

[Sign in](#)[How to sell](#)

繁 | 簡

[Auctions](#)[Private Sales](#)[Locations](#)

CHRISTIE'S



The A-Z of furniture: Terminology to know when buying at auction

From applique and back splats to veneering and wingbacks, an essential glossary of furniture terms — with examples previously sold at Christie's

**A|B|C|D|E|F|G|H|I|J|K|L|M
N|O|P|Q|R|S|T|U|V|W|X|Y|Z**

A

Abattant: A term used to describe a drop-down flap often seen in the French style of the secretary desk, *secrétaire à abattant*, concealing drawers and shelves within.

Antique: A piece of furniture or object that is more than 100 years old.



A George III mahogany serpentine serving table, attributed to Ince and Mayhew, circa 1775. Sold for £20,000 in Chieveley House, Berkshire and Five Private Collections on 19 March 2020 at Christie's in London



Applique: A term for a category of light which can be affixed to a wall.



A pair of ormolu twin-branch wall appliques. Of Louis XVI style, after a model by Jean-Charles Delafosse, late 19th century. 19½ in (50 cm) high. Sold for £2,500 on 20 July 2016 at Christie's in London



Apron: A decorative element joining the surface of a chair or table with the legs.

Armchair: An armchair can be any chair with arms. However, there are two different kinds: the fauteuil, with open sides, and the bergère, with closed sides. (See Fauteuil and Bergère)



An upholstered hall seat, by David Hicks, circa 1965. Sold for £4,750 in Chieveley House, Berkshire and Five Private Collections on 19 March 2020 at Christie's in London

Armoire: A tall standing wardrobe or closet, often used to store clothes, which can feature one to three doors and sometimes a mirrored panel.

Arrow foot: A type of chair foot that ends in a tapered cylinder, often seen in the 18th century.

Art Deco: A style popular from the 1920s to the 1930s characterised by bold geometric designs.

B



Back splat: The vertical piece of wood running from the frame of a chair to the base of the backrest.



A pair of George I walnut side chairs. Early 18th century. 37½ in (95 cm) high. Sold for £1,000 on 20 July 2016 at Christie's in London

Ball foot: A fully spherical foot on a piece of furniture.

Ball and claw foot: A cast or carved foot consisting of a ball covered by an animal's claw, in English furniture often that of a lion or a bird. The design is thought to have originated in China, where a dragon's claw would represent the strong grip of the emperor.





An Irish George II mahogany long stool, circa 1740. Covered in plum-coloured velvet with silvered thread braiding, the frame carved with masks within a trelliswork ground, the cabriole legs headed by carved scallop shells and acanthus leaves, on claw-and-ball feet and recessed castors. 16½ in (42 cm) high; 50 in (127 cm) wide; 28 in (71 cm) deep. Sold for £58,750 on 18 November 2015 at Christie's in London

Baroque: A decorative style from the late 16th century through to the 18th century characterised by the use of bold sculptural forms, dynamic surfaces and elaborate ornament.

Barrel chair: Also known as a tub chair, a barrel chair has a round upholstered seat, and arms forming a continuous line with the backrest.



Pair of English tub chairs. Second half 20th century. Faux tortoiseshell and parcel-gilt. Sold for \$3,000 in Christie's Living: August Collections, 7-20 August 2020, online

Bas relief: A form of carving or moulding in which the design projects out from the flat surface of the background.

Bentwood: A kind of wood that has been heated and shaped to become curved.





A Regency mahogany caned library bergère. Early 19th century. 37½ in (95 cm) high; 25½ in (65 cm) wide. Sold for £3,500 on 17 August 2016 at Christie's in London

Bergère: A kind of upholstered armchair with closed sides that first became popular in the 18th century.

Bevel: An edge that has been cut at a slant, often seen on mirrors.

