

# Amazing American Antiques

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# Handouts Amazing American Furniture

## Welcome to our CEU!

From the time Pilgrims landed on “Mayflower” in 1620, British furniture design was principal influence that shaped American furniture production. Then at beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> C, French furniture design became influential as well – during Federal and Classical Styles American Antique Periods: William and Mary, Queen Anne, Chippendale (whose names were based upon English Periods because American was basically an English Colony at that time, as they occurred before or during the American Revolution) and then Federal and Classical Periods, which were far more “American” in feel since by then America was a country of its own.

Sotheby’s said American furniture design copied English furniture design – but that is not accurate... Americans adapted English furniture design and created their own style

| Period               | English vs | American Dates    |
|----------------------|------------|-------------------|
| William and Mary     | 1680-1702  | 1690-1720         |
| Queen Anne           | 1702-1720  | 1720-1760         |
| Chippendale          | 1745-1760  | 1750-1790         |
| Hepplewhite/Sheraton | 1760-1800  | Federal 1790-1830 |

Differences between English and American Furniture:

1. Wood and especially the inside or the carcass wood
  - -Some American furniture used Birds Eye Maple as outside wood which English furniture never used
  - Most Mahogany veneers look the same, be they on English or American furniture
  - -But the English carcass is normally oak while American furniture carcasses have various woods, depending upon the region where it was made
2. Stylistic differences between English and American Furniture
  - -Block front chest and Newport Shell are only found on American furniture
  - -Philadelphia highboy bonnets with carved centers for broken pediments are only found on American furniture
  - -Chippendale chairs with exaggerated volutes or ears on top chair rail and “Owls Eye” decoration on chair splats are only found on American Furniture

American Period Furniture cannot be viewed as a single entity but must be subdivided into various regions, each with its own individual Regional style

1. New England - Since most prosperous Era in New England was early 18<sup>th</sup> C, New England was famous for its Queen Anne style furniture –and it retained many aspects of Queen Anne Style throughout entire 18<sup>th</sup> C. New England was most important area of colonies in early 18<sup>th</sup> C – up until about 1760 - but it fell into a recession in 1760 and never quite recovered. Since most good cabinetmakers were proficient in Queen Anne style furniture from Boston’s heyday, much of furniture still retained Queen Anne style throughout entire 18<sup>th</sup> C.

Rhode Island (Newport) was especially famous for its block fronted chests and beautiful carving that rivaled not only Boston but even high society “Philadelphia Style”

-Can be further subdivided into Boston, Charlestown, Newport RI, and Rural Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire  
Stylistic Generalizations in New England: Puritan, simple, thin, and had little decoration

- Boston Characteristics – Main cabinetmaker was Thomas Seymour
  1. Corkscrew finial
  2. Block front chests of drawers ( all New England)
  3. Top of chest is larger than rest of piece
  4. Tiny carved drop or drops on bottom of chest or apron
  5. Bombe shapes popular on chests
  6. Canted corners popular
  7. Closed in bonnet on highboy popular
  8. Pierced splats on Queen Anne style chairs rather than Chippendale style chairs
  9. Spindly legs on many furniture pieces
- Charlestown Characteristics – Main cabinetmaker was Charles Frothingham
  1. Some of best Boston Furniture produced in this Boston suburb near Cambridge
- Newport Characteristics - Main cabinetmakers were Goddard and Townsend
  1. Newport Shell
  2. Cupcake finials – urn on a plinth with a candle
  3. Block front chests of Drawers ( all New England)
  4. Bell Flowers
  5. Crooked ball and claw feet
  6. Closed in Bonnet on Highboy
  7. Ears and pierced splats applied to Queen Anne style chairs rather than actual Chippendale style chairs
- Salem Characteristics – Main Cabinetmaker – Samuel McKentire
  1. Punchwork motif designs popular
  2. Carved baskets of fruit in center of broken pediment
- Connecticut Characteristics
  1. Block Front
  2. Closed high bonnet on Highboys
  3. Shells
  4. Thin Queen Anne legs ending in Pad feet
  5. Eccentric – typical is atypical
- 2. New York, NY – New York's heyday was Federal Period when cabinetmakers looked to France for inspiration and created some of the finest known American Antiques  
Stylistic Generalization in New York: Initial influences were Dutch and Germanic - due to Dutch and Germanic settlers in NY area so heavier furniture... French Influence after 1800
- NY Characteristics: Main cabinetmakers were Charles Honore Lannuier & Duncan Phyfe
  1. Square heavy straight Marlborough legs ending in square block feet
  2. Straight chair rails
  3. Wider chair backs than other regional areas
  4. Heavy furniture
  5. Use of gadrooning popular
  6. Influence of Charles Honore Lannuier, French cabinetmaker after 1810 added inlaid and painted designs especially ovals

