

## **Top 10 Rules for Valuing Antiques & Collectibles Like an Appraiser**

From Pamela Wiggins (<http://antiques.about.com/od/antiquesgeneralguides/tp/aa012406.htm#>)

Determining the value of an antique or collectible means more than locating an item in a price guide or auction results. In fact, that's just the beginning of the valuation process. There are a number of factors to consider when deciding how much your antiques are really worth. With a little effort, patience and learning about your favorite antiques categories, along with these guidelines to point you in the right direction, you can learn to value it yourself like an appraisal pro.

### **1) Don't Overlook a Mark**

Whether we like it or not, items stamped with a manufacturer or designer's mark are often worth more than identical pieces with no signature. Use a magnifying glass or jeweler's loupe, if necessary, to make sure you don't overlook a mark that may add value and assist you with further research. With hand painted and hand crafted pieces, finding an artist's signature in addition to a manufacturer's mark is a boon. Be sure to examine each piece carefully for these valuable identifying signs.

### **2) Consider Condition**

One of the most important factors to consider when you value an antique is condition . Even when you locate an item in a price guide, if your piece isn't in comparable condition the point is moot. Take all flaws into consideration including chips, cracks, excessive wear, tears, stains and missing components. Is it a minor nick or major crack? Basically, look for anything that keeps your antique from being in like new or "mint" condition and take that into consideration when determining value.

### **3) Is It Common or Rare?**

There are times when an extremely rare antique with condition factors will still be worth quite a good sum. For instance, if you determine that you own a piece of Newcomb pottery with a hairline crack, it may still be worth quite a nice sum. However, if you own a cracked piece of Frankoma pottery, it probably won't hold much more than decorative value. If you're not sure about how rarity plays into the area you're researching, check with an expert in that field before discarding a damaged item.

### **4) Old Doesn't Always Mean Valuable**

Much of an item's value lies in the buyer's demand. There are many items over 100 years old now that aren't in high demand. Take birthday greeting postcards from the early 1900s as an example. Many of these postcards survived over the years making them too common to hold much value. On the other hand, if you own a hard to find Santa Claus postcard of the same age, it's likely worth more. There are times when a single Santa postcard can be worth \$75 or more to an avid collector or dealer.

### **5) Is it Real or Fake?**

If an item has been in your family for many generations and you know the provenance, you can feel reasonably sure you're dealing with an authentic antique. But if you purchase

an item at a shady flea market, many times you'll have to authenticate it before you can truly determine the value. Look for telltale signs of wear and age, along with discrepancies in marks and signatures. Subtle details can often provide clues to the true age of an object. Use black light testing as a place to start.

#### **6) Has It Been Restored or Repaired?**

Professional restoration can add value to a rare antique, but amateur repairs affect value negatively in most cases. It's important to evaluate a piece to discern whether it has been haphazardly repaired or the original value-adding patina has been removed. If glue is present, solders are easily detected, or chips have obviously been ground down, an antique or collectible should be valued accordingly. Minor repairs may not affect the value of a piece at all. Ask an expert if you're not sure.

#### **7) Does It Have Salvage Value?**

Just because an antique or collectible is broken or damaged doesn't necessarily render it totally worthless. Many dealers will buy items they can repair or use for parts to repair other pieces. Severely damaged antiques are sometimes transformed by those clever at makeover projects, or crafters will purchase them for supplies. Depending on the extent of the damage and the item's relative usefulness, it may still hold some value. It's wise to check around before banishing it to the dumpster.

#### **8) Consider Current Market Influences**

If you've located an item in a price guide or auction results, does the information reflect current markets? Prices for antiques and collectibles can fluctuate widely and quickly depending on current demand. Prices may drop down to pre-demand levels once the boom has passed, or they may remain high due to diminished supply as dealers have difficulty replenishing inventories. It's important to watch the markets in your favorite collecting categories and stay on top of value-affecting trends.

#### **9) Ask an Expert Friend for Advice**

Many times when you're watching *Antiques Road-show* appraisers will indicate they've consulted with their colleagues when determining values. This happens in the non-televised world too. Don't be afraid to ask a well-versed friend or a dealer you trust for their opinion. Sometimes your educated judgment will overrule what they've shared, but it's good to get the advice of others when you're feeling a bit uncertain about valuing an item, especially those seldom seen on the secondary market.

#### **10) Think About Common Values for Common Pieces**

Appraisers most often value antiques based on the median value rather than the highest or lowest prices realized for similar items. There are times when a piece will sell very high at auction, but the same item will bring a more moderate price at an antique show. In the same vein, items aren't valued based on a bargain garage sale buys either. Rarities are more difficult to value, however. The most recent selling price may be a good indicator of expected market value when pricing a rare item.

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