

Antique Furniture: What Adds Value

This guide outlines what actually drives value in antique furniture, beyond age alone. While many items qualify as antiques based on age, only certain pieces maintain or increase value depending on condition, craftsmanship, materials, and market demand.

What Is Considered Antique Furniture?

- **Standard Definition:** 100 years old or older

General Age Categories

- **Antique:** 100+ years old
- **Vintage:** Roughly 20–99 years old
- **Modern/Used:** Under 20 years old

Many assume older furniture automatically has high value—but age alone does not determine value.

What Determines Value in Antique Furniture?

- **Condition:** Original finish and structural integrity matter most
- **Quality of Construction:** Solid wood, joinery, craftsmanship
- **Rarity:** Unique designs or limited production
- **Provenance:** Known maker, documented history
- **Demand:** Whether buyers actually want that style today

Even very old furniture may have limited resale value if demand is low.

Common Antique Furniture Periods

- **William & Mary:** 1690–1730
- **Queen Anne:** 1720–1760
- **Chippendale:** 1750–1790
- **Federal / Hepplewhite / Sheraton:** 1780–1820
- **Empire:** 1800–1840
- **Victorian:** 1837–1901
- **Arts & Crafts / Mission:** 1880–1920

Many antiques seen today come from the Victorian and early 1900s periods.

Common Woods Used in Antique Furniture

- **Mahogany:** Common in 18th–19th century furniture
- **Walnut:** Frequently used in Victorian pieces
- **Oak:** Popular in late 1800s–early 1900s
- **Cherry:** Early American furniture
- **Maple:** Country and colonial styles
- **Rosewood:** Higher-end Victorian furniture

Many antiques combine solid wood frames with veneer surfaces.

Construction Features to Look For

- **Dovetail Joints:** Often hand-cut in older pieces
- **Mortise and Tenon Joints:** Traditional joinery method
- **Wooden Drawer Runners:** Common in older construction
- **Hand-Planed Surfaces:** Indication of hand craftsmanship
- **Solid Secondary Woods:** Used inside drawers

Machine-cut parts became more common in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Common Types of Antique Furniture

- **Dressers & Washstands:** Bedroom storage pieces
 - **Dining Tables & Sideboards:** Formal dining furniture
 - **Armoires & Wardrobes:** Large storage units
 - **Secretary & Writing Desks:** Functional antique desks
 - **Rocking & Parlor Chairs:** Seating pieces
 - **China Cabinets & Hutches:** Display storage
 - **Trunks & Blanket Chests:** Storage and travel items
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Reality of the Antique Market Today

- **Shifting Demand:** Traditional styles less popular with modern buyers
- **Size & Practicality:** Large pieces harder to sell and transport
- **Buyer Preferences:** Smaller, modern, or mid-century styles preferred

Because of these shifts, many antiques sell for less than they did in the past.

Some rare or high-quality pieces still perform well, but most sell based on demand, condition, and usability—not age alone.

Simple Way to Think About It

- **Antique:** 100+ years old
 - **Value:** Age + quality + demand
 - **Reality:** Not everything old is valuable
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Key Take-Away

The value of antique furniture is best understood by looking beyond age and focusing on the factors that drive real demand—quality, condition, and usability in today’s market.