A Chair Is A Chair

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Relying on a name brand and the integrity of a large merchant may be a good way to buy some things, but furniture is not one of them. The average buyer comes in unprepared for anything except buying what he likes, and often may find defects in workmanship after he makes the purchase; all because he didn't know how to look for furniture.

Because so much in wood construction is hidden, it is sometimes difficult for the layman to check his purchase carefully. Ascertain that the quality of the workmanship is good does not guarantee that the quality of the glue is as good, nor does it point out things like the way in which two pieces of wood are joined together, or the kind of core wood used in plywood. But there are a few things you can do to test the construction of the piece you buy.

Check Quality

Sit in a chair; twist and turn it. There should be no creaking, and no spindliness as you turn. A table should sit flat on the floor . . . you should be able to stand, or even jump on it. Drawers should pull out easily. And you can usually rely on a large, brand-name manufacturer to provide repair service or replacement for defective merchandise.

Expensive Finishes

A chair is a chair is a chair . . . but the price is higher in proportion to the amount of carving, decoration, inlays, and all sorts of encrustations involved. Finishes are sometimes the reason for an expensive object; elaborate staining, bleaching, true wood, or "distressed" finishes eat up labor and money. The following list of finishes should help to supplement your knowledge of the kind of furniture best suited to your purposes.

Filling coats bleaches blemishes in wood — used in very open grain woods (oak, ash, chestnut). Staining deepens the color and enhances the grain of a wood. Bleaching removes the color from wood, lightens the grain pattern and makes the surface look more uniform. Sealing a coat of varnish, shellac or both, with sanding in between coats. Shellac has a high luster, shows water spots, is soluble in alcohol. Varnish can have a high or low luster, produces a hard surface but is difficult to repair. Oil is inexpensive and a good natural protector; must be reapplied every six months, and is best on hardwoods. Water or alcohol stains are easily repaired. Polishes: paste wax is most durable, cream best for low-gloss furniture, and silicone leaves a milky film is easily applied and repels water. Melamine plastics are made by impregnating a layer of lamination of paper, or melamine — very durable or impossible to repair. Paint or lacquer is easy to clean but difficult to repair a scratched surface.

Remember, the way a piece of furniture looks is only a part of the consideration. The way it feels, in some cases moves, wears, and is built — all these things enter into sensible decision. If you come in knowing what you're looking for, the chances are much better that you will get a good buy.