



# PURIST BEAUTY

## HANDMADE AMISH FURNITURE EPITOMIZES EXCEPTIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP

BY DEBI BRYANT

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Amish furniture conjures images of heirloom American-heritage pieces — handmade with the classic, timeless craftsmanship of Amish artisans. “The most common reason for choosing Amish furniture is the quality,” says Neta Caples, co-owner of Thee Amish Shoppe with husband Larry. That quality shows up in construction that is both sound and beautiful. “These pieces are put together well and with care,” Caples says.

**ABOVE:** An *Armington*-style table surrounded by distinctive curved-back chairs creates an inviting place not to eat, but to dine and enjoy lingering conversation. From the craftsmen of *Simply Amish*, whose furniture is available locally through *Amish Home Furnishings in Spring*. Photo courtesy *Simply Amish*

Amish furniture is typically made of solid hardwood such as oak, cherry, maple and quarter-sawn oak. It can be crafted in almost any style, from an Arts & Crafts-period piece to modern items that would look appropriate in a downtown loft.

Amish furniture can be either custom ordered or bought off the floor. Steve Brumbelow, co-owner of Amish Home Furnishings with wife Nelda, says that his business is split about 60/40 — custom to off-the-floor.

At Amish Barn, owner Brenda Seidenberg says, “With custom orders, our clients get furniture made by Amish craftsmen that, start to finish, is made just for them. Their name will be on it somewhere. They have lots of choices, but it is very personal.”

Some people want to match something they already own. “In these cases, we can send a piece to our builders and they can match it exactly,” says Caples.

As for cost, Seidenberg points out that if you compare similarly made furniture — that is, solid hardwood — Amish furniture is not more expensive than other furniture. “People are often surprised by how affordable Amish furniture is,” she says.





**ABOVE:** Comfort and quality go hand-in-hand with this Amish bedroom set at The Amish Craftsman. Photo by Anthony Rathbun

**BELOW LEFT:** Pull up a contemporary office chair to a Loft-style desk from Simply Amish, and you have a wonderful area to take care of business, all while making a salute to technology as well as tradition.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Shaker, not Amish: Collection of Shaker chairs, Mount Lebanon, N.Y., late 19th century, on view at "An Eye Toward Perfection" Jan. 18-27, 2008, during the Winter Antiques Show at the Seventh Regiment Armory in New York City. Photo courtesy The Shaker Museum and Library, Old Chatham, N.Y.



### AMISH OR SHAKER?

People sometimes confuse Amish furniture with Shaker furniture. Amish furniture is a type of craftsmanship characterized by handmade furniture that is often custom ordered and is constructed of solid hardwood.

Steve Brumbelow of Amish Home Furnishings says, "Amish furniture is not a particular look, like Country. We offer 12 styles made by our Amish craftsmen, like Mission, Prairie and Savannah."

Kimberley Murphy, owner of The Amish Craftsman says, "You can actually have Shaker-style furniture made by the Amish."

Shaker furniture comes from the religious colonies of Shakers founded in the United States in the last quarter of the 18th century. The Shakers' designs reflect their beliefs that good craftsmanship was itself an act of prayer and that form should follow function. Constructed of pine or other inexpensive wood, each item was fashioned solely to serve its intended use and was devoid of decoration.

Interest in Shaker furniture and other Shaker crafts revived in the 20th century after most Shaker colonies had dissolved. Reproductions are now widely produced. (Source of Shaker information: [www.answer.com](http://www.answer.com))



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*The clean lines of genuine Amish furniture allow it to take on different "looks," from country to traditional to contemporary, when paired with the right accessories. Photo of a Loft-style bedroom suite courtesy Simply Amish*

**RESOURCES**

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www.amishbarn.com

**AMISH CABINETS**  
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**THEE AMISH SHOPPE**  
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281.286.9911  
www.egamishfurniture.com

**SIMPLY AMISH FURNITURE**  
www.simplyamish.com

**TAKE CARE**

Your Amish furniture may be finished with the catalyzed varnish used as the finish in today's high-end furniture market. To maintain the beauty of your furniture's finish for many generations to come, Kimberley Murphy, owner of The Amish Craftsman, suggests the following care guidelines:

- Regularly clean your furniture with a clean, soft damp cloth. It is important to dust regularly. If left to accumulate, dust can dull or even scratch the surface of your furniture.
- If a cleaner is required, use a very mild soap and wipe dry immediately.
- Limit direct sunlight exposure as much as possible. Excessive sunlight exposure could cause changes or fading in your furniture's finish.
- Do not use commonly available furniture polishes that contain wax, silicone or abrasives. Also, do not use cleaners that contain bleach or ammonia.

Prices vary with size, wood and finish, but Caples offers this example: "A 42-inch-round dining table with three leaves costs about \$820. The chairs can cost from \$175-\$400 each." She estimates custom orders take about six to eight weeks.

In addition to the high quality, there is a certain nostalgic romance about Amish furniture. Brumbelow says, "We work with about 90 shops, all of them old order Amish. That means they do not use automobiles or electricity. When you walk through their shops, it's very quiet. There are no power tools, only pneumatic ones. The lighting is by gas mantles. The pace is very methodical."

Seidenberg is drawn to the Amish integrity. "They stand 100 percent behind what they make," she says. "They are very humble and don't take offense if you ask them to change something. We feel very blessed to do business with them."

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