Biedermeier: Encompasses the period between 1815 and 1848 in Central Europe. Influenced by Napoleonic styles, the furniture was produced in Germany and Austria, with simpler designs that often incorporated local timber.



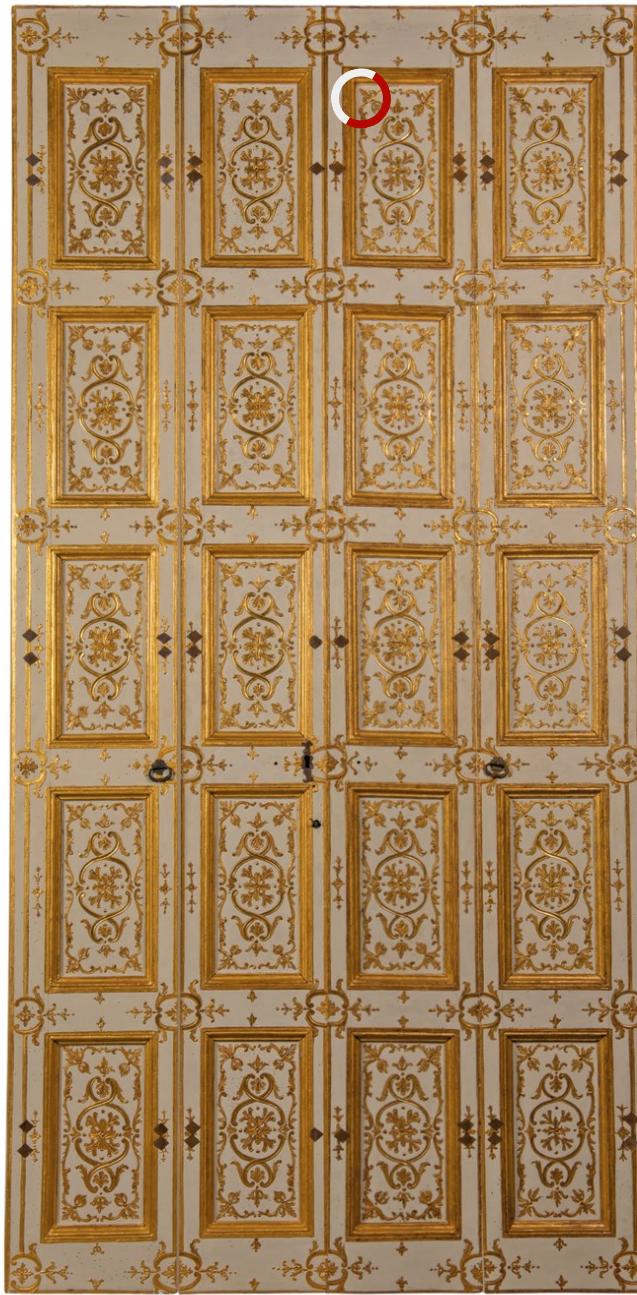


A Biedermeier cherrywood and ebonised commode. Austrian, circa 1825. 32½ in (82.5 cm) high; 44½ in (113 cm) wide; 16 in (41 cm) deep.
Sold for €10,625 on 28 September 2015 at Christie's in Paris

Blockfront: A kind of chest divided into three parts in which the middle part is set back from the sides.

Boiserie: A French word for panelling, generally highly decorative.





Palazzo Reale, Turin: parcel-gilt and cream painted boiserie panels or window shutters, early 18th century. Each panel: 127½ in (323 cm) high; the two inner panels: 15¼ in (39 cm) wide; the two outer panels 17¼ in (44 cm) wide, the decorated surface approx 63⅛ in (160.5 cm) wide in total. Estimate: £15,000-25,000. Offered in Works of Art from The Giuseppe Rossi Collection Sold to Benefit a Charity, 24 September to 15 October 2020, online

Bombé: A term used to describe the bulging outwards of a



piece of furniture.

Bowfront: A chest with a convex front.



