

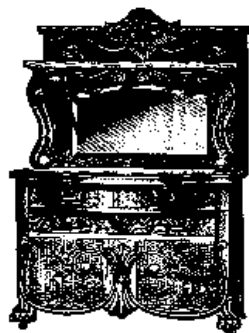
Safely Transporting and Storing Your Furniture

What the insurance companies and movers may not be telling you before you move. How to protect glass. Requesting storage that won't destroy your glue joints! Did you know most large pieces can be disassembled? (What to look for.)

After working for insurance companies, movers, home & office cleaning companies, furniture stores, freight people and consumers I have always been amazed at the severity of damage that can occur when furniture is stored or moved. Just 3 feet or 3000 miles it doesn't make much difference. Most consumers think that moving and storing furniture is some type of standardized practice. It's not! Last year I worked on several hundred thousand dollars worth of custom built furniture from Malaysia. It was all carefully packed and boxed. There was less than \$500 worth of structural and cosmetic damage to the whole lot. That is a minuscule amount of damage to an entire showroom full of furniture. The furniture had just arrived after a two week voyage from a custom builder in Malaysia. On the other hand I had an elderly couple just 12 miles south of our shop who decided to move their sleeper sofa 18 feet and 4 inches down the hall and to the left to a renovated den (now to be a guest bedroom.) They did \$230 worth of damage to the sofa and put 64 dents, dings, and scratches in their fancy woodwork on the way! They said, "We just didn't measure right!"

Older Furniture was often Designed to be Moved and Serviced

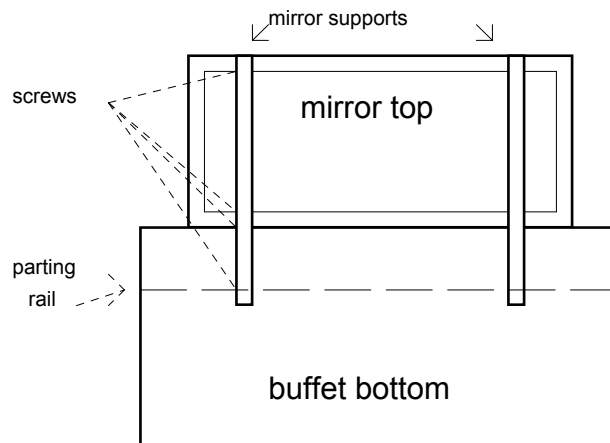
The old oak buffet, circa. 1900, in our first illustration has a large heavy mirror encased in it's top piece. The top piece can be easily separated from the buffet deck area by removing about 8 screws in two boards on the back. Notice that this piece that weighs about 260 pounds, is also on casters (you call them wheels) so a housewife could clean around it easily. These were design considerations for shipping and also for daily use.



The additional design steps have allowed many of these old buffets to survive countless moves with little or no damage. Even if they were damaged screws and glue blocks could be removed and

replaced as well as tops and panels. Just being able to easily clean around it without shifting the frame out-of-square (this is called racking) is a big plus.

The top mirror piece is easily removed and looks like this in back...



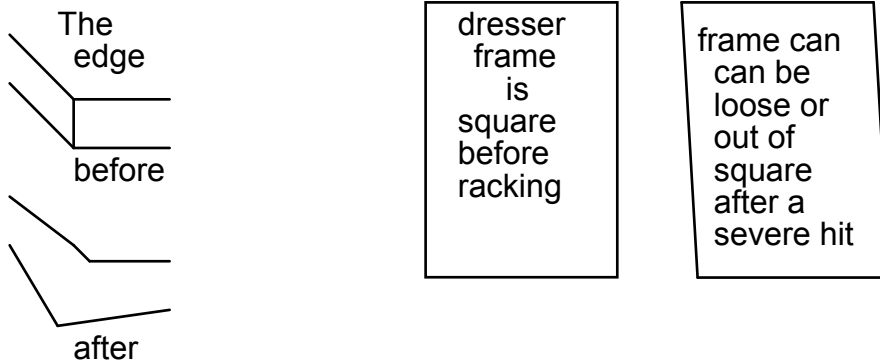
How it is attached is very important because the screws must go back in very specific holes. One goes in the top of the mirror frame, another goes in back of the lower mirror frame, another goes in the back of the top of the buffet bottom, and the last screw on the bottom goes into a device called the “parting rail” (indicated by the dashed line going across the buffet bottom). The parting rail is invisible from the back of the piece but is easily seen on the inside of the buffet casing. Why bring this up now? I can’t tell you how many times I’ve seen this great design compromised by people just putting the screw anywhere that’s convenient!

