



TIPS FROM TOP DESIGNERS ON HOW TO DECORATE WITH ANTIQUES
~ Featuring Mary Helen McCoy, Charlotte Moss, David Easton and Ralph Harvard ~

CHARLESTON, S.C., Oct. 15, 2008 – Decorating with antiques can be one of the toughest tasks if one is not familiar with the tricks of the trade. Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques is one of the nation's premier sources for fine and unusual, period 16th – 19th century French furniture and decorative arts. In addition to being an antiques dealer and President of Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques, Mary Helen McCoy is an accomplished decorator. Charlotte Moss, David Easton and Ralph Harvard are among the top designers in the interiors world and are well-versed in decorating with antiques. These designers join McCoy in providing answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about how to decorate with antiques.

“One of the greatest rewards in the decorating and antique industry is the interaction you have with your customers and the ability to recommend something that will bring them daily lasting pleasure,” McCoy said. “It is important to suggest which great pieces you should mix in a room while still adhering to the personal taste of the client.”

Can You Mix Furniture and Accessories from Different Periods in the Same Room?

Should you try to stay with one time period or create an ensemble that features products from numerous time periods? According to McCoy, it is wise to mix contemporary and modern pieces with antiques instead of having a period room that creates a stiff setting. “By mixing furnishings like a contemporary sofa, modern art and wonderful antiques, you can create an ambiance that is comfortable and inviting, as well as distinctive and elegant,” McCoy said. While mixing contemporary products with antiques is currently a popular decorating technique, it is not necessary to do this in every room.

An example of a stunning antique to mix with modern pieces is the French, Louis XIV period, marquetry commode from Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques. This sophisticated antique has a rounded rectangular top with molded brass edge, inlaid with a central floral spray of a basket of flowers flanked by birds with arabesque scrolls, acanthus leaves, insects and grotesque masks, above three long drawers similarly inlaid. Combining this stunning commode with a contemporary sofa and modern accessories could create a distinctive décor.

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Charlotte Moss, who has used Mary Helen McCoy as a source in her decorating projects, has become a trusted voice on achieving a discerning elegance that is informed with a mood of comfort and livability. She also recommends mixing periods. “I call it generational decorating – whether it’s the family or decorating – mixing creates excitement,” Moss said.

Ralph Harvard adds that “good pieces from any period always work well together.” Restoration, preservation and renovation of period buildings are his firm’s specialty and he is among the top experts on eighteenth century architecture in the country.

What Furniture and Accessories Make the Best Statement in a Room?

Choosing a piece that gives a powerful impression can be difficult. It is not only necessary to select one really striking piece of furniture, but also to focus on the big picture. According to David Easton, who while he has made his name as a neo-classicist, his erudition of architecture and decoration is wide-ranging and continuing, the most important first piece of furniture that goes into a room is a mantle. Secondly, the most important decoration to select is a carpet. Once these vital elements are taken care of, table settings and wall hangings can be added. “The biggest impact is a wonderful mirror on any wall,” said Easton. “A mirror is an additional window in the room.”

A stunning example of a mirror that can be used as an additional window is the French, Régence period, gilt wood mirror from Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques. This would add a decorative touch to a room while making the room look larger because of its reflection. “An ornate mirror provides something for the eye to become immediately attracted to, as well as serves a functional purpose within the room,” McCoy said.

Ralph Harvard believes that it is more about the big picture rather than the individual accessories. “You want someone to walk in and say ‘What a beautiful room’ not ‘What a beautiful chair’ or ‘What a beautiful wall color,’” said Harvard. If everything is complementary and works well together, it will be a great room.

How to Combine Different Textures and Colors in a Room?

Two of the most visually appealing elements of interior decorating are texture and color. With a wide variety of textures and colors available, it can become difficult to decide how to combine them. “You may use antique upholstered furniture with a more modern fabric and color,” McCoy said. “The mix of contemporary fabrics with antique furniture and accessories will give the room a distinctive personality.”

An example of an antiques show stopper is the 18th century German bureau made of 17th century marquetry by Antonio and Luccio de Lucci of Venice from Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques.

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This piece features components from both Germany and Italy and a scrolling strapwork border amongst panels of scrolling leaves, birds and insects that would add elegance and distinction to a room. McCoy could envision this with a nice, crisp paint color used as a background.

Can You Put Furniture with Different Finishes in the Same Room?

The use of furniture with different finishes in the same room, if done properly, can have a profound effect. When approached with this question, all designers agree that the answer is yes. “A mix of finishes suggests furniture that has aged gracefully, been accumulated over time and loved accordingly,” said Moss. Harvard believes mixing finishes is a good technique to use. “It is good to mix a highly glossed or finished piece with a rougher finish so that it is not too intimidating,” he said.

The pair of French, Louis XVI period, painted, beechwood fauteuils stamped, “C. SÉNÉ” from Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques would provide a striking counterpoint to a contemporary setting that would by contrast highlight their delicate and intricate detail. These armchairs are decorated with carvings of flowers and leaves resting on tapering fluted legs. “Combining fine antiques, such as these, with modern furnishings with a different finish may, when skillfully done, create a unified appearance in a room without having the stiff, repetitive look of a period room,” McCoy said.

How to Achieve Harmony in a Room?

There are many other factors to take into account when decorating with antiques. “The most critical element overall of decorating is the total sculptural relationship of the furniture to the interior architecture – it’s exactly like music,” said Easton. In essence, every piece of furniture contributes to the harmony of the room similarly to how every note contributes to the harmony of a song. Other noteworthy advice includes what to look for when purchasing fine antiques. Easton said one should look for sustainability to the overall interior architecture and architecture of the house – and its relationship to the overall design impact that is implied in the decoration.

Antiques as an Investment

Harvard believes the investment quality of antiques is a noteworthy topic. “Buyers have to take into consideration that antiques hold value so much more than new furniture,” he said. “The piece may not go up in value, but it won’t go down.”

When shopping for accessories, Moss recommends buying “First and foremost – the ones that you love, the ones that say who you are.” She offers examples of these accessories including a beautiful mirror that makes a great statement and is a good investment, a pair of candlesticks that are not only about a beautiful object but a candlelit room and a porcelain jardinière that is visibly placed with

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an orchid or flowers. As far as how many accessories to use, "Fewer and well chosen would be my mantra," she said.

McCoy believes antiques are not only a solid investment, but also a critical element to the shaping of a home. "Our homes are where we spend most of our lives," she said. "Therefore, the best investment is an antique that gives you the greatest pleasure and accurately portrays your personality."

Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques is based in Charleston, S.C. Charlotte Moss & Company, David Easton, Inc. and Ralph Harvard, Inc. are all based in New York, N.Y.

Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques exhibits in prominent, national and international fine art and antique fairs, including the upcoming *International Fine Art and Antique Dealers Show* in New York City in October. The firm is one of only 15 dealers in the United States to be a member of the prestigious Syndicat National des Antiquaires (SNA). It is also a member of the esteemed Confédération Internationale des Négociants en Oeuvres d'Art (CINOA) and The Art and Antique Dealers League of America for which Mary Helen serves on the Board of Directors. Mary Helen also serves on the Board of Trustees for the Birmingham Museum of Art.

Mary Helen McCoy Fine Antiques is located at 120 King Street in Charleston, S.C., and is open Monday to Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. For more information, call 843-577-6445, fax 843-577-6447, e-mail MHMcAntq@aol.com or visit www.maryhelenmccoy.com

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