A Regency mahogany and rosewood-crossbanded bowfront chest, Channel Islands, early 19th century. 40 in (101.5 cm) high; 40 1/4 in (102 cm) wide; 21 in (53 cm) deep. Sold for £4,000 on 2 June 2015 at Christie's in London

Bracket foot: A right-angled foot shaped like a bracket.



Bronze: An alloy primarily consisting of copper and tin, generally used for sculpture but also as the base metal for ormolu and furniture mounts.



[Italian, second half of the 12th century, Christ crucified](#). Bronze.
10¾ in (27.2 cm) high; 9 in (23 cm) wide. Estimate: £5,000-8,000.
Offered in [Works of Art from The Giuseppe Rossi Collection Sold to Benefit a Charity](#), 24 September to 15 October 2020, online

Bun foot: A ball foot that has been flattened slightly, like a bun.



Bureau: A chest of drawers often used in a bedroom, sometimes combined with a fold-down desk.



A Queen Anne cross-and-featherbanded burr-walnut bureau. Early 18th century. 40 1/4 in (102 cm) high; 38 in (97 cm) wide; 20 in (51 cm) deep

C

Cabinet: Cabinets come in many forms, from the industrial to the ornate, and usually consist of drawers and shelves; some feature glass doors for the display of objects.



Cabriole: A kind of leg that curves out from the seat of a chair or base of a table before curving into a foot in a narrow S shape. The name comes from a type of ballet jump in which the dancer leaps into the air with one leg forward.



A Chinese Export padouk open armchair, circa 1730. Sold for £10,000 in Chieveley House, Berkshire and Five Private Collections on 19 March 2020 at Christie's in London

Caning: A technique using the rattan or bamboo plant to create an interwoven seat, back or side of a chair.





A Regency mahogany caned bergère. First quarter 19th century. 38½ in (98 cm) high; 27¾ in (70.5 cm) wide; 33 in (84 cm) deep

Castor: A small wheel that allows a piece to be moved easily.

Chaise longue: A long low chair for reclining, with a back and single armrest to one side.





A French giltwood chaise longue by Henri-Auguste Fourdinois, Paris, circa 1878. Covered with green and cream-coloured cut silk velvet, the back of outscrollled form with one arm supported by a kneeling putto, the rounded base on seven column-form legs separated by fabric swags. 41½ in (105.5 cm) high; 75¾ in (192.5 cm) wide; 34¼ in (87 cm) deep. Sold for £47,500 on 7 June 2016 at Christie's in Paris

Chest on chest: Two chests of drawers stacked together, with the narrower piece on top.

Chest on stand: A chest of drawers on legs.



A William and Mary oak chest on stand. The chest late 17th century, the stand 19th century. 52 in (132 cm) high; 39½ in (101 cm) wide; 22½ in (57 cm) deep. Sold for £2,125 on 20 July 2016 at Christie's in London

Cheval mirror: A freestanding mirror that can be tilted to change the angle of reflection.

Chiffonier: A tall chest of drawers often used to store linen or needlework, sometimes topped by a shelf or mirror.

Chippendale: For Thomas Chippendale, one of the leading cabinetmakers of 18th-century Britain. The term also refers to a style of 18th-century American furniture.



The Deshler Family Chippendale carved mahogany side chair.

Probably the shop of Benjamin Randolph (1737-1791/2); the carving attributed to John Pollard (1740-1787), Philadelphia, circa 1769-1770.
37½ in high. Sold for \$173,000 on 22 January 2016 at Christie's in New York

Claw foot: A foot carved to resemble an animal's claw (see also Ball and claw foot).

Club chair: A chair with a low back, often upholstered in leather.





A pair of Art Deco mahogany and close-nailed leather upholstered club chairs. Sold for \$10,000 in Christie's Living: August Collections, 7-20 August 2020, online

Coffee table: A long low table to be placed in front of a set of chairs or a sofa.



