

Treasures in your Attic?

ART AND ANTIQUES
EXPERT MJ CLARK
CAN TELL YOU



An ironing board bearing a hot iron deftly guided by Mary Jane Clark, an attractive woman with shiny brown hair, stood between us the first time I met MJ on a brisk September morning at her house in Wilder, Vermont. Under her iron and nearly sweeping to the floor was a vintage black Japanese wedding kimono—a tomesode—suitable not for a bride but for a close female relative attending a wedding in Japan. She explained that its short sleeves indicate that the wearer was married. A member of the Norwich Historical Society, where MJ is on the board, had donated

Above: Mary Jane Clark.

Left: Maker's mark helps determine this tea set's value.





Careful storage and handling have kept this quilt in excellent condition.

the tomesode to help raise money for new windows for the society's home, Lewis House. It would go on sale at the NHS Antiques Show a few days later.

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Illustrating the tools of her trade, MJ demonstrated techniques for evaluation on her own art and antiques, all of which are mixed gracefully with modern furniture, and whole bookcases of reference books she has collected over the years while working in museums in the U.S. and abroad. She's now turning her museum, research, and teaching skills into a new business venture, Collection Care & Appraisals LLC, working from her home office.

What does this mark mean? How old

is it? What kind of wood is this? How much is it worth? How do I take care of it? These are the kinds of questions MJ fields when she visits clients' homes. Her expertise and research capabilities can provide the answers, whether the objects are Asian (her special area of training), American, European, or from other parts of the world.

Clients' objects may be large furniture, tiny pots, dishes, calligraphy, paintings, books, rugs, silver, vintage clothing—whatever he or she has questions about. MJ works with what her clients have: fine art, decorative art, antiques, books, individual pieces, collections, or collectibles. She'll identify personal property, sort it, catalog it, and appraise it. She'll locate someone to build a crate, carry



Detailed carving helps date this chair.



The tools of an appraiser.

valuable goods as a courier (she's done it herself many times), or install a large painting. She'll tell people what they have and what their personal property is worth. "An informed client is an empowered client," she says.

Moving to a smaller residence is a common occasion for evaluating possessions, as are other life episodes when an accounting for personal possessions is needed: death, divorce, dividing up, insurance or tax purposes, or simply "spending down."

BACK TO THE UPPER VALLEY

MJ's familiarity with the Upper Valley comes from having lived here twice, first in Thetford and Hanover in the '70s, when she worked at the Dartmouth College Museum and Galleries and taught in Dartmouth's Asian Studies program. In 1978, she led a three-week group tour to China for Dartmouth's Friends of the Hopkins Center.

Following years of museum work, she returned to the Upper Valley in the late '90s and taught Chinese for The Moun-



Looking at the joints under a table.

GELLNER
THE SPIRIT OF PEARLS



Pure Romance.SM
VonBargens.com



35 South Main St.
Hanover, NH
603-653-0006

also in Burlington, Springfield & Stratton, VT



17th century "Pilgrim" table.



Looking for telltale clues to date this table.



Examining the bottom of the drawer.

tain School in Vershire and did collections consulting. During her time away, she was head registrar of the Smithsonian's Traveling Exhibition Service; a contract registrar for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and Bilbao, Spain; and worked in the Far Eastern Art Department at the Yale University Art Gallery and the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center in Washington, D. C. She also taught a course at Yale called "Daily Life in China" and co-wrote a book, *Traces of the Brush: Studies in Chinese Calligraphy*, Yale University Press, in 1977 when she was a PhD candidate at Yale. She has also worked as a translator, editor, and researcher at the National Palace Museum in Taiwan.

Her new business is not a traditional one. She doesn't buy and sell art or antiques, though she may act as intermediary to help a client sell an object, using identification and evaluation techniques that are her stock and trade. Her toolbox, her research books, her connections, her advice, her translation skills (in addition to her native English, she speaks fluent Mandarin, French, and some Japanese and Italian), and knowing how to read identification marks helps clients sort, value, or care for their own possessions. She detects restoration or distinguishes an original from a reproduction. (Not surprisingly, she volunteers at the Five-Colleges Book Sale, pricing books on art, architecture, and antiques.)

GIVING CLIENTS EXPERT ADVICE

What does "Care" mean in "Collection Care?" MJ is referring to the care and preservation of special objects, including insurance coverage, storage, handling, and display. Moreover, she has a mission to educate clients with practical advice on how to better care for a valuable object. Some—not all—textiles, for example, should be kept in unbleached muslin, which doesn't bleed, transfer chemicals, or off-gas. Tightly sealed plastic traps moisture inside, and MJ doesn't recommend using it.

Some recent projects MJ has under-



Dating an early Chinese ceramic jar.

taken are with clients in the Upper Valley moving into retirement residences. These clients want to know about what they have accumulated and its worth, to help them decide whether to keep, sell, or donate personal property, or divide it equitably among their children. “Sort, identify, catalog, and appraise,” she summarizes. She is a certified appraiser of art and antiques as well as a collection consultant. Sorting can include taking care of shipping, finding storage spaces, or taking objects away for donation. »



Checking for chips and cracks.

*Voted “The Best Place
to Buy Furniture
in the Upper Valley”
for 14 years*

**BROWN
FURNITURE**

Interchange Drive, West Lebanon, NH
603-298-5755 • 800-539-5000
M-Fr, 10-6 Sat, 10-5 Sun 12-4

www.brownfurniture.com

Why save \$100...