3. Philadelphia PA- Philadelphia “came into its own” in the 1760’s -1770’s. During the Chippendale Period, it became the seat of government and “High Society” and had many rich people (such as John Cadwalader who was the richest man in Philadelphia) who had the most money in America to spend on furniture, so many good cabinetmakers flocked to Philadelphia and produced some of the most beautiful and most beautifully carved Chippendale furniture done in the “Philadelphia version” of the “Chippendale style. But it fell into a recession during Federal Era after Revolutionary War – so didn’t have as beautiful furniture in Federal Era as it had in Chippendale Era.  
Stylistic Generalizations in Philadelphia: very elegant furniture with lovely carving/the best
  - Philadelphia Characteristics: Main cabinetmakers were Ben Frothingham, Thomas Affleck and Benjamin Randolph
    1. Rich deep sculptural Carving – naturalistic carving
    2. Typical Philadelphia highboy has scrolled broken pediment carved delicately with latticework trellis tracery
    3. Center of scrolled broken pediment is elaborately carved with basket of flowers or cartouche with peanut or kidney bean or cornucopia
    4. At each end of top of Philadelphia highboys were carved flame finials
    5. Philadelphia Highboys and chests often had fluted quarter columns and ogee bracket feet – which means that they were curved on the outside as well as the inside
    6. Chair rails were delicately carved
4. Washington DC area including Baltimore and Williamsburg
  - Washington DC Characteristics especially Baltimore
    1. Bellflowers
5. Charleston South Carolina and the entire south
  - Charleston Characteristics Main cabinetmaker: Thomas Elf
    1. All South had removable headboards for beds for ventilation and keeping cool in the summer – they removed the bed hangings as well and put up mosquito netting
    2. Rice beds – with carved rice motif designs on posts because rice was important crop
    3. Bell flowers
    4. Lozenge or Diamond shaped motifs
    5. Used Urns as finials on bedposts and highboys

American Furniture production: main body of a piece was made out of an expensive often indigenous wood used in its solid form (such as Walnut, Mahogany, Maple, Cherry and/or Fruitwoods,) which was called the Primary wood; while the inner unseen areas (such as bottoms and sides of drawers) were made out of a cheaper indigenous wood, (such as Pine, Tulipwood /Poplar and/or Cypress) which was called the Secondary wood. Since different geographic areas had different indigenous tree species, one can often tell the origin of an American piece by its wood, especially by its secondary wood.

Regional Differences of American Furniture:

1. Carcass woods were local – but they are now old and it is hard to differentiate between them
  - New England – White Pine Carcass
  - New York – Saw gum or Tulip poplar
  - Philadelphia – White Cedar
  - South Caroline – Cypress

## American Period Styles

### **William and Mary Period: C 1690-1720**

First real Period in America...Not much furniture used at this time in America

Age of Walnut

Typified by tall chairs and case furniture all resting on Trumpet turned legs,

Marquetry and Lacquer popular, especially for case furniture

Gate leg tables appear

Highboys and Lowboys first introduced

### **Queen Anne Period: C 1720-1760**

Formal rectilinear lines of William and Mary Period were exchanged for graceful subtle serpentine curves

Walnut still wood of choice but Mahogany introduced and becomes increasingly popular

Main carved decorations were smooth shell & curved Cabriole leg-both used on most furniture

New England Epitomized the Queen Anne style - When you think American Queen Anne

furniture— think New England - Additionally –New England loved this style so much that they retained the Queen Anne style throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> C

Furniture in use: various chairs, highboys, lowboys and tables

Furniture:

1720's New England Q A chairs have: prominent curved hoop back with uprights that look like shoulders, simple vase shaped splats with yoke shaped top rail, and cabriole legs that terminated in club feet

1730's New England Q A chairs have: crooked back, with carved shell at top, compass or balloon seats that were often drop in, and cabriole legs terminating in ball and claw feet

Easy chairs were introduced – comfortable but expensive

Sofas were only found in wealthy homes

Philadelphia made more elaborate versions of these Q A chairs in 1740's -1750's

Fully Dressed Beds were among the most important articles of furniture in a wealthy 18<sup>th</sup> C

Consisted of 3 parts... the "bed furniture" or drapery, the "bed" or mattress and the "bedstead" or frame which was either Low or High posted

18<sup>th</sup> C marked introduction of numerous specialized tables: tea tables and card tables, claw tables, slab tables, night tables, breakfast tables, toilet tables side-board tables, writing tables and library tables

