

New England HOME

Celebrating Fine Design, Architecture, and Building

THE NEW MOOD:
COZY, CHIC &
COMFORTABLE

Perspectives

Five Questions



CEO Field and Vice President MacDonald in the Leonards showroom.

Jeff Field and Lois MacDonald will tell you a Leonards bed is so much more than the sum of its antique parts.

1 Leonards sells a variety of antiques but is best known for its antique and reproduction beds. Why beds?

Lois MacDonald: Everybody needs a bed. They are a very personal piece of furniture, a place to feel secure and comfortable as well as a place to get away from it all. **Jeff Field:** We spend a third of our lives in bed. One should look forward to going to bed and wake up happy. A wonderfully carved bed made from elegant wood can help heighten that experience. **L.M.:** The Leonards developed this niche—selling resized

antique beds—back in the 1930s. Other dealers hated antique beds because they had so many parts: posts, rails, a canopy frame, and specialized hardware. But the Leonards saw a need that they could fill. They came up with the idea of resizing antique beds to fit larger modern-day customers.

2 What inspired them to begin resizing antique beds?

L.M.: When they were about to get married, Lester Leonard's wife-to-be, Hazel, told him she wanted an antique

| INTERVIEW BY ROBERT KIENER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN SOARES |

Perspectives:

Five Questions

bed. But available beds were too small. Most were what were called three-quarter beds and were just forty-eight inches wide. As a wedding present to her, he retrofitted an antique bed, using antique posts and side rails and headboard, and designed it to take a standard double mattress. People admired it and started asking him to make similar beds for them. That's how they got into the bed business and began making resized and custom beds using antique components such as posts and rails. They even standardized bed hardware by producing bolts that all had the same threading.

3 How does resizing an antique bed affect its value?

L.M.: A bed's value is actually enhanced when resized. Appraisers agree that a bed, compared to other antiques, can withstand a far more complete restoration. Experts advise that the two key pieces of an antique bed that should not be altered are the two foot posts,

which are usually more elaborately carved than the head posts. That's because these are the posts you see when you first enter a bedroom as well as what you see when you're lying in bed. **J.F.:** Resized antique beds also hold their value because they are long-lasting and resalable. They are portable and are easy to take apart and reassemble. People are often surprised that we can fit a whole disassembled king or queen bed into a four-door sedan.

4 How do you help clients find a bed that fits their needs?

Clients can buy ready-to-go beds, or we can help them find just the right elements, so they can have a custom bed. Some come to us like they are on a hunt, digging through our collections of antique bed posts to find what appeals to them. We ask them about sleeping heights, what finishes they like, and more. **L.M.:** We work with both designers and customers and enjoy helping them design a bed that they love. I recently had a customer who told me she wanted a bed that was low enough that her dog would be able to jump up on it. Another wanted a high bed, so their dog

couldn't jump onto it. We made them both happy.

5 Tell us something about antique beds that might surprise us?

L.M.: The phrase "sleep tight" comes from antique beds. Instead of being supported by box springs as mattresses are today, antique mattresses were suspended on canvas that was tied with rope to the bed frame. Over time, these ropes would loosen, and the canvas would sag, much like a hammock. To "sleep tight," one had to tighten the ropes to pull the canvas taut. **J.F.:** Many antique bedpost finial carvings have a symbolic meaning that modern buyers may be unaware of. The cannonball represents sturdiness. The tulip happiness and serenity. The acorn represents new ideas. **L.M.:** And the pineapple symbolizes welcome and hospitality. It is said, however, that while a pineapple was placed in a room to welcome a guest, it would be moved outdoors after three days or so as it started to get funky, a not-so-subtle suggestion to guests that their time, too, was up. | *Leonards, Seekonk, Mass., 508-336-8585, leonardsantiques.com* 