**just to
take home a
ticking bomb?**

**The machines
we sell** are only those
that we haven't seen back
time and again at our service
desk over the last 23 years.
**Buy better. Buy quality.
Buy local.**

**SYSTEMS plus
COMPUTERS inc.**
Solutions • Products • Services • Quality

Systems Plus Computers, Inc.
South Street > Hanover, NH
Centerra Market > Lebanon, NH

(800) 388-8486
(603) 643-5800
www.spci.com

GREAT IDEAS

She finds that people are better able to make decisions after they have accumulated sufficient information. “Sometimes it’s helpful to a client if I act as a surrogate daughter, someone who can say to an older client, ‘Let it go.’ The children don’t want the family silver? ‘Use it or donate it,’ or ‘I can recommend a dealer.’”

MJ’s interest in Asian art and an-

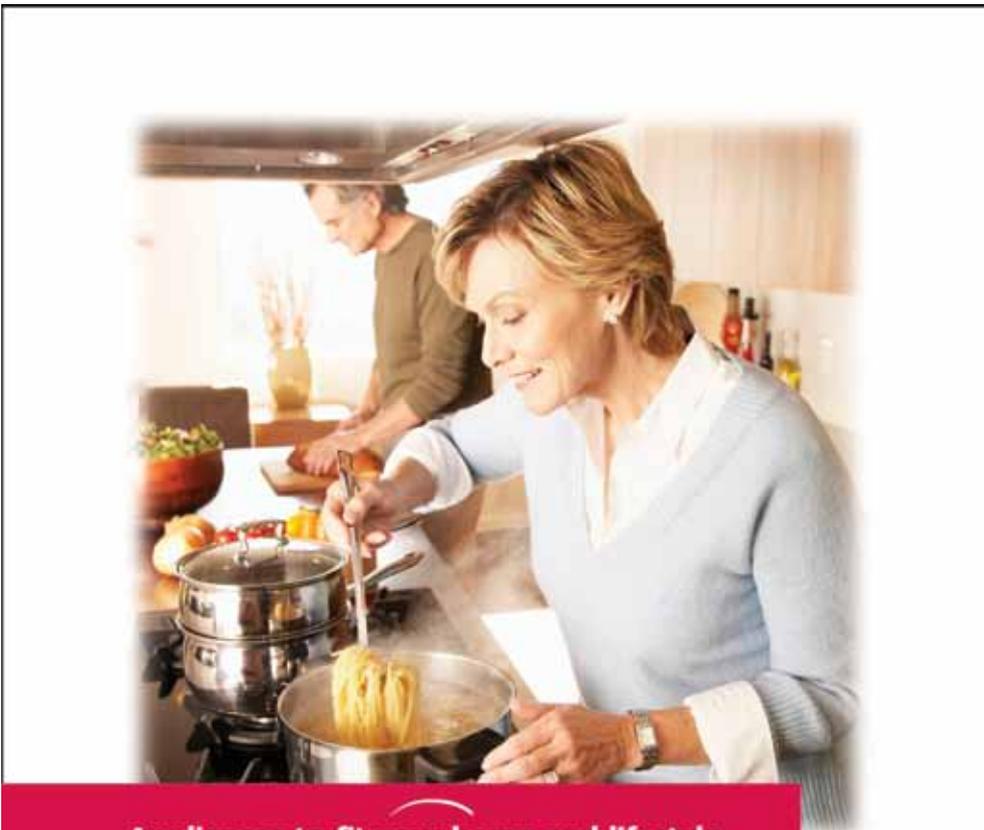
tiques began on an extended trip through Asia with her mother, when her parents lived in Taiwan and Korea because of her father’s military post there. After the trip, she came back to the U.S. and changed her Wellesley major to Asian Art. Her first museum job, between her junior and seniors years in college, was at the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, where she was a volunteer



Native American knife sheath undergoes remounting.

assigned to organize and catalog a collection of early Chinese pottery, beginning her initial experience in using the tools she now carries with her in her toolbox.

The contents of her toolbox illustrate the kind of helping hand she offers: two cameras, latex and nonlatex gloves, a “gorilla” tripod, magnifiers, a timer to track her hours, a large over-the-door picture hook, a headlamp, a black light that detects restoration on paintings and damage on rugs, a Swiss Army knife, a multi-purpose tool, tape measures, an articulating mirror on a stick to search out marks on the undersides or backs of heavy furniture, a thread counter for rugs—tools she once carried in a kit for traveling exhibits for the Smithsonian and the Guggenheim, now packed and ready for use at homes in the Upper Valley and beyond. ☺



Appliances to fit your home and lifestyle.

Thinking about a new appliance? Dead River Company offers many advantages.

- **Selection:** Dishwashers, refrigerators, dryers and ranges from leading manufacturers: Wolf, Bosch, GE, Sub-Zero, Miele and Amana.
- **Peace of Mind:** We service what we sell—you can trust us to be there when you call.
- **Value:** Energy-efficient appliances save money, and rebates* are available on select models.

* Contact Dead River Company for details.

**Ask us
about our
free
delivery
program!**

Delivering on A promise.™



464 Woodstock Road, Woodstock, VT (802) 457-1610

www.deadrivernet.com

For More Information

**Collection Care &
Appraisals**

(802) 295-0916

E-mail: MJ.Clark@Valley.net