Put the screws back in their original holes and fix those holes if they become stripped out. At least drill new holes that grip onto the same framing member again! Now let’s apply these principles to newer furniture.

Newer Furniture, It’s Designed to Sell!

I think somewhere in the last 30 years form has finally won completely over function. I stopped at one of our “leading” retailers here in the Columbus, Ohio area today just to make sure I was current on this. What I saw was a 5 drawer high chest that stood about 5 feet tall, 4 & 1/2 feet wide, and about 14 inches deep. It even had a neat tilt beveled mirror attached to the top of it very much like our old buffet illustration. To first look at it you might think that it was solid mahogany. If you took a closer look you would see that it was extremely thin mahogany veneer applied over Medium Density Fiberboard (this is compressed recycled and virgin paper). Yes, that’s right, paper. Almost the entire piece was made of this material, even the cardboard back! They were asking \$1460 for this piece of furniture. Now here comes the real “rub.” Let’s call the local moving company after we bought this piece and have them move it for us. They send out two guys that know how to handle larger furniture and case goods. Let’s say they just barely bump an edge of this piece. Whoops! The veneer smashes in and the compressed paper swells to 3 times it’s size in that area.

Let's say they hit it a little harder this time on a stair rail. This time the frame "racks" and pulls screws loose.



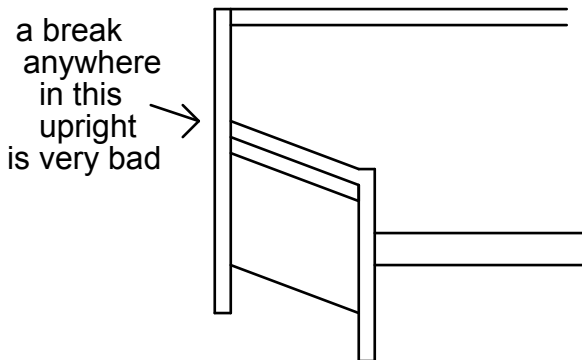
As a consumer you would not even be aware that a frame has loosened on this piece until you try to close your drawers over a period of time. They'll rub and grind until the piece just becomes unusable.

So what are we telling you here? Medium Density Fiberboard is an accepted standard in furniture building now. It requires more diligence in moving and handling than almost any of the older furniture. Don't think you've got any of this stuff? Trust me, I see some of it in every household I service. I worked on a \$9500 dining table two months ago. The wife said that "gray dust" was pouring from an edge after a move. Welcome to the wonderful world of paper!

Improving Your Furniture's Odds of Surviving the MOVE

If you really want to spend a lot of money and see your furniture get to your new residence most moving companies offer custom boxing services. They come to you with wooden framing members, heavy duty cardboard sides, special wraps and foams and literally build a box around pieces with air staplers. Honestly, I think this is a little too much protection. However, if you do have a few "shaky" antique chair or loveseat frames, it might be worth it. Also consider having "art frame boxes" made for large mirrors and separate glass pieces. This is how most valuable art pieces are shipped around the world and because these are not extremely large or complex boxes they are quite reasonable. You might consider taking some masking tape or better yet some of that new "blue tape" that they make for paint masking (it's easier to remove) and make an x pattern on the inside and outside of any glass doors or pane inserts that are not removable. If you have a hard time removing the tape later just soak the areas in mineral spirits or naphtha available at paint and hardware stores. A very simple thing you can request of your movers is that when they pick up your dressers, china, and almost any case item they should remove any drawers and shelves. Sounds simple, huh??? This takes all the stress off the frame and reduces the chance of racking by 25 to 50%! Once the pieces are in the truck they can put the drawers back in but should wrap any shelves separately in moving pads. For a mover, time truly is money and most will charge you extra for moving pieces like that. The more common practice is to shrink wrap the drawers in place in the piece. There is really nothing wrong with that practice however I do feel all of the items should be removed from the drawers and boxed separately. Moving pads, those quilted blankets, are important for protection. I've recently seen some cut rate moving companies using cheap blankets.