Bureaus and fall front Desks became more common

Highboys became even more popular, made en suite with a lowboy

### **Chippendale Period: C 1750-1790**

English Chippendale Style C 1745-1760 was light playful whimsical style where straight lines were eliminated wherever possible and a deliberate asymmetry was sought after

Chippendale style became popular in America around 1750 and continued in popularity to 1790 even after the Revolutionary War :

It overlapped earlier Queen Anne style at its beginning and the later Federal style at its end

Continued long after Chippendale Period had finished in England, probably because war

stopped relations between the 2 countries and many American cabinetmakers didn't have any information on the newer, later Hepplewhite and Sheraton styles

-Philadelphia took over as dominant center for American Chippendale furniture

The most beautifully carved, most highly developed Chippendale chairs were made in Philly Philadelphia Cabinetmakers- especially Thomas Affleck and Benjamin Randolph, adapted the furniture popularized in the great pattern-books popular at that time especially Thomas Chippendale's "The Gentleman and Cabinet-Makers Director", but modified furniture to represent Philadelphia taste and style

-Newport Rhode Island under famous cabinetmakers Goddard and Townsend, became famous for their blocked front style

Furniture:

Chair proportions change: backs became lower and were pierced in an infinite variety of ways, seats and legs get wider

Chairs: Splats, front legs, seats and entire frame becomes undulating and exaggeratedly carved while Back legs remain devoid of ornament because they were meant to stand against the wall when not in use and when in use at the table, would be seen only by the servants

Straight Marlborough legs became popular but the 3 dimensionally carved cabriole leg terminating in an undulating realistic ball and claw foot was the most popular

In America arm chairs with rectangular backs and square seats with straight legs often decorated with blind or pierced fretwork were called Marlborough chairs

Easy Chairs now had undulating aprons and frames embellished with carved foliage

Sofas first really became popular in Chippendale Era:

Had exaggerated undulating serpentine shaped backs, long stuffed seat accommodating two or more people, high scrolled stuffed arms, 6 curved 3 D carved cabriole or straight Marlborough legs and 3 D carved Ball and Claw Feet

Bedhangings were still far more important than bedstead or frame

Many new tables appeared in Chippendale Period: Most of the surviving tables are either tea or card tables – with either round or square tops..

In Philadelphia most tea tables had round tops with piecrust edges and birdcage action but in New England, most tea table had square tops and round ones were usually devoid of carving

Tables with raised fretwork gallery inside the rim were called "China tables

Side tables were now called Slab tables and Chippendale called them frames for Marble slabs

Sideboard tables were similar in form to side tables but were intended to be used in Dining room

Chippendale Card tables were rectangular with square corners, cabriole legs with ball and claw feet while in New England card tables were often plain with a blocked sculptural façade

Chippendale Case furniture was often the most elaborate of all Chippendale Furniture:

New England especially Rhode Island Case furniture is now block fronted

First Bureau in American was Chippendale one of 4 types according to their fronts:

1. Serpentine front (waving curve convex in center and concave at sides),
2. Reverse serpentine front (opposite – concave in center and convex at sides)
3. Blocked front
4. Straight front without curves

Philadelphia Highboys represent the highest Pinnacle of Chippendale furniture and carving exemplified by lovely bonnet tops with scrolled broken pediments topped with flame finials

## Federal Style C 1790-1840

After the war a new style emerged in American- which can be subdivided into 2 Eras

1. Earlier style - called the Federal Style -1790-1820 which was based upon Roman Ruins found at the newly discovered ancient Italian cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii. It corresponds to a combination of the English Hepplewhite (curved line) and Sheraton (straight line- rectangular) styles popular in England around 1780-1800 coupled with a new interest in Americanism – and exemplified by American motifs such as the eagle and the star. Philadelphia was still a very important city in terms of furniture design but now areas around Washington DC -the new capital of the United States of America became equally important
2. Later style sometimes called the Classical Style -1810-1840 which was based upon the Greek Cave Paintings, Vase paintings and sarcophagi found in the secondary excavations of those same cities coupled with an interest in both French Design and Egyptian motifs. During this time New York became very important city in terms of furniture design due to 2 cabinetmakers:  
Duncan Phyfe who popularized the Sheraton/Regency Style and  
Charles Honore Lannuier who introduced French furniture design into the New York furniture repertoire

Inspiration for this furniture came from 2 English Patternbooks:

Hepplewhite's Gentlemen's and Cabinetmaker's Guide and Sheraton's Gentlemen's and Cabinetmaker's Drawing Book .

