

Everything Olde Is New Again!

Antique and Classic Style Office Furniture

When it comes to the interior design of offices, few lovers of fine furniture realise that they can have their cake and eat it too – functionality and timeless beauty. Many people don't perceive that there is a place for their stylish furniture both at home and at work. If they can overcome just two obstacles, I'm sure they will reach the same conclusion as I have.

The first obstacle is to overcome 'group think' or thinking the same way that everyone else does. Since most businesses have standard contemporary office furniture and because the bulk of advertising, films and such reflect this as normal, most purchasers don't even think about other alternatives. However, lots of

wonderful choices do exist and these are discussed in this article.

The second obstacle follows the 'I didn't know it was possible' factor. Once buyers come to realise that antique and fine furniture is a good choice in offices, they don't realise that alterations can be made, where necessary, without diminishing the value of the pieces. Furthermore, many people don't understand that any furniture can be custom designed and manufactured featuring personal choices such as mouldings, carvings or fittings. This enables 'specific need' furniture to be made which matches in nicely with existing furniture.

Continued on page 39



Antique French burr walnut desk with cross banding and 22 carat gold embossed leather top. Middle drawer is hinged outward upon opening so allowing computer keyboard use and storage.



Olsson range three-drawer silky oak filing cabinet accommodating modern suspension filing systems

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Continued from page 31

Now I'll expand on what I mean about the first obstacle. When in their commercial or career mode, a lot of fine furniture lovers simply get caught up in the metal and plastic, 'use today and throw away tomorrow' world of contemporary styles of office furniture. This is because these contemporary styles have evolved into the standard way that everyone furnishes their offices. Such furniture is generally mass produced and made quickly using cheap materials. Not only that, but it's produced to a tight budget and profit margin with countless middle men picking up their due along the way. I'm not saying this is wrong, I'm simply saying that this is the norm that has evolved over time.

After reading this article I'm hoping enthusiasts of classic and antique furniture will be better able to think outside the square. Fine and antique office furniture holds many values such as aesthetics, artistry, antiquity, prestige and investment value (antiques and fine furniture can actually increase in value over time). Additionally, classic and antique furniture can be highly functional and most importantly, it can even enhance personal and corporate image.

There is a lot of psychology tied up with images and how people perceive them. The conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings gained from being in your office amongst the furniture and decor need to result in pleasure and energy for both you and your staff. Your furniture can reflect an image of professionalism to your clients as well as an aura of uniqueness, precision, prestige, mastery, style, and elegance.

Now the values, thoughts and feelings of your clients also require consideration. Will the image



Olsson range cedar revolving book case with 22 carat gold embossed English leather top. Accommodates foolscap size manila folders.

of your office furniture reflect the values that your clients are seeking in the products and services you offer? For example, if your business advocates New Age thinking you might combine New Age imagery with Renaissance style furniture, making iconic connections between the two enlightening time periods. If you were a client coming into an investment brokers office you would no doubt feel more comfortable seeing valuable, well restored and stylish antiques in the office rather than vinyl, metal and MDF or chipboard furniture.

Many professionals who have antique and fine furniture in their offices do so because they like it. It provides the effect of having been in business for a long time, it demonstrates the success achieved (being able to afford antiques and fine furniture) and the idea that you intend to be around for a long time still.

People who wish to set themselves apart from the rest of the pack will do so by having office furniture which others don't have. Indeed antique furniture, through its innate uniqueness, portrays this image to the client. They get the impression that you have a specialised business, which sells unique products and services.

The condition of the furniture also needs to reflect the business products and services and the corporate values. For instance if your business is about providing travel services to those undertaking historical site visits and archaeological field trips, patina (character marks resulting from age and use) looks wonderful on the furniture surfaces. However, if you are the Chief Executive Officer for a major corporation selling wood machines, sanders, paints and finishes, it would not do well to have patina or poor quality finishes on your desktops and counters. A final example would be for an architectural or engineering firm. These firms should not choose antiques of lower functionality and strength with the joints obviously in great need of repair.

So, to be really successful, the furniture needs to reflect what your clients are coming to your business for. For even within the world of antiques and fine furniture there are so many different styles and tastes that care must be taken to choose according to the image and feeling both you and your clients need.

Now that we are over the first obstacle we will attend to the second. Many people don't believe antique furniture can handle contemporary stationery and technology. They are partly right, but mostly wrong. Some antique and period furniture, through its original design, is naturally able to take the stationery and technological hardware commonly found in today's offices. Most desks, desk chairs, library tables, bookcases, reception area chairs, accessional furniture, side tables, display cabinets, storage cupboards and shelving are designed in such an unrestrictive manner that anything can be placed on it, or fitted within it.

Many people hold the misconception that because mouldings, carvings, colours or timbers are dissimilar in different pieces of furniture, they cannot be used collectively in the one room. However in a lot of cases the furniture can be altered and French polished to match other items in the room, in terms of style, colour and shine. In other cases the antique and fine furniture may need minor adjustments to handle the new needs. An example might be the alteration of the centre drawer in a desk so that it still looks the same from the outside when closed, but when in use, it hinges out and rolls out to perform the role of support for the keyboard of a computer. In pedestal desks the drawers on one side can be replaced by a cupboard, which takes the bulk of the computer tower and all the accompanying wiring, freeing up the space on the desk. Some executives want the computer monitor removed from the desktop altogether because it acts as a physical barrier to discussions. Sometimes the monitors are placed adjacent to the desk and some are actually mounted inside the desktop surface. Where security is important, hidden, secret compartments can be added to house safes or important items and documents.

There are some pieces of antique furniture, which although lovely are impractical for an office, perhaps due to their dimensions. In cases where the piece is liked and valued, the decision to alter needs consideration. As an example we'll

discuss a piece which was common years ago in professional offices – the revolving bookcase. Professionals, typically accountants, solicitors, doctors, architects, engineers and financial executives, stored their small books and numerous folders in these years ago. Unfortunately with the introduction of modern day manila folders they are not really as useful. So, this is where the option of custom made reproductions come in. Anyone handling a lot of projects or clients, each with their own manila folder will rejoice at the ease of retrieving and storing files in a revolving bookcase. These can be so convenient when placed adjacent to the desk. One simply spins the bookcase to the appropriate side before selecting or returning a file. No more getting up out of a chair and no danger of filing cabinets falling over with too many drawers being opened at once. Antique furniture can sometimes offer a better alternative to the modern solution.

Another problem encountered by those wanting the antique and fine styles of furniture in their office is how to combine the necessary modern items of furniture, which jar the eye. The filing cabinet, for example, is nearly all made of metal and can look odd next to timber furniture in an office, especially since the styles and colours are so different from each other. It is possible however to obtain custom made solid timber filing cabinets. These can be made so that the popular suspension file systems found in most offices will fit perfectly.

To conclude this article I will go back to the first comment about having your cake and eating it too. With office furniture, you can have your functionality and your timeless beauty. Won't it be nice to know that this furniture is probably appreciating in value, even though everything else is depreciating? ■

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