

# 'BUZZ' WORDS

## SHOPPING ON eBay

### David Zipkin 11/2001

More often than not, the dealers on eBay are not experts on cribbage boards or woodwork or scrimshaw or much of anything; they come across interesting things to sell, and like all merchants, they employ buzz words to attract buyers. And like all advertising, buzz words often catch the attention of the unwary buyer and trigger a sale. Here are a few terms that sellers frequently employ. There is very little consistency, either from one dealer to the next or from one item to the next by the same dealer.

#### **Vintage vs. Old**

**Vintage** refers to a collection of contemporary & similar things, a period of origin or manufacture. A **vintage** item is of **old**, recognized and enduring interest. Generally it refers to the best and most characteristic of the genre.

**Old** refers to something that dates from the past; it is thus a relative term - something cannot be old without the existence of more recent similar objects.

Dealers tend to overuse the term **vintage**, because it brings to mind the best, and therefore attracts buyers. But how can a home made board be "**vintage**"? It is by definition one-of-a-kind, and therefore cannot be **vintage** - it may or may not be **old**, but it is unique.

Which leads me to another term I see used all too frequently - "very unique". How can a unique, i.e., one-of-a-kind object be very one-of-a-kind?

Don't they mean 'very unusual'? And how can the same board appear again and again (like the post-WWII Hong Kong ivories with the dragons and flowers) be 'unique'? Often I see three or more listed at any given time, all labeled as unique. Don't they bother to see what the other dealers are doing?

#### **Rare vs. Scarce**

These terms seem interchangeable but are not.

**Rare** refers to an object that is marked by an unusual quality, merit or appeal; it refers to a distinctive or extreme object of its kind; it stands out from all the other similar objects. Here we encounter the concept of the classic: an item of the first rank, something of recognized value that serves as a standard of excellence, traditional and enduring

**Scarce** refers to something which is deficient in quantity compared with demand. It is not plentiful.

Beware of these terms - they are the most misused. For example, the wooden crib-derby board is almost always referred to as '**Rare**' or '**Scarce**' each and every time one comes up for sale. If they repeatedly surface they are not **scarce**, and they certainly aren't **rare** because they were machine made to specs and within any one run are identical. This generally results in an inflated final price the first time one appears. Other dealers, encouraged by the high sale price, and dreaming of wealth, then flood the market with others and the price plummets. Be aware of what you want and hold off bidding the first time you see something, especially with manufactured boards. Remember, these were mass produced and more will surface.

#### **Inlay vs. Veneer**

Frequently these two terms are used interchangeably, a serious mistake. Often they are confused and one must be wary, and study the photos carefully and ask the dealer questions so you don't spend your money in the expectation of gaining the one but ending up with the other.

**Inlay** is anything - wood, metal, nacre, ivory - that is set into a surface. It is adornment by insertion.

**Veneer** is a thin sheet or layer, often of superior quality, value or appearance to the base material, which is glued into place as an overlay.

Often boards are marketed as, for example, bird's eye maple, and the unwary expects a very expensive cut of wood only to discover that the maple is a **veneer** over pine or oak. Be on the lookout for frayed edges, a dead give-away for **veneer**. Many popular British boards are produced as a **veneer** to imitate the better quality of the inlaid versions. [Sorry I don't have a means of showing the two side by side, but I'm technologically deprived.]

#### Other Misleading Terms

Funny how all plastic boards are made of Bakelite, according to eBay dealers. Regardless of color, texture, presence of seams and a variety of other features that preclude them from being Bakelite (or even catalin), the dealers all proclaim that all plastic boards from the 1930's to the 1960's are made of Bakelite. By the time Bakelite & catalin had reached their peak of popularity in the 1930's, a myriad of other plastics had appeared on the market and were being used to make a wide variety of consumer products, including cribbage boards. Take this designation with a grain of salt. Some dealers, when questioned, angrily proclaim that they bought the "Bakelite test kit" from AL or Amazon and their plastic tested positive. Well these kits test for the presence of formaldehyde, a main ingredient of Bakelite. However, many other plastics use formaldehyde in their manufacture, so positive results can be misleading. Once again, "Bakelite" is a buzz word that unwary collectors jump at because of its high collectability. Be skeptical.

Another one that gets me is how **ALL** cribbage boards seem to be made out of Mahogany, Teak, Ebony or some other expensive and exotic wood. Most dealers have no expertise in identifying woods, and are merely using these as a come-on. Hasn't anyone ever heard of the practice of staining to spruce up a plain inexpensive wood? Not all dark wood is automatically Mahogany.

Another thing dealers use as a selling point is that an item came from an estate this conjures up visions of Mandalay or the Breakers and misleads the unwary into thinking that there must be something special about a board if someone with an **Estate** collected it. Usually these boards come from box lots found when an auction house is selling off items from a dead person's home that some relative contracted them to sell off. A box lot is just what the name implies; a box of miscellaneous items that dealers bid a token amount on in the hopes it contains something that they can sell.

There are other things that bother me (I'm getting cranky in my old age - I'm beginning to feel like Andy Rooney on '60 Minutes') but I'm starting to get heartburn from venting and must leave them for a later column.