Insist on quality thick moving pads. Next let's talk about wooden dining chairs. Take a minute and put your knee in the middle of each dining style chair you own and grab it on each side of the top and wiggle it. Try to push your knee around in a circle and see if the bottom is loose at all. Number each chair with a pencil mark under the seat bottom and keep a log about the condition of each chair. Better yet get a video cam and just make a video log of every piece of furniture before the movers even show up. You see this is "evidence of condition" that you might need later to settle any insurance claims if there is damage. Look them over for existing wear and gouges. Check especially for cracks. A simple crack at this point could really open up if put under enough pressure or packed incorrectly. Repair it now before the move and keep your receipt for the work. Also consider taking 4 and 6 legged dining table apart. Most legs usually unbolt with simple wrenches or even with your fingers. Oh, let's not forget about your upholstered furniture. Always insist that the movers carry this furniture or transport it on a cart. If they just slide it they can easily snap off a leg or two! (In the retail furniture stores you could hear dock personnel sliding sofas around for delivery. The in-shop repair people would yell, "job security.") In most sofa designs the **back legs** are an integral part of the structural support for the whole piece. They look like this inside the sofa...



Another thing about moving most upholstered furniture that I would be cautious about is simply shrink wrapping it in plastic alone. Quality sofas and chairs have shaped cushions that can be damaged even through the fabric without some padding and careful packing. It's surprising how much damage can occur even in a short move.

"If I could make my furniture smaller maybe it wouldn't get damaged"

If we could just shine a shrink ray on it all and put it in a bag. Well, we can't do that but we can disassemble some large items that are going to be hard to move. Some people don't realize that most kitchen china cabinets consist of a bottom, the china deck, and a separate china top. They sometimes are put together just like the old buffet illustration using boards or even metal mirror supports to screw them together.

You might want to go to a Sears Hardware store and pick up a couple sizes of each of the following screwdriver patterns...

⊖
slotted
screw

⊕
phillips
screw

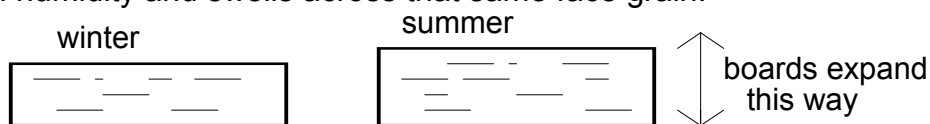
⊠
roberts
screw

If you do not obviously see any type of external support on the back the next place to check is for screws that may be up inside the china bottom top. Simply back a few of these screws out and see what is loosening. Now might be a good time to get out that video camera again for a “before” and “after” shot so you can put this thing together again. Of course, any mirrors should be removed from dressers and if possible any large glass doors should be removed, taping any screws to the inside of the piece for transport (video cam the door removal, too.) Now occasionally you see a large piece of furniture that you just stand back and say, “How did they ever move this?” If you carefully inspect the piece you’ll find that somewhere it has screws and mounting blocks making it look like one solid piece. Just remember, the furniture factories want to ship pieces easily and most local furniture craftsman don’t like building “back breaking” pieces either. It’s just a puzzle you’ve got to solve. If you have to call in the best furniture restorer in your area and have him look at it or disassemble it for you. (I’ve been called in to do this many times over the years.)

