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## Contemporary Collectors Pay Big Bucks for Wooden Ducks

Posted: *January 6, 2009*

The past century is often referred to by waterfowl hunters as America's Golden Age of Shotgunning. Although sky darkening clouds of ducks and geese indeed seemed limitless, hunters of yesteryear enjoyed little in the way of "store bought" equipment. Decoys, for example, were often hand carved from raw blocks of cedar, balsa, or cork. Most of these old time relics have been replaced by modern, lightweight plastic decoys. The relative handful of authentic old blocks that do remain are now highly prized by collectors. Once an old decoy is discovered, one of the greatest challenges lies in determining what the antique duck is really worth.

When it comes to identifying, appraising, or selling antique waterfowl decoys, Gary Guyette is the walking talking, real deal.

A resident of St. Michael, Md., Guyette has single handedly accounted for more than \$120 million in sales of collectable decoys during the past three decades. Along with partner Frank Schmidt, he currently manages Guyette & Schmidt Inc., the world's largest and most successful decoy auction house. When the world's most experienced collectors need council, Gary Guyette gets the call.



"Decoys are a fascinating subject and the number of people collecting old decoys continues to grow," says Guyette. "There are a lot of different reasons for buying a piece. Some people look at old working decoys as investments, while others purchase them strictly for their beauty. Some people purchase a particular decoy simply because it reminds them of a special hunt or a particular period in their childhood.

"It's really no surprise that interest in collecting decoys remains so high," says Guyette. "Each piece is literally a tangible example of classic American folk art.

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"Although most decoys will increase in value, not all collectors are investors," notes Guyette. "Many people collect decoys simply as sculptures [art] and also for their historical value."

From a purely financial perspective, however, most collectable decoys do tend to increase in value, says Guyette. Generally speaking, the more you pay for a piece the faster it tends to appreciate. For exceptionally rare or unique decoys, initial prices can be staggering and record sales continue to be shattered.

In 2003, for example, Guyette sold a single preening drake pintail decoy [carved by Cape Cod market gunner Elmer Crowell] for the incredible sum of \$801,000. In 2007, he sold a feeding plover decoy for \$830,000, and a single antique merganser for a wallet flattening \$856 thousand. Later in '07, the Crowell pintail traded hands again [this time privately] and made national headlines by fetching an astounding \$1.13 million - the highest sum ever paid for a single decoy.

"Each decoy is unique in its own right," says Guyette. "When it comes to price, nothing really surprises me anymore."

Although hundred thousand or million dollar decoy sales are purely restricted to the rich and famous, decoy collecting is by no means limited to the Millionaire's Club.

"You certainly don't have to be rich to collect worthwhile bird decoys," notes Guyette. "People can still find beautiful pieces for under two hundred dollars, and you can purchase some extremely nice decoys for under \$500. For example, we [Guyette & Schmidt Inc.] are currently listing a 1948, mint condition, factory made wooden Wildfowler mallard for \$350. That same decoy would have sold for \$200 just a short time ago."

Not all decoys are created equal. To find out what Grand Dad's old wooden mallard is really worth [or to view other historic pieces currently listed on the market] send a single, profile photo of your decoy to: [decoys@guyetteandschmidt.com](mailto:decoys@guyetteandschmidt.com).

