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# Antiques from Asia not foreign to Texas

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*By Kay O'Donnell February 4, 2006 Publication: San Antonio Express-News (TX) Page: 01E Word Count: 864*

Introducing northern Chinese antiques into a South Texas setting might not seem a good fit. However, there are similarities between the seemingly disparate styles that make it a natural union.

"Northern Chinese pieces are typically much simpler than southern Chinese pieces," and therefore relate well to a rustic décor, said Ruth Davies, an Austin importer of Chinese furniture and owner of the shop Shanghai Collection.

Davies deals primarily in Chinese softwood antique furniture. "A lot of people call this style 'vernacular' furniture," she said. The pieces reflect a "country style" with designs related to the Ming dynasty.

Part of her collection will be displayed in a booth at the 19th annual Asian Festival today at the Institute of Texan Cultures.

Small pieces such as farmers' baskets and rice measures (large, mainly wooden buckets of standardized sizes used to portion out rice) can find use in contemporary homes as magazine or mail holders. "They have unique shapes that are ornamental and utilitarian," Davies said of the pieces.

The furniture with which Davies mainly deals features dark woods and rich painted tones balanced with simple ornamentation.

Davies, who travels to China to find her pieces, said it can be difficult for the average person to

discern an authentic Chinese antique from the flood of reproductions that have inundated the U.S. market.

"These (the reproductions) prices are very cheap, but the wood is new and lightweight, not as sturdily built as an old piece," she said.

Michael Quigley, owner of Oriental Arts in San Antonio, agrees that it is getting more difficult to find good pieces.

"The only thing I see coming out (of Japan) are brand-new pieces made to look like antiques," he said.

Quigley, who has been working with Asian antiques for 30 years and who specializes in Japanese arms and armor, cautions that when it comes to antiques from Asia, "the average buyer doesn't really know what they're looking at."

There are "lots of forgeries, copying out there" and some of it is very well-done, he warns. "Out of most of the things that I normally see, only about 20 percent has any real age to it," he said.

When purchasing an item labeled as an antique, the buyer should ask for documentation or have the piece appraised, especially if it is a high-dollar item, Quigley said.

Like Davies, Quigley said there are elements of the Asian aesthetic that can fit with any style of décor.

He cites the austerity of Chinese furniture as a style "that would work well in any situation (because) it's clean but beautifully done." But, he said, be prepared to pay handsomely for better made, mint-condition pieces, especially those crafted before 1900.

Like the rustic baskets, Asian screens can add panache to a room -- as long as there's space to show them off. Some screens, Quigley said, can be 8 feet wide and 5 feet high, and as they are typically hung on walls in Western households, wall space, and preferably high ceilings, are in order.

Peasant paintings, typically small and only about 50 years old, are a way to add color and culture to walls. Davies, who imports this style of art from Jinshan, China, near Shanghai, notes that the style is similar to folk painting, but done with thick tempera paint.

"Provinces have their own style of peasant painting," she said. Typical scenes often include children or festivals.

Other items commonly used for accent pieces are Asian porcelain and ceramics. The "blue and whites" are very popular, Quigley said, referring to the blue-and-white-colored Chinese porcelain patterns. Similar in style but offering an array of colors is Imari, a more visual and bold style of porcelain.

Quigley also said Asian wood-block prints and bronze pieces with gold or silver inlay serve as interesting entry pieces. Of the wood-block prints, he says depictions of samurai and natural settings are common.

The Korean culture has its own contribution, he said, in the form of celadon-colored objects. "The Koreans are famous for celadon," Quigley said, describing how scenes are sometimes etched beneath the green glaze. Look for earthenware vases, cups and bowls, he said.

In general, an Asian antique, whether it is a northern Chinese table or a small Japanese ceramic figure, can blend in to a variety of décors and personal styles, from midcentury modern to a South Texas setting.

Asian

Festival

What:

Celebration of culture and the New Year with Asian foods, dancing and games.

When:

10 a.m.-5 p.m. today.

Where:

UTSA Institute of Texan Cultures, 801 S. Bowie St., HemisFair Park.

Tickets:

\$3-\$7.

More info:

[www.texancultures.](http://www.texancultures.utsa.edu)

[utsa.edu](http://utsa.edu) or (210) 458-2300.

A bonus:

From 9 a.m. to noon, CPS Energy and Alamo Forest Partnership will give away 1,000 trees in celebration of Arbor Day to those participating in a brief course on tree care.

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