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ARMCHAIR ANTIQUING

Jessica Doyle finds out how to take the best routes to buying antiques online, and gives a round-up of other news and events

When it comes to buying antiques, it is hard to beat the thrill of a live bidding war at an auction house, but the inexorable rise of online shopping has had a modernising and democratising effect on this traditional industry. The first online auctions took place in 1995, the same year that eBay launched and, since then, their popularity and reach has soared. But how do you negotiate the challenges of internet antiques shopping, and avoid the various pitfalls that can come with buying online? Below, some experts offer their advice.

WHERE DO YOU START?

The sheer number of online auctions is daunting, but one service that addresses this issue is Barnebys (www.barnebys.co.uk), established by Swedish antiques expert Pontus Silfverstolpe (above right), which launched in the UK this May. The site collates saleroom and online auctions from over 30 houses in the UK, including Sotheby's, Christie's and Bonhams. Subscription is free of charge, and another key advantage is that you get one email newsletter a week – rather than several from various auction houses bombarding your inbox – as well as the option to get personalised email alerts from sales all over the world, tailored to what you're looking for. If auctions aren't your thing, try 1stdibs (www.1stdibs.com), which brings together



high-quality antiques, vintage furniture and design from more than 1,500 international dealers, while Decorative Collective (www.decorativecollective.com), a favourite with the *House & Garden* decoration team, provides a fruitful hunting ground on an accessible level.

WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR?

'Don't be scared of buying online,' says Pontus. As 1stdibs founder Michael Bruno (above left) points out, 'Sourcing antiques online allows you access to dealers and products that otherwise you may never have seen.' Both emphasise that it is important to use sites like theirs, where the dealers are well vetted, and to get plenty of information about what you are buying. The quality of the images provided is key – you need to be able to enlarge the picture and view the piece from different angles. Research before you buy and, as Michael says: 'Remember, if the price seems too good to be true, it probably is.'

WHAT IS BEST TO BUY?

'Buy with your heart, and buy with your own wallet; if you can afford it, you will never regret it,' says Pontus. Michael agrees: 'If you love the piece and it's more than you were planning to spend, divide the price by the years of enjoyment to be had and you will always come out ahead.' Be open-minded, Michael advises. 'Don't be locked into one style or period, and avoid trends. Buying something "current" and at the height of the market is like speculating: you won't know if it will retain its value. However,' he adds, 'if you are looking for underestimated antiques at the moment, I would suggest eighteenth-century neoclassical or art-nouveau furniture.' ▸

As seen online



BARNEBYS
Eighteenth-century Swedish armchairs, £2,000-£3,000



1STDIBS
Art-nouveau vase by Galileo Chini, £10,550



BARNEBYS
Set of 64 eighteenth-century Chinese plates, £2,000-£2,500



BARNEBYS
Arne Jacobsen 'Egg' chair (1958), £2,200-£2,400



1STDIBS
Phyllis Morris art-nouveau style chest, £2,785



1STDIBS
Eighteenth-century Italian table, £12,123