Storage

Brrrrr!!! A cold chill runs up and down my spine when a customer says, “I just can’t believe it, my furniture was damaged in storage.” The absolute worst and most irreparable damage to furniture occurs in storage areas. Why??? If you were told that your furniture was going to be put in storage for awhile did you actually see the storage facility? Did it, your furniture, ever even go to a facility? A local farmer in our area once told me that he had an old barn that really wasn’t good for anything but he made good money renting it to a local mover! Can you imagine, your fine furniture sitting in some old barn that’s about ready to cave in? It happens. Even the typical “self-store-it” facilities cause a lot of problems for furniture. It has to do with two major factors, heat and humidity.

A student in one of my classes put a recording thermo-hygrometer (these record the highest and lowest heat and humidity readings) in one of these units for a year here in Ohio. The unit was a block building with an no insulation in the walls or the metal roof. He recorded a low humidity reading of 16% and a high of 98%. That’s a staggering humidity difference. It gets worse! He recorded a temperature low of 16 degrees below 0 and a temperature high of 186 degrees!!! That’s a span of 202 degrees in temperature! Your furniture was built for an environment of about 65 to 75 degrees and 30 to 70 % humidity swings. The laws of physics say that wood must come into equilibrium to it’s environment. When it’s cold and dry the wood shrinks across it’s face grain, when it’s hot and humid it loads up with humidity and swells across that same face grain.




This easily starts to loosen glue joints and damage finishes, and here we go again, what about that compressed paper furniture? If it takes on enough moisture it will swell and never, ever, regain original size. What can you do about storage problems like this? Be aggressive in your moving planning. First, try to plan it so your furniture does not need any type of storage at all. Second, if a mover is going to store your

furniture ask to have it stored locally and tell them you want to see the facility (you might want to video tape your furniture once it has been stored there.) Third, request (yes, they'll probably charge extra for this service) at least heated storage and better yet "climate controlled" storage. Climate controlled is the best because heating, cooling, dehumidification and humidification factors are kept constant 24 hours a day all year long. Even some of the newer self-store-it units are offering this on their premium units. Another type of damage that happens in storage happens when your pieces are put into one large "collective warehouse." Movers make a lot of money on old warehouse space where they can cram a lot of furniture in and stack it to the ceiling. I saw a sofa frame that was actually flattened this way. A mover called me in to look at this frame. When I said it was shot he said, "I'll just tell the lady the frame was loose when we picked it up, no big deal." Wow! How about storage in the semi-truck van itself?

These are often unhitched and may set for weeks in a storage yard. Movers admitted to one of my customers that the print marks on her Chippendale chairs were caused by the moving pads. It had gotten so hot in the trailer that the pads bonded to the finish!

Here are a few final tips for those of you doing your own storage in a self-storage unit. Try not to set furniture directly on concrete floors. Wooden furniture legs act like "wicks" for moisture and water damage. Put furniture up on bricks or blocks to avoid this. Any shelves or leaves should be stored flat above the floor if possible to avoid warpage. Avoid long term contact with most cardboard. It contains sodium hydroxide residue which can eat into your fine furniture finishes. Many plastics and tape can also bond to finishes in a short time. Try not to store stripped woods or furniture. Cracking and warping can become permanent.

"But I've got insurance or they'll repair or replace my stuff

100 %, right???" 

The mover or his insurance company are never going to just roll out the red carpet for your moving claims unless you do some careful planning. It is going to be your responsibility to prove that you have incurred "new damage" in your move.

Again you will find that the moving business is very non-standardized when it comes to your move. You have to be the detective here. First you will find that most simple moving contracts are going to consider your furniture in "depreciated" condition based on the age of the item you will claim. An example is a sofa you paid \$1500 for 8 years ago. According to a "depreciation schedule" this moving company might consider your sofa fully depreciated at 5 years of age so your 8 year old sofa is essentially worthless. They might pay nothing for this damage claim no matter how severe. These simple policies may attach no importance to your antique furniture and simply call them "used furniture." Even if your furniture falls within their depreciation schedule you may have to show copies of original receipts for those items. I even saw a policy that only covered furniture for the "manufacturers stated warranty period" in case of claims damage. That is only a 1 year period with most wooden furniture. A slight improvement on this type of policy states that all claims must be listed by the customer within a certain time period. The mover will send out his "claims examiner" and sends out an in-house repair person or an independent repair company . I work for a lot of movers doing just that type of damage. If someone comes out to do the work and you don't feel confident request a second opinion.



