

ANTIQUE QUEST

with Muriel & Michael Fahrion



Muriel & Michael Fahrion are avid antique collectors, researchers and online auctioneers. They run a commercial art studio, Big Rock Works, from their mountain bungalow. Contact them at: antiquequest@bba.travel

After 36 years spent collecting and studying remnants from the past, we look at *Antique Quest* as a way to share with others this fascination and also act as an introduction to those who are intrigued by the idea of living with antiques. We expect that our readers will send us photos of particular pieces they may have questions about. What era did they come from? Who was the designer behind the piece? How was it actually used? And predictably someone will ask, "How much is it worth?" It is the last question that we find the least interesting. Unless you're going to sell it, the price is not important. Also, prices vary too much for one to even presume that the value given can come close to what it might sell for. We would enjoy hearing your stories of quest and conquest.

Today we live surrounded by antiques and art. It wasn't always this way. It started in trickles. It started simply – a Roseville vase, a brass bed, some vintage slotted spoons, a sewing basket rescued from a basement, a steamer trunk, a Maxfield Parish print all purchased inexpensively to add to the hand-me-down furniture from our families. The Maxfield Parish "Air Castles" was found at a house sale in an attic tucked inside a steamer trunk. It was the day of the Great Lakes blizzard

of 1976, but that didn't stop us hardcore antique questors. Our reward for such bravery (foolishness?) was buying the print for \$4 and the trunk for \$12! We never bought for investment. We bought because of the intrigue, beauty, craftsmanship, patina or just because it made us smile. And although most experts recommend you study long and chose only the best, that was not how we did it. Our rule of thumb was if we could buy an antique for less than or at the same price of a new item and it was something we loved, we did.

Our first house was a late shingle-style Victorian that had been modernized in the 1940s. It was one of the least expensive places in the neighborhood. It was a combination of my childhood play where I made doll houses out of cardboard boxes and the myriad of craft projects Michael put together with his Dad that allowed us to fearlessly tackle returning the house to its 1906 roots. We restored furniture, stained glass windows, fretwork, accessories and all.

We have now lived in numerous styles of houses: Victorian, Dutch Colonial, low profile 1950s ranch, neo-traditional and mountain bungalow. We have looked at each one as an opportunity to find an-

The original Quaint Furniture Company tag



tiques and art to suit the house's personality and learn more about another era.

Just for starters, we have included the photographs of some antiques we live with. Here is an example of a fumed oak mission style rocker. It was purchased in the backroom of an antique store where they had fixer-uppers. This simple little rocker was "off its rockers." We picked it up for a mere pittance of \$25, I think. (See Backroom Quest.) The next photo shows yet another arts and crafts chair. It was manufactured by the Quaint Furniture Co. and had the original maker's tag. It is a true Stickley – not

the more expensive Gustav Stickley. FYI: This chair, purchased in 1998, was also found in the backroom of a shop and was just brought in for consignment. The shop owner had to call the consignor for the price. She said, "He won't take less than \$125." Michael whispered under his breath, "No high fives until we get the chair in the car!"

In the next issue we will be taking a look at how you can use antique fixtures and accessories to help create ambiance. Be sure to send us your Antique Quest stories and pictures of finds you would like identified. ●

BACKROOM QUEST

There is a quote from Larry McMurtry's book, *Cadillac Jack* that we feel should be in the mind of every one who goes on an antique quest, "Anything can be anywhere." No matter what the shop may look like from outside, or where a house sale may be, you might find a real treasure tucked away in a dusty backroom or garage.

Here is an example of such a find. We were out antiquing in an area we had not been before. After going through the shop we ventured into the "as-is" backroom. There in a neglected corner sat this wonderful little Arts & Crafts rocker. Surrounded with rusty metal objects and other broken furniture, it was covered in dust with an old, cheap cloth seat cover that was faded and torn. And worst of all, the rockers were missing. We brushed off the thickest part of the dust and carried it up to the clerk and asked the price. He said \$25, and we bought it. Even in its sad looking shape we could see it had potential.

We were careful to leave the original finish as we cleaned off years and years of accumulated dirt to reveal a fumed oak finish* that was at the height of popularity during the Arts & Crafts - Mission era. Michael made a pattern for the rockers from another old rocker of that period we owned which worked beautifully. The new rockers were cut from oak and stained to match the original finish as close as possible. We attached the rockers with pegs through the legs as the originals had been. Muriel upholstered it with a suitable piece of Pendleton fabric. When it was finished we had a fine looking piece that would have been in the front room of the antique shop.

This rocker bears no maker's mark. We haven't been able to find any reference that comes close enough to matching it to attribute it to any particular designer or any manufacturer of the arts and crafts period. No matter, it quietly enhances a nook and we love it.

**A fumed finish was accomplished by placing the wood pieces in a sealed chamber. Ammonia was then allowed to flow into trays on the floor of the chamber. The ammonia used was very strong commercial grade, fumes from the ammonia was poisonous and great care had to be taken when using it. The longer the wood was left in the ammonia fumes the darker it got. By timing the exposure, furniture makers could achieve different color finishes. After fuming, the furniture was assembled and a sealant applied.*



Mission style rocker,
maker unknown

Arts & Crafts style
chair made by the
Quaint Furniture
Company