

They Will Be Feather

Many families have grandmothers affectionately called Nana. But Ann Richbourg was no ordinary grandmother. Even before I became her son-in-law, I dubbed her “Queen Ann.” She enjoyed adoration and pampering. She welcomed my sobriquet with its connotation of royalty.

We loved Nana. Everyone in Nashville Georgia did. And everyone knew that Nana liked fine things. Expensive things. Well-made things.

From plush cushioned wicker furniture on her sun porch, Nana admired a Japanese maple centered in a garden defined by wrought iron fencing. A trellis spanned one of the ornate gates. Bird feeders and bird baths invited live entertainment. Inside, the house teemed with her collections. Handwoven sweetgrass baskets from an artisanal market in Charleston. A dozen bronze sculptures by Brother Jerome Cox. Delft china with oriental scenes spilled from the wall and several cabinets onto a ceramic tile countertop. Gleaming Waterford lead crystal of myriad shapes and sizes twinkled inside glass cases. Wedgewood Runnymede Blue fine china for special events.

Oils and watercolors by Mary Van Landingham embellished the dining rooms, Henry’s study, and bedrooms. My favorite canvas hung above Henry’s and Nana’s matching wingback chairs in the sunlit nook where they often sat. Princess, their spoiled Shiatzu, reclined on Nana’s ottoman.

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Small items were more easily accommodated in the homes of Nana’s heirs. What about the big stuff, the furniture? Nana’s home was lavishly furnished.

Nan and Fortson Turner, lifelong friends of Richbourgs and purveyors of fine furniture, inventoried the household shortly after Nana and Henry passed away. I was amazed at their expertise. They strolled from room to room, pointing to each item and confidently identifying its style and maker. They reminded me of myself as a teenager who loved cars. I could tell you the year, make and model from a mere glimpse of a hub cap or wheel cover. There is a difference!

Nana was very proud and protective of her Hinkel Harris dining table with ten matching chairs.

“That’s a Crescent,” Fortson said as he paused to examine another fine table and with eight Queen Anne chairs. He stroked the polished surface of one well-made side table, saying, “This Hekman is worth three to four thousand dollars in today’s market.” I was astounded! Fortson claimed the plain darkly stained corner cabinet “would sell for five or six thousand to the right buyer.” Clearly, I’m not the “right buyer!” Most cars I’ve purchased cost less.

He looked at each piece with admiration and affection. Coming to a Hekman sideboard, he shook his head and smiled slowly. “Oh, this one has a story,” he mused aloud.

“Henry ordered this for Nana. When it was delivered to our store in Tifton, Henry found the tiniest dimple on one of the drawer fronts. He said, ‘Nana won’t have this. It must be perfect.’” Fortson ordered an identical replacement, uncrated it, and made sure it was immaculate before seeking Henry’s approval.

Fortson and Nan warned us of having a yard sale where local bargain hunters unaware of the quality craftsmanship of each item would offer mere pittance for these fine pieces.

“These are high quality pieces. People who know furniture will pay handsomely for them.”

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No one ever went into Nana’s formal living room except Princess who slept on the antique Hickory Chair sofa. The only time we humans gathered there was for the somber consultation with the Funeral Director the day after Nana died.

Initially nobody wanted that sofa, but after Mary Helen gave our couch to her son when he moved, we suddenly had a place for it. It did not harmonize with the décor of our Music Room. In bright light, those stains where naughty Princess slept were conspicuous. After a feeble attempt to clean it, we gave up.

Mary Helen made three trips to fabric stores. One was enough for me. Mary Helen relished the dilemma. She vacillated between bold patterns and muted solid

colors. She examined a dozen fabric swatches in various light. She scrutinized multiple combinations, several for the sofa, others for the pillows.

When she reached a firm decision on a soft-white fabric for the sofa, I inquired,

“What about pillows?”

“They will be feather!” she asserted, her firm tone leaving no room for negotiation.

“Why feathers?”

“Because feathers can be fluffed!” she beamed.

Feathers can also be ruffled, I thought, but dared not say, realizing this to be a hopeless battle this husband cannot win.

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“What’s the difference between a couch and a sofa?” I asked the upholsterer when we unloaded Nana’s into his cluttered workshop.

“People in Crestridge have sofas. Folks in Bart’s Acres have couches.” He meant *wealthy* people have *sofas*. *Ordinary* people have *couches*.

“So there is no visible or structural difference between a couch and a sofa?”

“Sofas, couches, chesterfields, settees, squabs, davenports.... Different names for something that two or three people can sit on.”

“Fortson said this one was eight-way hand tied. Is that special?” I asked.

“The gold standard!” he said, reaching into a bin overflowing with metal. Holding up a coil, he explained, “This would be attached to neighboring coils in eight directions, making it very stable but labor intensive, and more costly.”

He fetched a bowed springy wire from another bin. “This is the cheaper option. It spans the cushion. It doesn’t distribute the weight evenly and tends to splinter the wood where it is stapled to the frame. It’s much faster and cheaper and easier to build with this, but it doesn’t feel as good when you sit on it and it won’t last as long.”

“Well, since this one belonged to Nana and it is eight-way hand-tied, I reckon it’s a *sofa*,” I concluded.

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“If you say so,” he nodded and smiled.

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In our Music Room sits a lovely heirloom camel back sofa of the highest quality. Expertly re-upholstered at great expense. Embellished by *feather* pillows. Beautiful and refined, inside and out. One of a kind.

Like Nana! Queen Ann!

GR Davis, Jr.

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