## swedish painted furniture

Traditional craft, captivating forms and patinated paintwork contribute to the charm of these vintage Scandinavian heritage classics, says Katrina Burroughs.

squisitely textured antiques that lend depth and character to modern rooms, Swedish painted-wood furnishings of the 18th and 19th centuries are coveted by interior designers and collectors. Sought-after items range from elegant Gustavian sofas to rustic cupboards, densely decorated with folk motifs. So popular are these gems that authentic examples, with original paintwork, are increasingly rare.

Though King Gustav III had a taste for gilding, acquired during a visit to France in 1771, by "Gustavian" we mean sober re painted in a shades-of-g Antique-folk-art dealer Robert Young warns buyers to beware if it seems too tidy: "Much of the Gustavian furniture has been comprehensively rebuilt and restored, often repainted in one of the 'magic colours' – white, grey or duck-egg blue." Young's rococo sofas, with cabriole legs, camel back and discreet carving, sell for £6,000-£15,000. The market prizes original, not pristine, paintwork; a pair of 1790-1860 demi-lune console tables, with picturesquely distressed finish, costs £4,000-£7,500. Young sums up their allure: "The tops are scrubbed wood and the bases painted, so you get a juxtaposition of faded wood, patinated to silvery pewter, and the legs retaining paint, with a wonderful textural surface."

The polar opposites of such patricia furniture are exuberantly patterned

Kurbits furnishings. Made for rural homes, this folk style, characterised by freely hand-painted feather and foliage motifs, flourished around 1780-1840. It was used to decorate everyday basics (beds, tables, storage), which were given as wedding or birthday presents, marked with the date of the event.

Commodities trader Tom

Hills and his wife, Anna, have a number of Swedish furnishings in their Suffolk farmhouse. He says they are especially charmed by folk-art pieces: "They really stand out. The country-style furniture with the painted pattiern is so unusual; every piece is unique." His favourite is a 2m pine kitchen cabinet, made in Dalarna, central Sweden, decorated with faux woodgrain, stylised flowers and feathers, and bearing the date 1810. "It has huge character. I love the

slightly rough and used country look."

The rarest examples of folk painting are sold at specialist auctioneer Uppsala Auktionskammare, where prices can soar. In June 2007, a cupboard from Järntland, north of Dalarna, with original red and





blue paintwork and floral motifs, fetched SKr680,000 (about £50,000 at the time).

Unfortunately, this type of treasure is invariably exportforbud – the Swedish government won't allow it to leave the country. So where to buy, if you live elsewhere? Swedish Interior Design is a leading specialist in Kurbits furniture, offering early-19th-century wall-hanging cabinets for around £3,500. Netberlands dealer Gaby van Schagen sells fantastic

Mora clock, £7,500, and chest, £6,500, both c1820 and at Robert Young.

patinated folk furniture, such as a tilttop painted table, decorated with doves (£6,950) and a blue bench from the Duhland region (£1,150). In New York, fetted interior designer Lars Bolander is the go-to guy, with a selection of antiques including Mora clocks and painted sofas. In London, meanwhile, Maison Artefact offers less august but highly decorative pieces. For instance, £4,200 will buy you a much-repainted early-19thcentury Mora longcase clock.

Standing up to 2.5m high, with an hourglass shape that resembles a curvy woman, Mora clocks take their name from the Mora area, in Dalarea, where

In June 2007, a cupboard with original paintwork fetched about £50,000.



made (with parts often commissioned separatel from families in the local co-operative), from the late 1700s until the mid-1800s. Madeleine Lee, creative director at Swedish Interior Design says that, due to scarcity and increasing demand. their value is rising. Tifteen years ago you could buy a Mora clock for £500; now you'll be lucky to find one for £2,000." She has about 50, priced £1,500-£6,500. Examples that approach the £6,500 mark have original paint detailing, a named maker, unusual ornamentation or extra height: a 2.42m-tall, 1800s Mora clock painted with Swedish folk scenes. marked J Soderdahl, and a white 2.5m "Lundblad" clock, are £5,950 each.

Though the Mora is the embodiment of a northern European country-crafts tradition, it makes itself at home in the most unlikely settings. Journalist Sarah Bacon and her husband,

Pete, an esecutive in the construction industry in the UAE, bought a Mora clock last year for their villa in Duboi. "I had my heart set on a Gustavian grey version. Then I came across this one and thought, That green is so gorgeous," says Sarah Her 2.2m-high 1860s clock cost €2,500. It has a walnut-grain pattern on the flanks and a deep blue-green panel on the front, with floral motifs. One detail has been altered to adapt the Nordic artefact to Middle Eastern humidity. "Swedish Interior Design replaced the mechanism with a quartz-crystal movement for us. When we come back to London, they are going to put the original one back in."

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