

SUNDAY TIMES DIGITAL
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We chucked it out along with the chintz, but Georgian and Victorian furniture is being tipped for a revival. It's elegant and offers great value, says **Katrina Burroughs**

Twitter is a special place. Home to cats with cucumbers and cooties, board toppers, it also attracts passionate single-issue campaigners like the auctioneer Jeremy Lamond. After 30 years in the antiques and fine-art trade, the director of Halls of Shrewsbury noticed that brown furniture – everyday Georgian and Victorian household staples, from chests of drawers to dining tables – had never been cheaper.

He thought the furniture-buying public was missing a trick in choosing flimsy particle-board cupboards ("with zero resale value") over Victorian mahogany chests for the same price. So he created a #bringbackbrownfurniture campaign to persuade a new generation of homeowners of the benefits of brown. Earlier this month, Lamond's campaign was boosted by an unlikely voice, Ikea's head of sustainability, Steve Howard, said "we have till... peak home furnishings", and suggested "repair and recycle" as a solution. "It's interesting to hear Ikea recommending recycling," Lamond says. "Antique furniture is the ultimate ecofriendly product, from its low carbon footprint to

its enduring quality." So is it time for us all to forsake the fatpack and fall in love with brown?
 "Brown" is unfashioning trade shorthand for furniture, often in mahogany, walnut or oak, of the kind made in quantity in the 18th and 19th centuries. Several factors have driven prices steadily south over the past two decades. It can be too bulky for the smaller home; it isn't from an era made trendy by high-street poshtike, such as mid-century, and it's still fairly plentiful. "It doesn't pander to our lives, where you expect a new look with every season," Lamond says. Indeed, he wonders whether brown's main virtue has restricted its appeal: this is furniture for keeps.

It's not as if there's no call for antique furniture. Interior designers including Ben Pentreath, Paolo Moschino, Harriet Anstruther, Tallulah Earle, Retrocurio, Victoria Meale and Tanya Leech routinely use antiques. While design leaders frequent events such as the Decorative Antiques & Textiles Fair at Battersea, for most homeowners, brown has fallen off the radar. But there are signs it is about to stage a comeback. Lamond's Twitter crusade has played a small part in its rehabilitation. Lady

▲ Robert Young is renowned for antiques with sublime surface colour and texture. The picture shows a Queen Anne farmhouse dining table with a fruitwood top (similar tables available for £4,500-£8,500). The chairs are from a set of six English gothic lace-back Windsor chairs in yew, oak and elm, c1800 (similar available for £8,500-£18,500). robertyoungantiques.com



Ben Pentreath and Nicole Holt's house always has a few pieces of antique furniture such as the handsome early-Victorian chairs and table in the photo of Pentreath's Dorset dining room. Antique chairs typically start at £100, tables at about £500. pentreath-holt.com

► Lasso is a great source of stock that steers away from over-ornamental designs and majors on the plain and simple. This Windsor armchair in yew, with an elm seat, was made in the Thames Valley c1800. £800, lasso.co.uk



artworks. A handful of dealers are renowned for supplying absurdly picturesque examples of brown – plain but timeworn, sometimes patched up, they look wonderful in a contemporary home. These heroes of eclectic cabinetry include established names such as Robert Young and Spencer Swaffer, and youngsters are now joining the gang.



This mahogany-secrete cabinet is from the campaign furniture. It features chestnut Drawer Antiques. Made c1860 as a travelling desk, it has a top drawer that flips down to serve as a writing surface. Similar chests start at £3,450. campaignfurniture.com



◄ Many pieces of antique furniture are compact enough to suit the smaller modern home. This Georgian three-drawer looking c1700 is from Robert Young Antiques. £6,000, robertyoungantiques.com



▼ Plain brown is often bargained, but fancy floral imagery of astonishing quality costs a little more. This chest of drawers (c1800) will set you back £32,500. It's shown with a copy of an early-18th-century armchair, which is priced at £5,250. measofit.com



Knock on wood



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Twitter is a special place. Home to cats with cucumbers and eclectic board toppers, it also attracts passionate single-issue campaigners like the auctioneer Jeremy Lamond. After 30 years in the antiques and fine-art trade, the director of Halls of Shrewsbury noticed that brown furniture – everyday Georgian and Victorian household staples, from chests of drawers to dining tables – had never been cheaper.

He thought the furniture-buying public was missing a trick in choosing shiny particleboard cupboard ("with zero resale value") over Victorian mahogany chests for the same price. So he created #bringbackbrownfurniture to persuade a new generation of homeowners of the benefits of brown.

Earlier this month, Lamond's campaign was boosted by an unlikely voice. Ben's head of sustainability, Steve Howard, said "we have hit... peak home furnishings", and suggested "repair and recycle" as a solution. "It's interesting to hear Ben recommending recycling," Lamond says. "Antique furniture is the ultimate eco-friendly product, from its low carbon footprint to

its enduring quality." So is it time for us all to forsake the flatpack and fall in love with brown?

"Brown" is unflattering trade shorthand for furniture, often in mahogany, walnut or oak, of the kind made in quantity in the 18th and 19th centuries. Several factors have driven prices steadily south over the past two decades. It can't be too healthy for the smaller home, it isn't from an era made trendy by high-street poshies, such as mid-century, and it's still fairly plentiful. "It doesn't pander to the fantasies we've introduced into our lives, where you expect a new look with every season," Lamond says. Indeed, he wonders whether brown's main virtue has restricted its appeal: this is furniture for keeps.

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Ben Pentreath's hand always has a few pieces of antique furniture such as the handsome early-Victorian chair and table in this photo of Pentreath's Dorset dining room. Antique chairs typically start at £100, tables at about £250. pentreath-hub.com

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This multi-layered veneer cabinet is from the campaign furniture specialist Christopher Clarke Antiques. Made £180 as a dressing desk, it has a top down that flips down to serve as a writing surface. Similar chests start at £3,450. campaignfurniture.com



Many pieces of antique furniture are compact enough to suit the smaller modern home. This Georgian three-drawer lowboy (£1,700) is from Robert Young Antiques. £8,000. robertyoungantiques.com

Leissa is a great source of stock that steers away from over-ornamental designs and majors on the plain and simple. This Windsor armchair in grey, with an elm seat, was made in the Thames Valley (1800). £850. leissa.co.uk



Plain brown is often bargained, but fancy floral embroidery of antebellum quality costs a little more.

This chest of drawers (£1800) will set you back £12,500. It's shown with a copy of an early-18th-century armchair, which is priced at £5,250. maxwellfine.com



Max Myers is a shade and interior who works the 18th- and 19th-century English antiques, as well as the non-antique market. He says the most common problem on the ground is that many people are not aware of the value of antique furniture. He says: "I've seen a lot of people who are not aware of the value of antique furniture. They are not aware of the value of antique furniture. They are not aware of the value of antique furniture."



Place antiques in a contemporary context. The three-seater George III style sofa (Robert Howard) says "I've got a lot of the new 'flat design' look. They do extremely expensive pieces and have the beautiful piece of antique furniture, but are often better than you'd expect."

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Picturesque, plain but timeworn examples look wonderful in a contemporary home

How to buy brown

Take a top measure. A lot of antique furniture has been made in the 18th and 19th centuries. It's important to know the date of the piece, as you can get a better idea of its value.

Buy in bulk. A single antique chair or table can be a good investment, but buying in bulk can be a better option. This is especially true for larger pieces of furniture.

Think outside the box. Don't be afraid to buy antique furniture in a contemporary context. This can be a great way to add character to your home.

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