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## Antiquing: A fun way to recycle

By Vera Kochan



Two-piece hutch (top piece 18th century, bottom piece 20th century) Photo Vera Kochan

When people hear the word recycle, they usually think of bottles, cans and paper - and what bin to toss them into (green or blue). It's rare that folks equate antiquing with recycling, unless you're the owner of Orinda Village Antiques, Susan Leech, who has been refurbishing furniture since 1982, when she first opened her shop at 107 Orinda Way.

Much more happens than recycling of wood through the reuse of furniture. The popular phrase comes to mind, "One man's junk is another man's treasure," but to those who love historical pieces, that phrase is never assigned to antiquing. For Leech, it's all treasure!

Leech was born in Nottingham, England, but grew up in the United States. She goes back to her birthplace often for visits. She has virtually lost her British accent, however when she reminisces about the UK, a faint trace of it crops up in her speech.

According to Leech, anything between 50-100 years old is considered a collectible and over 100 years old is considered an antique. "Women are good at reinventing the wheel. We repurpose things into different rooms and use them not necessarily for the original purpose it was intended," she explained, as she held up an old pewter mug with lid that she had turned into a candle holder.

Many of the china cabinet/hutch pieces of furniture in the shop are mix and match. The top piece of the cabinet was not made for the bottom or vice versa. They can even come from different centuries. It's all part of the recycling process.

When asked how to identify what type of wood a piece of furniture comes from, Leech explained, "You can tell by the grain." One of the more common trees used to make furniture 200 years ago was rosewood from Brazil; its deep rich brown tones with a darker grain was a popular choice among the wealthy. "Rosewood is not seen anymore. It was harvested to death," Leech said.

A discussion about the overexploitation of trees turned into a history lesson. "Lots of trees are gone in England, because from the mid-17th century through the 19th century, ship building for the Royal Navy was in high demand," Leech said. "The biggest trees were saved for the ship masts, while the rest was harvested to build the fleets."

When asked if she had heard of wood with the Forest Stewardship Council label, Leech said, "Yes, I've heard of it, but it's a relatively new concept and wouldn't apply to antiques." According to the FSC, wood that is tagged with this logo has been harvested in a more environmentally friendly way than wood used to make conventional furniture.

Leech believes antique stores are very good for the environment. Customers help to recycle wood and glass while keeping things like 200-year-old porcelain figurines, bone china and silverware out of landfills, thus turning a cherished possession from a bygone era into a personal treasure.

"My job is to take something and give it a new lease on life," Leech said.

For information and hours of operation, visit [www.orindavillageantiques.com](http://www.orindavillageantiques.com).

Book a special High Tea at Orinda Village Antiques

Orinda Village Antiques hosts "History of High Tea - Taking Tea in the English Manor," where Leech serves a delectable array of homemade sweet and savory treats while giving her guests a history lesson, and she insists that men are some of the most astute pupils she's ever had. Tea parties aren't just for girls anymore. The tea is by appointment only. For more information visit [www.orindavillageantiques.com](http://www.orindavillageantiques.com) or call (925) 254-2206.



Orinda Village Antiques owner Susan Leech in doorway. Photos Vera Kochan



There are three antique stores in Orinda. In addition to Orinda Village Antiques: Tally Home at 85 Orinda Way and Hilton House Consignment & Design at 21 Orinda Way.

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