Can I Get Some Real Protection Here

Please!!!

Most moving companies are going to offer you optional coverage for your furniture. This will also be quite different company to company. A local executive here in town had me do about \$4500 worth of claims damage to his household. The insurance company for the mover didn't bat an eye. My client told me he had paid an extra \$500 for insurance that included a pre-inspection and a post-inspection by the insurer. They knew exactly what was damaged in the move and the condition of the furniture before it was moved. I had a Marine Sergeant that moved back to Ohio from Germany. He brought a huge Shrunken (large cabinet system) back with him. It had fallen in its shipping container and was broken to bits. The insurer argued with me for 1/2 hour on the phone that surely the piece wasn't in that bad of shape. Couldn't I just slap it together for them for a couple hundred dollars??? Yeah, right. What's the difference between these two situations. I think it's just plain money. If you buy more insurance you will get more service. If you have a lot of older furniture consider antique riders on your policies. These will specifically state how damages and money is to be paid on these pieces. Also consider talking to your home insurance agent. Many times your householder's policy will cover damages to furniture even while it is being moved. Your home policy deductible will still have to be paid by you but the rest may be picked up by them. The insurance company in turn will still probably try to recover money from the movers' insurance company.



Who you gonna' call???

Yep, you bought the good insurance. Yep, they broke, smashed, and hit 13 pieces of your best stuff. Now the mover's insurance company says,

"We'll need you to get 3 quotes for us as soon as possible." What they didn't tell you is that most companies like Furniture Physicians and Darrel Kestner Restorations charge a fee for insurance quotes. Depending on your area in the United States this can be as little as \$10 to \$100. You can see that you're going to be out a chunk of change for these estimates. Some insurance companies will reimburse you for these costs. Our restoration companies simply credit this back to the customer for any of the work that will be done. Why do we charge for insurance estimates??? These companies can really drive us crazy with phone conversations and paper work. This covers our wasted office time and our travel time. Okay, now I'm looking in the phone book and I've found 3 guys that do this kind of work. Don't just limit your search for good restoration or touch-up people to the phone book. Call around to the furniture retailers and better antique shops. They are going to know who does the best work in town.

If you keep hearing the same people referred over and over again those are the ones you want! A lady once told me, "You must be some kind of Super RepairMan." She had been referred to me by a neighbor on each side of her house, her reverend at church, the neighborhood "block watch" commander, and one of the antique dealers. You may even have to wait a little longer for the more talented folk but it will be worth it. So now you've got your 3 quotes. Who decides which quote to go with? It's time to get aggressive. Tell the insurance company which company you preferred. Tell them you checked out 3 references on each of them. Tell them you went to their shops and saw their work. If the quotes are within about 20% of each other the insurance company will accept your choice. If there is quite a bit of disparity between the quotes they may not allow you to make the decision or may simply refer back to the language of the policy as to choice.



Are we through yet?

Your house, your car, your household belongings (furniture). This is how most Americans rank their possessions. Yet many people don't see the risk exposure presented to their furniture. You've got enough information here to choose your mover wisely (or even move it yourself). You now know what can happen in a bad move (one of my clients had a total of \$45,000 worth of damage to her furniture and collectibles) and how to make your next one better.

About Darrel Kestner and Company...

Mr. Kestner along with his wife Annette and daughter Lora run the Furniture Physicians Company and Darrel Kestner Restorations. This material is taken directly from company files and classes taught by the Kestners over the last 32 years. These publications are in response to many e-mails we have received about these topics. We are so flooded with questions in our business it would be impossible to answer each one. Here's something novel for you, too.

A personal Thank you, from the desk of,
Darrel D. Kestner
Master Craftsman
Furniture Physicians Co.
Darrel Kestner Restorations