An Italian rectangular scagliola table top, late 18th century. Sold for £6,250 in Chieveley House, Berkshire and Five Private Collections on 19 March 2020 at Christie's in London



Commode: Not to be confused with a chair containing a chamber pot, the traditional commode is a cabinet with doors or drawers, often highly ornamental.

Console table: A narrow table that is designed to be placed against a wall.



A Regency giltwood side table, first quarter 18th century, possibly German. Sold for £2,125 in Chieveley House, Berkshire and Five Private Collections on 19 March 2020 at Christie's in London



Credenza: A low sideboard with doors, used for storage or for serving food. The name comes from the Italian word for ‘belief’; in the 16th century, the act of *credenza* entailed the tasting of one’s food by a servant to ensure it was not poisoned.

Cresting: The carved decoration on the top rail of a piece of seat furniture or mirror.

D

Damask: A lustrous fabric with a reversible pattern and figured weave, often of linen, cotton or silk, which can be used for upholstery.

Davenport: A narrow writing desk with a sloped top above drawers.

Daybed: A long sofa, similar to a chaise longue, that can double up as a bed, often with a small headboard at either end.





A French giltwood daybed, 19th century, of Regence style. The shield-shaped ends covered à chassis and carved with shells, acanthus and flowerheads, on cabriole legs and hoof feet, regilt. 45¾ in (116 cm) high; 87½ in (222 cm) wide; 32 in (81 cm) deep

Decoupage: Derived from the French, a term for applied cut out paper decoration glued to the surface of objects, often flowers or figures.



A north Italian giltwood, simulated marble and 'lacca povera'
occasional table, the tray, probably piedmont, late 18th century, the
base 19th/early 20th century. 29 in (74 cm) high; 20½ in (52 cm); 16¼
in (41 cm) deep. Estimate: £2,500-4,000. Offered in Works of Art from
The Giuseppe Rossi Collection Sold to Benefit a Charity, 24
September to 15 October 2020, online

Dentil moulding: A form of decoration of evenly spaced blocks often used on a cornice. From the Latin for tooth, *dens*.

Dresser: A type of sideboard, often with shelves above drawers for the display of plates.



Drop-leaf: A kind of table with extendable parts that hang by its sides when not in use.



E

Ebonising: The process by which wood is stained dark to resemble ebony.



A regency parcel-gilt and ebonised satinwood games table, early 19th century, in the manner of John Mclean. 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ in (73 cm) high; 33 $\frac{1}{4}$ in (84.5 cm) wide; 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ in (48 cm) deep. Sold for £9,375 on 11 September 2019 at Christie's in London

Empire: A style dating to Napoleon's reign (1804-1814), characterised by Egyptian, Greek and Roman motifs.



Escutcheon: The term for the plate of metal that surrounds a keyhole, often decorative. From *scutum*, the Latin for shield.

Etagère: A piece of furniture with open shelves used for the display of ornaments.



A pair of gilt-metal three-tier etagères. Modern. 32½ in (82 cm) high; 31¾ in (80.5 cm) wide; 14 in (35.5 cm) deep. Sold for £2,250 on 20 July 2016 at Christie's in London

F

Fauteuil: An armchair with open sides, usually upholstered on the seat and the back, leaving the wooden frame exposed.

Fluting: Vertical grooves that form an elliptical-shaped recess, often employed on columns.



A set of six Louis Philippe mahogany fauteuils. Second quarter 19th century. 39 in (99 cm) high; 24½ in (62 cm) wide

Frieze: A broad, horizontal band that is often decorated with painting or sculpture.

Front rail: The piece of wood that runs between the front two legs of a chair.

Four-poster bed: A bed with high posts at each corner and sometimes a canopy.



An Italian red and clear beaded pagoda bed, 20th century. 92½ in (235 cm) high; 86½ in (220 cm) wide; 118 in (300 cm) deep. Sold for £21,250 on 11 September 2019 at Christie's in London

G

Gallery: An ornamental wood or metal rail around a piece of furniture.

