaging and totally unique.'

To get this uniqueness, people are turning to the past. A limited resource, historic objects are capable of reflecting the individuality of a person because, like them, they are one of a kind. 'People believe

it says something about them that they saw something beautiful in that object, which becomes a physical manifestation of their personality,' explains Young. In turn, the commonplace has become anathema creating a universal rejection of the mass-produced, flat pack furniture which dominates many homes. In the same way that no one wants to turn up to a party wearing the same outfit as someone else, so too do people not want to walk into a friend's flat and see a bookcase identical to the one that they have at home. It is this desire for uniqueness which draws people to antiques.

Yet this individuality has also ironically been mass-produced too. Clever companies such as Mykea have been cashing in on the reaction against the monotonous uniformity of flatpack furniture by offering a service which personalises your Ikea purchases. Using specially designed stickers created by various artists, it claims to put an end to 'naked' furniture. Meanwhile, manufacturers have been attempting to mass-produce the individuality of texture, as seen in the 'shabby chic' interiors on the high street.

The irony is not lost on Young. 'An original surface which has texture is non-repeatable. It's like driftwood, a work of art largely created by nature. It cannot be replicated by a factory.'

Going hand-in-hand with the trend for texture is upcycling, another creative way of achieving the unique. This involves

reinventing a salvaged item into a new object with a new purpose. The necessity of one generation becomes the luxury of the next as previously outdated items are transformed into current and contemporary sculpture. 'It's about taking something and making it your own,' says Young, 'and turning it into something totally unique.'

Flying the flag for both the current focus on texture and upcycling is another big trend – bringing the outdoors indoors. Take for example a Regency two-seater iron bench. Made for an 1820s English Garden, it looks wonderful positioned in a modern interior because of its lines and texture. Similarly weather vanes, which were made to stand on the top of garden follies, are now somewhat obsolete, yet indoors they bring a contemporary sculptural feel with the rust, adding a wonderful texture.

Whether it's down to texture, history or reinvention, pieces that are unique will always appeal. Offering as much of a cerebral investment as a materialistic one, their charm lies in the fact that they only improve with time; the years only serve to add to their story.