

京大過去問 1998年 第2問

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The word “patina” refers to the surface color and finish build up by age, wear and polishing. On wooden furniture, a patina shows depth and grain and indicates that the piece has aged. Indeed, this mellowed color is one of the things about antique furniture that collectors love most. Like the laugh lines on the face of a beloved grandparent, they are the signs that it has “lived”.

Patina is also an important indicator of fake antiques. All woods and wood finishes discolor over time due to use, oxidation*, the care (or lack of it) the piece has received at the hands of former owners and exposure to heat and cold, sunlight and humidity. However, false patina are produced with a variety of weapons that range from chemicals to smoke.

(1)If the patina of the entire piece is a uniform color, be wary! The finish should be uneven, worn wherever it would have been rubbed by hands, backs of knees, shoulders and dust rags as a part of normal use and care. It should be darker where rags and hands couldn't reach or where the wood was protected from the elements. Check the back or underside of the piece in question, which would have been left in its natural state — neither stained nor varnished — when it was made. Over time, this untreated, unfinished wood will have oxidized. Its surface will be dark, but if you scratch it gently with a fingernail, you'll see the wood is appreciably lighter underneath. If the dark color penetrates below the surface, this may indicate that the wood has been stained or treated with chemicals. (Never, never attempt to do this “scratch test” anywhere it will show!)

(2)Since all of their individual components are genuinely old, truly “married” antiques usually show the expected pattern of fading produced by many years of use. But, if you have a cupboard, for instance, with a top and bottom that started life on different pieces of furniture, the color of the patina on each section will be somewhat different. There will also be gaps where the old joining and the new ones do not match.

One last word about patina: If the piece you are looking at has a carbony, woodsmoke smell, or you can pick up carbon dust in cracks and crevices with a clean tissue, it probably got its patina in a smokehouse. Pass it by.

*oxidation: 酸化