

City of Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission WINTER 2012 NEWSLETTER

Smart Shopping Tips

Searching for antiques or old building parts can be tough, so, thanks to Old House Online, here are some tips to make finding what you need easier.

Salvage Yards: Preservationists may cringe over the loss of unique structures that supply salvage yard inventory, but admit that saving elements is better than all being lost. Houses sometimes need parts and this is a great resource for authentic items and elements with a story. Some stores sell entire rooms.

Often the salvage dealer is the only source of information about the piece and where it came from. Focus a discerning eye on other things, like suitability and condition. As most salvaged house parts are made of wood, consider if the species, patina, and finish are a good for the end use. Painted wood may contain some lead-based paint, so be aware of health hazards with that. In fact, many dealers won't carry painted wood for that reason.

Check condition. Check how weathered exterior doors and windows are, and that all parts move easily. See how many nail holes doors and flooring have. How many times have floorboards been re-sanded? One more sanding may leave you with nothing but the tongue and groove below. Look for any breaks, splits, or signs of rotting wood, and consider if the sizes and thicknesses of older floorboards fit the space. Always check for missing pieces: you can find parts for the inner workings of an antique light fixture, but the ornamental pieces are harder.

Non-profit salvage shops often benefit local preservation efforts with proceeds, and often have the best pricing.

Once you find what you want, try negotiating a better price. Watch for sales too; salvage yards have to move inventory like any other store, so it's easier to deal on overstocked styles that are unpopular or in unusual sizes that won't fit a new home. These days, antique lumber and bricks are in great demand.

eBay or Online Auctions: Dealing with eBay or any Internet auction site is a bit of a gamble. While it offers countless items and unprecedented opportunities to find pieces that would have virtually impossible to locate just a few years ago, eBay has some risks. A few tips offered by veterans of the eBay auction:

- After doing the research and finding the item you want, begin bidding
- In a bidding "war" with others, one strategy is to wait until the last moment before the sale ends and enter a significantly larger bid than the last offer
- Sometimes sellers will contact bidders when the winning bid falls through, so check back
- Don't get too attached to the item: odds are someone else is also looking for that unusual find



8 Tips for Successful Auction Buying

Don't be intimidated: Most of today's auctions aren't stuffy or ruthless. competition. Live auctions are growing more popular, with total gross revenues nationwide of \$270.7 billion in 2007 according to the National Auctioneers Association, a jump of 5.3% over 2006 and steadily increasing in the last decade.

1. Locate an auction near you. Ask other old-house owners if they know of auctions. Your local newspaper also carries auction notices in the classifieds. Or visit the National Auctioneers Association website (auctioneers.org) to search for live auctions by date, category of item, or geographically by zip code. Another useful web site to try: auctionnetwork.com.

2. Start with a low-key environment. Find a place that's low-stress and welcomes newcomers; most are. Look for a place that makes a pre-printed list of items to be auctioned available, either beforehand on the web or at the door.

3. Know your limits. Before you enter, know how much you are willing to spend to get started. Twenty dollars? Two hundred dollars? Any amount is fine since most public auctions have items in a wide range of prices. (Check the auction list to make sure.) Once you decide on a limit, stick to it. It's easy to get carried away during the proceedings, especially as a newbie.

4. Go in prepared. Once you get involved in the auction, you won't want to leave to eat, so take a snack or check if food is sold on site. Take a notebook with measurements of rooms, doorways, windows, and walls that you may want to furnish. Take a tape measure to check items for size; a pen; checkbook, credit card, and cash; and a cell phone. Also pack bubble wrap, boxes or bags in case you buy a delicate or hard-to-carry item.

5. Check out items before the bidding starts. Most auctions will let you do that in a specified period before the bid-calling begins; it may be a separate day before the auction. Research items featured, then come back and bid. In the end, the responsibility lies with you, so buyer beware.

6. Take a gut-check friend. Besides making the outing itself more enjoyable, having a friend or family member along gives you a second opinion on potential purchases, and can remind you about your spending limits in the heat of the moment. Take someone with a level head and common sense and listen.

