

## Antique Show Producer Warns Of Fraud

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Author: MEGAN APPLGATE

HARRISONBURG - In the Shenandoah Valley, it's easy to get swept up in the excitement of antique shopping.

Significant Civil War history aside, the area boasts numerous flea markets, antique malls and juried shows to meet the needs of every level of shopper - from the bargain hunter to the savvy expert collector.

The potential for making money in the industry is sky high. This year, a Ming Dynasty "chicken cup" sold in China for \$36 million, breaking world records. Closer to home, a sugar pot made by Mennonite potter Emanuel Suter smashed Virginia pottery records when it fetched \$86,250 last year in a sale conducted by the Jeffrey S. Evans & Associates auction house in Mount Crawford.

There's no doubt that antiques can be big business, and along with the potential for profit comes the potential for fraud and fakes.

"Anything of value is a prime candidate for fraud and reproduction," said Dordy Fontinel, an antique show producer who will host a show today and Saturday at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds. "One of the most popular items to fake right now are Civil War belt buckles. It's something we see a lot of in this area."

And the reproductions, she warns, are good and only getting better.

"Lots of fakes are so good that even museums are fooled from time to time," Fontinel said.

Jeffrey Evans, principal at Jeffery Evans & Associates, agrees that the fakes are getting harder to spot for the average buyer.

"If something becomes [popular] with collectors, it will end up being reproduced pretty quickly," Evans said. "Knockoffs find their way to the market in no time. And it's easy to be fooled if you're not careful."

With the official start of summer this weekend, the antique show season kicks off as well, and Evans and Fontinel have advice for novice antique shoppers.

"You have to make sure you purchase from a dealer who stands behind their merchandise," Fontinel said. "I recommend that people shop where participating dealers are required to guarantee authenticity of their items. All of the dealers in all of my shows are

required to sign contracts stating their items are authentic to the best of their knowledge."

Evans, who runs monthly auctions, will host an auction Saturday that will feature pottery, primitive art and furniture. He suggests that buyers do their homework - read descriptions, ask questions and in the end, go with their instincts.

"You always have to look at everything in the industry with a critical eye," he said. "We thoroughly vet all of our items and we offer a 25-day guarantee that gives customers plenty of time to really look at their item. It's rare, but mistakes happen."

For bargain hunters on the prowl this summer, Evans suggests furniture.

"Because home building slowed down so much in the past few years, the furniture market is very soft," he said. "There are great bargains to be found in walnut and Victorian furniture."

Fontinel said antique enthusiasts pride themselves on being caretakers of history and newcomers can start a collection on any budget - from \$10 to \$10,000.

"Start investigating antiques and arm yourself with knowledge. Get to know dealers and read about items that interest you," she said. "Ask a lot of questions. Most dealers love their pieces and they'll tell you anything you could possibly want to know about their items. That's how you learn what's valuable and what's a reproduction."

For information about this weekend's antique show hosted by Dordy Fontinel, visit [wheretobuyantiques.com](http://wheretobuyantiques.com).

Contact Megan Applegate at 574-6286 or [mapplegate@dnronline.com](mailto:mapplegate@dnronline.com)

**If You Go: The antiques fair runs today and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds on U.S. 11 south of Harrisonburg. Admission is \$10. For more information, go online to <http://wheretobuyantiques.com>.**

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