

Passion for antiques

Raymond James has an eye for quality

By Brenda Lange / Photographs by Andrew Wilkinson



When someone is passionate about his work—and skilled at what he does—his eyes reflect a certain light and his words are strong and sure. It’s that way with Raymond James. He talks about the antiques that fill his building in Lahaska Courtyard as if they were living, breathing entities, rather than armoires, highboys, secretaries and ladderback chairs.

“I know many dealers who are just making a living, with no great love for the pieces, and without much knowledge, but Raymond—he has the interest, great taste and terrific knowledge,” says Richard Sandor, a local antiques dealer for more than 50 years and something of a mentor for James.

The two men met 20 years ago when James was relocating from Connecticut, where he had started his business. Born in Minnesota, but raised in Valley Forge, James was homesick for the Delaware Valley region and decided to settle in Bucks County. He leased space from Sandor and they became friends.

“We had trust and faith in each other,” Sandor remembers. “He feels like I do, that we are just temporary custodians for these items. If possible, we’d keep them all, but we can’t. His love for the antiques contributes greatly to his success in the business.”

James’s love spans centuries, but he has chosen to focus his business on items from the early 1700s to the 1830s, with well-thought out reasons.

“Pre-machinery items have more character,” he explains. “Look at a piece from 1770 and one from 1870, the first is handmade and has better patina and character.” And so he has filled six rooms at his new location next to Penn’s Purchase on Route 202 in Lahaska with items of walnut, cherry and mahogany, and those of silver, brass and porcelain and so much more.

In his blood

Affinity for antique furnishings started early for James, who worked with an antiques dealer in Spring City, Pa., when he was about 14. He polished silver, helped out at auctions and started his own collections. First it was redware and stoneware in Lancaster. He would buy it and then resell it, and was drawn in completely to the world of antiques dealing. By the time he opened his own business in Connecticut, he was in love with wooden pull toys, rocking horses, painted country cupboards and especially quilts.

“I knocked on doors of the Amish and asked for their old quilts,”

he remembers. "I painted windows for one woman in exchange. I only wanted their old quilts, because it's a lost art. The new ones won't hold up like the old ones." At his shop a little more than an hour outside Manhattan, his clientele included some rich and famous collectors. Michael J. Fox was one who bought quilts from him. "They



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(the celebrities) were all so passionate...it was contagious."

As time passed, James continued to educate himself at every opportunity, on his own and at NYU where he took courses in appraising, glassware, porcelain and the different periods. His tastes evolved to the more formal, including Queen Anne and Chippendale items.

"That's when I really learned from Richard (Sandor)," he says. "He had been doing it for so long, and he taught me about woods and regions. Hands-on learning is the way to go. I had such passion for this knowledge that my brain was like a sponge. You don't ever forget that."

Expansion

Last summer James grabbed the chance to buy the group of buildings comprising the Lahaska Courtyard. The 1850-square-foot red and white building he now occupies was a shambles. "It took

eight men three weeks to get it in shape," he says. Everything was redone from the walls, in.

Now the building is clean, spacious and well stocked with beautiful antiques, inviting new clients as well as old to follow him there. The other three buildings also house antique dealers of different styles and time periods. One is a co-op of 30 dealers. "All are complementary to each other," James says. "It's better for people out antiquing to have a choice, and all are different."

He's willing to share the secret to collecting antiques: "Buy the best you can afford as an investment. If you take care of your antiques, they will take care of you." He finds just the right pieces—those from the William & Mary to the Federal periods—at estate sales and auctions on the east coast from Maine to Florida. "Those are the pieces that work in this region, especially in all the old stone houses. They just fit."

"Some dealers are superficial, with their only aim to make money, but I saw in Raymond a real love for the antiques," Sandor says. "To be successful, one must have a feel for these things; look at them, caress them and feel them."

"I was blessed with a great eye, and I know when something has integrity, when it is great. I love what I do, and I consider myself the luckiest guy in Bucks County," James adds.

Raymond James & Company

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The store is open Monday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Sunday 12 to 5 p.m. ▼



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