This translated into straighter less exaggerated lines and simpler less heavily carved pieces  
Circles, Semicircles and ovals were key

Symmetry was important and exaggerated curves were replaced with straighter lines

Marquetry replaces carving as decorative form and it is now called inlay

Motifs were tiny strings of detail that looked like delicate jewelry : strings of pearls, bell flowers

Furniture used: chairs, sofas, beds, tables, sewing tables, sideboards, bureaus

Furniture:

Chairs were often either in Hepplewhite shield back style or Sheraton square back style with vertical back posts

Easy Chairs in New England still had cabriole legs but elsewhere had straight Marlborough legs

Sofas often have oval backs, straight tapered legs or monopodium supports

Tables: often have straight tapered legs and spade feet – are often made in demi lune or semicircular shape though sometimes still retained vestiges of Chippendale era with slightly curved tops

Many still made with central pedestal and tripod base

New York Tables often have turned fluted legs

Dining tables come into greater use and are now used in the Dining Room

Federal Case Furniture, especially bureaus were made in manner of Hepplewhite and Sheraton

Desks were exception to rule: made in several designs displaying English & French influence:

Desk was first furniture item to show French Influence –a Bureau with long legs and drawers topped with a superstructure of drawers –like the French Bureau-a-Gradin with either tambour or cylinder doors became popular in Federal Period as well as in English Fall-Front design

A new item, the Sideboard appeared, also intended to sit in the Dining Room- and were sometimes made in Tambour style

Bookcases were designed in several pieces or stages: lower stage being a bureau, upper stage

being a bookcase with either wooden or glass fronted doors, a cornice, a pediment and some decorative feature above the pediment and with some sort of desk in the center – either a fall front desk a cylinder desk or a tambour desk

This piece is called a Secretary because of “Secretary drawer” named so by Thomas Sheraton.

Federal Library Bookcase was enlarged version of Secretary

Highboys were not as popular in Federal Period

### **Classical Style C 1810-1840**

It is different form of Classicism than the one popularized by Hepplewhite and Sheraton...

From 1810-1840 the style in America was defined by and based upon:

1. The secondary excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii that had been discovered and that were the rage in England and France based upon Grecian cave paintings, vase paintings, and sarcophagi

2. Egyptian Motifs popularized due to France and England's fighting in Egypt... Coupled with

3. An interest in French Directoire design

Most popular cabinetmakers were:

1. Duncan Phyfe who popularized the Grecian Style

2. Charles-Honoré Lannuier who popularized the French Directoire Style

Stylistic Elements of Classical Style 1810-1840:

Large classical motifs such as lyres, Greek and Egyptian caryatids

Chairs based upon Greek Klismos chair

Round Reeded Tapered Legs or Splayed legs that on case furniture often protrude like columns and go all the way up through the piece

Square backs and Monopodium supports for chairs and sofas

Caryatids

Furniture

Chairs had rolled backs, turned tapered reeded Louis XVI style front leg and sabre back legs

Sofas have turned reeded legs and Monopodium supports Duncan Phyfe

Tables now rest upon a central shaft and 4 (rather than 3) splayed legs

or 4 turned reeded legs, or supports in the shape of a lyre

2 styles of Case Furniture were popular: one based upon English designs and the other based upon French designs

English styled bureau is similar to Federal bureau but leg is ringed and often comes up through the entire piece

French Empire Chest is made of dark wood, flat panels, sharp edges and large ormolu mounts

Classical Style Philadelphia Secretary bookcase also is made of dark wood with flat panels, sharp edges and large ormolu mounts

Classical style Mirrors had round frame and usually had eagle motif on top

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## Biography

Beverly Vosko is a “Full Service”, licensed ASID, TAID Interior Designer, President and founder of Beverly Vosko Interiors, DBA for C. V. Design Inc. She is also a CAPS and LEED Green Associate. For over 25 years, she has been designing majestic homes across the United States and Europe, specializing in creating custom Residential, Commercial and Hospitality environments, be they Traditional, Transitional, Contemporary or Eclectic, that match her clients' every need. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa, Magna Cum Laude from the University of Pennsylvania, studied Art History at Harvard University, received her MBA in Marketing from Stern Graduate Business School, and her design and Antiques training from Sotheby's and the world renown Inhbald School of Design. She has taught Antiques and Interior Design at both Rice University and the University of Houston, currently conducts monthly Interior Design and Antique tours in and around Houston and teaches Interior Designers about Antiques, Interior Design, Green Design and Universal Design /ADA codes for licensing Continuing Education via another one of her companies, InteriorDesign-ED. Please check out her websites, [www.vosko.com](http://www.vosko.com) and [www.InteriorDesign-ED.com](http://www.InteriorDesign-ED.com)

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