Georgian: Term referring to the artistic output in the decorative arts during the reigns of the first four members of the British house of Hanover, between the accession of George I in 1714 and the death of George IV in 1830.





A pair of George II mahogany stools of unusually small size, circa 1750, possibly Scottish.
16½ in (42 cm) high; 19½ in (49.5 cm) wide; 14 in (35.5 cm) deep. Sold for £32,500 on 11 September 2019 at Christie's in London

Gesso: From the Italian for chalk, a material that can be moulded into elaborate designs for cornices and frames, etc.

Gilding: A technique of applying gold leaf to wood for decoration.





A George II giltwood mirror, circa 1740. 42½ x 29½ in (108 x 75 cm).

Sold for £3,125 on 11 September 2019 at Christie's in London

Gillows: A firm founded by Robert Gillows in 1703 in Lancaster, known for its elegant designs and superior craftsmanship. Its pieces are still highly sought-after by collectors today.

H

Hassock: An upholstered footstool or short bench.



Herringbone: A way of using veneer as decoration, also known as feather banding, whereby two strips of veneer are laid at a 90-degree angle around the edge of a piece of furniture to create a herringbone-patterned border.

I

Inlay: A technique of using a contrasting material to create a decorative pattern on the surface of a piece of furniture.



A 'Moorish' ivory and mother-of-pearl-inlaid hardwood and ebonised occasional table, circa 1900. 29 in (74 cm) high; 21½ in (55 cm) square. Sold for £2,125 on 20 July 2016 at Christie's in London



J

Japanning: A technique developed in Europe that imitates the lacquering applied to Asian furniture.



[English japanned chest on stand](#). First half 18th century, the japanning later. 48 in (121.9 cm) high; 43 in (109.2 cm) wide; 23½ in (59.7 cm) deep. Sold for \$2,500 in [Christie's Living: August Collections](#), 7-20 August 2020, online

Jardinière: A pot for holding plants, often large and ceramic for outdoor use, but can also be a more elongated shape for indoor use.





An Italian patinated bronze jardinière,
late 19th/early 20th century, cast by
Fonderia Chiurazzi, Naples. After the
model No. 447 from the Chiurazzi
Workshop Catalogue, with Chiurazzi
foundry seal and incised '4/299'. 39 $\frac{3}{4}$ in
(101 cm) high. Sold for \$1,250 on 26 July
2016 at Christie's in New York

K

Kneehole desk: A type of desk with a recess in the front to make space for one's knees.





A French burr-elm desk and matching chair. Empire style, late 19th/early 20th century. Desk 29½ in (75 cm) high; 57½ in (146 cm) wide; 29½ in (75 cm) deep; chair 29 in (74 cm) high; 23½ in (60 cm) wide

L

Lacquer: A high-gloss varnish used in Chinese and Japanese furniture.

Loveseat: A small sofa designed for two people, often made in an S shape so that a conversation can be held face-to-face.





Claude Lalanne b. 1925, *Love-seat*, 1972. Gilt bronze, galvanized copper. 69 x 130 x 85 cm (27½ x 51½ x 33½ in). Sold for €721,500 on 25 May 2016 at Christie's in Paris

Lowboy: A low side table, usually with three drawers and cabriole legs.

M

Marquetry: A style of inlay that uses different types of veneered wood or other materials placed together to form a pictorial pattern. Marquetry can be contrasted with parquetry, which forms a geometric pattern.





A New Zealand specimen nativewood parquetry occasional table, by Anton Seuffert, circa 1870. Sold for £10,000 in Chieveley House, Berkshire and Five Private Collections on 19 March 2020 at Christie's in London

N

Neoclassical: A style of design that revives classical motifs, popularised from the second half of the 18th century.