7. Ask to hear the ground rules. Most auctions operate on the same basic principles: Ask for a list of rules. Expect things to move quickly until you get used to sounds and feelings. Don't be intimidated by the auctioneer's chant, which is just a call-and-response singsong meant to entertain the audience and move the goods along as quickly as possible. If you want to master the basic terms you'll be hearing, go to the NAA web site and click on the glossary page.

8. Drive a truck or SUV. Just in case you end up getting a real deal on something big. Later pick-ups often aren't allowed.

What Style is Your House?

Prairie School Style (1893-1920)

The Prairie School Style house was a late 19th and early 20th century architectural style, most common to the Midwestern United States. It is largely credited to Frank Lloyd Wright, one of America's most innovative and famous architects. Other Prairie School architects included Barry Byrne, E. Fay Jones, Percy Dwight Bentley, Walter Burley Griffin, and Francis Conroy Sullivan to name a few.

The term *Prairie School* was not actually used by these architects to describe themselves. The term was used to describe the relationship of the style to the landscape and spirit of the great Middle West.

The Prairie School developed in sympathy with the ideals and design aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts Movement begun in the late 19th century in England. It shared elements of handcrafting and craftsman guilds as a reaction against the new assembly line, mass production manufacturing techniques, which they felt created inferior products and dehumanized workers.

The Prairie School was also an attempt at developing an indigenous North American style of architecture that did not share design elements and aesthetic vocabulary with earlier styles of European classical architecture. In reaction, they sought to create new work in and around Chicago (taking advantage of rebuilding after the Great Fire of 1871 and attention from the World's Fair of 1893) that would display a uniquely modern and authentically American style, which came to be called Prairie. While the style originated in Chicago, the influence spread beyond the Midwest.

As the leader of the Prairie School movement, Wright's goal in designing this radical new form of architecture was to create organic architecture the primary tenet of which was that a structure should look as if it naturally grew from the site. He believed that houses should be an integration of structural and aesthetic beauty and above all a sensitivity to human life. Wright also felt that a horizontal orientation was a distinctly American design motif, in that the younger country had much more open, undeveloped land than found in most older, urbanized European nations.

Wright worked with and was mentored by Louis H. Sullivan until 1893, when he left Sullivan's employ to open his own architectural firm. Sullivan was ultimately more well known as a teacher and philosopher. Feeling that rooms in Victorian era homes were boxed-in and confining, Wright was the first of Sullivan's students to move toward a new form of architecture - a style with open interior spaces and whose gently sloping roofs and low proportions fit with the quiet beauty of the prairie.

Homes in the Prairie Style are informal and comfortable, blending in with and connected to the landscape. They are defined by:

- Strong horizontal lines
- One-story projections
- Belt-courses between the stories
- Broad overhanging eaves that spread toward the ground
- Open interiors
- Rows of small windows and art glass
- Indigenous materials and hand-craftsmanship
- Low-pitched, flat, or hipped roof

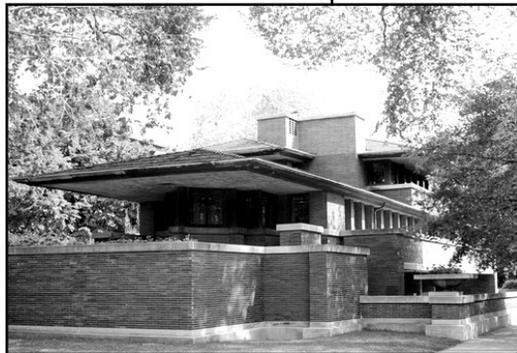
Early Prairie houses were usually plaster with wood trim or sided with horizontal board and batten. Later Prairie homes used concrete block. Prairie homes can have many shapes: Square, L-shaped, T-shaped, Y-shaped, and even pinwheel-shaped.

Many other architects designed Prairie homes and the style was popularized by pattern books. The popular American Foursquare style, sometimes called



the Prairie Box, shared many features with the Prairie style.

In 1936, during the USA depression, Frank Lloyd Wright developed a simplified version of Prairie architecture called Usonian. Wright believed these stripped-down houses represented the democratic ideals of the United States.



"What Style is Your House?" was a regular feature of early HPC Newsletters; some information in these articles may have already been published or compiled from other sources like Old House Journal online, Wikipedia, and about.com as well as from our recent Historic Resources Survey of the Jacksonville Historic.