



Pointers to collecting hand tools

Looking for something to collect outside the boundaries of ceramics, glass, silver or jewellery? Think about old hand tools. Hand tools have been a part of civilisation since the beginning of human history as evidenced by archaeological explorations that have found crudely shaped stone tools used by the very first hunter-gatherers.

ORIGINS of wooden tools and devices

Research on the Stone Age has led academics to theorise about cavemen and their tools as there are no known surviving wooden tools and devices. Tools made in later eras have survived and these are records of how necessity shaped their design and are testament to the inventiveness of their creators.

Not everyone wants to go back that far in history for their collections, but hand tool collectors of the more modern eras recognise the contributions of their ancestors to a product that is both a work of art in its own right, and useful.

WHY collect old hand tools

Old hand tools are collected for a number of reasons. Some people collect purely to display them, for the visual experience. There are collectors who acquire these tools for practical purposes as they consider early hand tools to be better made than modern tools and perform better. No doubt, there are many reasons that all collectors share, such as an appreciation of the workmanship that went into making these tools, the rarity of some pieces, aesthetic appeal, and their appreciating value when investing in a piece of history.

WHO is collecting?

It is probably fair to say that although tool collectors are mostly men, we have noticed enough interest by women to know that it is not exclusively a man's domain. We have also found that there is a lot more interest from younger people, particularly those in woodworking trades such as cabinetmaking. They are collecting and using old hand tools, which is a whole new experience and different to the current manufacturing methods using machines or electrical tools.

These old tools offer a different dimension to the craftsman who finds they are more suited to a job than a newer version of the same tool. Hence craftspeople and hobbyists prefer working with them.

COLLECTING themes

Those who choose to build a collection purely for display purposes are quite discerning in their choices yet may accept into their collection an item with minor flaws or faults. These pieces are included because they do not detract from the overall visual appeal.

Collectors who use their hand tools will seek out items that are flawless. To the woodworker, the tools need to produce a finely crafted piece.

Collectors may assemble their collections across a broad spectrum or may narrow their collections to individual themes such as a specific type of tool, a particular brand or manufacturer, only brass and timber tools, a specified timeframe, place of origin, tools relating to a specific occupation.

TYPES of tools to collect

There is a broad range of tools to choose from: planes, chisels, screwdrivers, hand drills, plumb bobs, hammers, spanners, saws, axes, hatchets, adzes, anvils, braces, vices, spanners, wrenches, callipers, levels, rules, and many more.

Another category relates to occupations requiring hand tools. These occupations include agriculture, carpentry, blacksmiths, boatbuilding, mechanical engineering and repairs.

BRANDS

There are endless manufacturers and brand names but some of the most popular for collectors are Stanley, Record, Marple, Falcon, Pope, Plumb, Disston and Dawn.

COLLECTING a type of tool

A collector may choose to follow the development progress of a specific tool over time, or how an early patent evolved. Following the progress might include the design being bought and developed by another company. This is very important when collecting made by a specific brand.

PERIPHERALS

A collection could also include or specifically focus on various forms of media such as advertisements, manuals and catalogues.

VALUE of restored pieces

Another factor to consider is the level of restoration applied to tools in their collections. Some prefer to collect restored tools, some prefer to find them in original condition and enjoy the challenge of bringing them back to life. As with most collections, there is the debate revolving around the opinion on how much restoration is too much. Some may restore tools to an as new appearance; others opt for minimal work to retain the original used character.

For more information and to view the many hand tool collecting options visit

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