A close pair of George III polychrome-decorated demi-lune commodes. Early 19th century.

Each 32 in (81.5 cm) high; 48 in (122 cm) wide; 21 in (53 cm) deep. Sold for £11,250 on 17

August 2016 at Christie's in London

Nesting tables: A set of small tables that fit inside each other.



Four Chinese export nesting tables. Early 19th century. Black and gilt lacquer. 28 in (71.1 cm) high, 19 in (48.3 cm) wide, 11½ in (29.2 cm) deep, the largest. Sold for \$2,375 in Christie's Living: August Collections, 7-20 August 2020, online.

O

Occasional table: A catch-all term used to describe small freestanding tables such as coffee or side tables.

Ormolu: Historic technique for gilding bronze using mercury, often finely chased.





A pair of George III ormolu-mounted fluorspar and marble Corinthian columns, attributed to Matthew Boulton, circa 1770.
Sold for £47,500 in Chieveley House, Berkshire and Five Private Collections on 19 March 2020 at Christie's in London

Ottoman: Usually a low upholstered stool that can be used as a foot rest and sometimes also for storage, adopted from similar styles in the Ottoman Empire.

P



Pad foot: A kind of foot often found on cabriole legs that ends in a flat oval disk.



Palmette: A decorative motif derived from classical architecture loosely resembling an open palm leaf, often used interchangeably with the term anthemion.

Parquetry: Similar to marquetry, parquetry is a technique used on floors and furniture that contrasts wood to create a geometric pattern.

Pedestal table: A table supported by a single leg.

Pembroke table: A drop-leaf table often with a drawer and twin flaps to the long sides.

Pie-crust edge: A scalloped motif either carved or moulded on the edge of a table.

Pietra dura: A form of mosaic decoration using semi-precious stones, mostly seen on tabletops.

Pliant: A form of folding x-framed stool, derived from ancient forms and often associated with royalty.





A pair of north Italian white-painted and parcel-gilt pliants, possibly by Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo, Turin, circa 1780. 17 in (43 cm) high; 24½ in (62 cm) wide; 18½ in (47 cm) deep.
Estimate: £5,000-8,000. Offered in Works of Art from The Giuseppe Rossi Collection Sold to Benefit a Charity, 24 September to 15 October 2020, Online

Reeding: The convex equivalent of fluting, reeding comprises parallel lines of rounded moulding.

Regency: A term referring to English furniture made between 1800-1830 in a style promoted by George, Prince of Wales, who reigned as George IV.



A Regency parcel-gilt and simulated-calamander sofa, circa 1815, redecorated. 36 in (91.5 cm) high; 80 in (203 cm) wide. Sold for £6,875 on 11 September 2019 at Christie's in London



Rococo: An elaborate style of furniture that followed the Baroque in the 18th century, characterised by scroll and foliate motifs.



A north Italian green-painted and parcel-gilt mirror, mid-18th century, possibly by Gian Pietro Baroni di Tavigliano. 79 in (201 cm) high; 43¾ in (111 cm) wide. Estimate: £10,000-15,000. Offered in Works of Art from The Giuseppe Rossi Collection Sold to Benefit a Charity, 24 September to 15 October 2020, online



S



Secretaire: A French term for a standing chest of drawers with a drop-down writing desk (see Abattant).

Shoe: The horizontal section of the back seat rail of a chair that supports the bottom of the splat.

Sideboard: A long cabinet often used in dining rooms for serving food and as storage.

Side chair: A traditional dining chair with no arms that would fit in at the side of a dining table.



A pair of Regency gilt-metal mounted, ebonised and fruitwood side chairs, circa 1820. Sold for £1,375 on 14 June 2016 at Christie's in New York



Slat back: A chair back consisting of vertical slats instead of a single panel.



Sofa: An upholstered long seat with back and arms.



