

FURNITURE

The elements greatly affecting furniture are severe climate changes with lack of ventilation and infestation by insects. To best protect furniture, the following general rules should be followed:

1. The greatest enemies of wood are temperature and humidity changes. Temperature changes should be avoided because they keep the wood "working." A high temperature with low relative humidity levels will cause cracking in woodwork. Furniture should be kept away from direct sources of heat and cold, such as fireplaces and drafts, and should be kept out of direct sunlight, which can ruin a fine patina in a matter of weeks.

2. Attack by fungi and insects is second only to humidity and temperature as a source of damage. Fungi (dry rot) will generally develop in damp areas where there is stagnant air. The result is to remove the wood substance and reduce it to a powdery state. Any piece of furniture showing the effects of dry rot should be immediately treated by an expert in furniture conservation before the damage spreads.

3. The most common type of insect to attack furniture is the beetle; actually, it is not the beetle that causes damage but its larvae. The female beetle lays her eggs in cracks or holes. When the eggs hatch they immediately start to eat their way through the piece of furniture. This larvae state can last for as long as two years or more. The signs to look for are piles of light-colored powder under the pieces of furniture. Treatment for woodworms is a difficult process and requires either complete fumigation or use of a liquid insecticide. In either case, it is best done by a professional since it requires destruction of all the larvae, otherwise the process continues. The best protection against these woodworms is scrupulous cleanliness.

4. Cleaning and polishing of furniture should be attempted only on pieces that are in good condition. When the veneer is lifting, splitting, or flaking or has damaged gilding, Japanned work or inlay, it should be handled by an expert. Furniture polish does two things; it removes dirt and gives some protection to the surface of the wood. Veneered pieces should be cleaned very carefully because the veneer may be loose. Considerable damage may be done by a polishing cloth being caught on an edge or rough spot in the veneer and pulling it up.

Storage

1. Storage areas should be kept clean at all times. Newly acquired pieces should be carefully checked before being stored with clean artifacts. One piece that is contaminated can infect and damage the rest of the collection.

2. A relative humidity of about 55% should be maintained and the temperature should be about 60°F. The area should be kept adequately ventilated. This should be done with fans and not open windows.

3. Proper shelving should be constructed to allow the stacking of furniture. Floor-to-ceiling bins can be built or installed to save storage space. Never stack one piece of furniture directly upon another. Each bin in each tier must have its own floor with the larger pieces in the bottom compartment and smaller on top. Never stack other storage materials on top of tables or other flat-surfaced furniture.