A George III mahogany sofa, circa 1750, in the manner of Paul Saunders. Sold for £15,000 in Chieveley House, Berkshire and Five Private Collections on 19 March 2020 at Christie's in London

Sofa table: A high, small table to be placed alongside a sofa with twin flaps to the short ends.

Spindle back: A chair with turned spindles instead of a single panel as a back rest.



Straw marquetry: A form of marquetry that uses straw instead of wood to create a contrasting pattern on the surface of a piece.

Stretcher: Often forming an H, X or Y shape, the stretcher runs between the legs of a chair or table to reinforce the structure.

T

Tallboy: A tallboy, or chest on chest, is a high chest of drawers.



A George III figured mahogany tallboy.

Late 18th century. 73 in (185 cm) high;
42½ in (108 cm) wide; 22 in (56 cm)
deep. Sold for £4,375 on 20 July 2016 at
Christie's in London

Term: A pillar surmounted by a carved male or female bust, usually armless, that tapers towards the base. Also known as a herm, after the posts bearing the carved head of Hermes that were used as boundary markers in ancient Greece.

Trestle table: A table supported by an upright at each end.

Tub chair: See Barrel chair.

U

Upholstery: The padded covering on furniture, usually made of horsehair, foam or springs and covered in decorative fabric or leather.



A late Victorian brown leather Chesterfield sofa. Late 19th century. 27 in (68.5 cm) high; 93 in (236.5 cm) wide; 39½ in (105 cm) deep. Sold for £3,250 on 20 July 2016 at Christie's in London

V



Veneering: The technique of applying thin layers of wood to a piece of furniture.



A stained and veneered beech two-tier occasional table in the style of Gio Ponti. Third quarter 20th century. 18½ in (47 cm) high; 37¾ in (96 cm) wide; 17¾ in (45 cm) deep

Victorian: Refers to the period coinciding with the reign of Queen Victoria of Britain from 1837 to 1901.

Volute: A spiral scroll characteristic of Ionic capitals, often used as a decorative form on arm rests and feet in furniture.

W

Webbing: A technique of interweaving elastic or fabric to provide support to an upholstered arm, back or seat.



Wicker: A term given to pieces woven from rattan, willow or reed.

Windsor chair: A classic design with a curved top and spindle back.



A George IV yew and elm Windsor armchair, early 19th century. Together with a Victorian beech and elm Windsor armchair. Sold for £1,250 on 16 March 2016 at Christie's in London

Wingback: A chair with wing-like side panels protruding from the top of the backrest and above the arms in order to shield the sitter from draughts or the heat of a fire. Also known as a *bergère à oreilles*, or a chair 'with ears'.





An English oak wingback chair, 19th century. Together with a Scottish Orkney Island child's chair and an oak and fruitwood side table. Sold for \$2,000 on 26 July 2016 at Christie's in New York

X

Y

Z

Zitan: a tropical hardwood ranging in colour from dark-purplish brown to reddish brown, and considered, together with huanghuali, the most precious and luxurious material used in Chinese furniture.



22 September 2020

**FURNITURE &
DECORATIVE ARTS |
COLLECTING GUIDE**

Highlighted sale



Works of Art from
The Giuseppe
Rossi Collection |
Sold to Benefit a
Charity

ONLINE
24 SEPTEMBER - 15
OCTOBER 2020

Help

FAQs

Buying guides

Selling guides

Get an estimate

Payments

Shipping

Storage

About us

About Christie's

Locations

Press

Careers

Corporate Social Responsibility

Culture & Philanthropy

Services

Bespoke client advisory service

Trusts, Estates & Wealth Management

Heritage & Taxation

Estates, Appraisals & Valuations

Corporate Collections

Museum Services

Restitution



Strategic partnerships

[Terms and conditions](#) [Privacy](#) [Security](#) [Cookie settings](#) [Do not sell my personal information](#)

[Modern slavery statement](#)

[Christie's Education](#) [Christie's Real Estate](#)



© Christie's 2021

