



Under The Hammer

Swetha P Venkataramani uncovers what happens at Chennai's longest standing auction house—Murray and Co.

Have you ever wondered about the origins of the old, sheen-faded guitar your father used in college? Or the Chettinad-style swing in your verandah that reminds you of lazy summer holidays? In all probability, it's been bought by some ancestor at one of the countless auctions held by Murray and Co over the past eight decades. Today, auctioning in South India can only mean one thing—Murray's, as Murray & Co is popularly known. A name to reckon with right from the day it was established by Vedantam in 1927, the firm has prided itself in being a forerunner in auctioning.

THEN AND NOW

As you leave Thambu Chetty Street in the busy Parrys Corner area and enter the space that houses Murray's administrative office, you are suddenly transported to a different era. The stone-laid common yard is shared by a bunch of different companies, but the elegant brass signboard of Murray & Co is the one that stands out. Once inside, save for the sleek flat-screen computers, everything else belongs to an era bygone. Right from the worktables and chairs to the

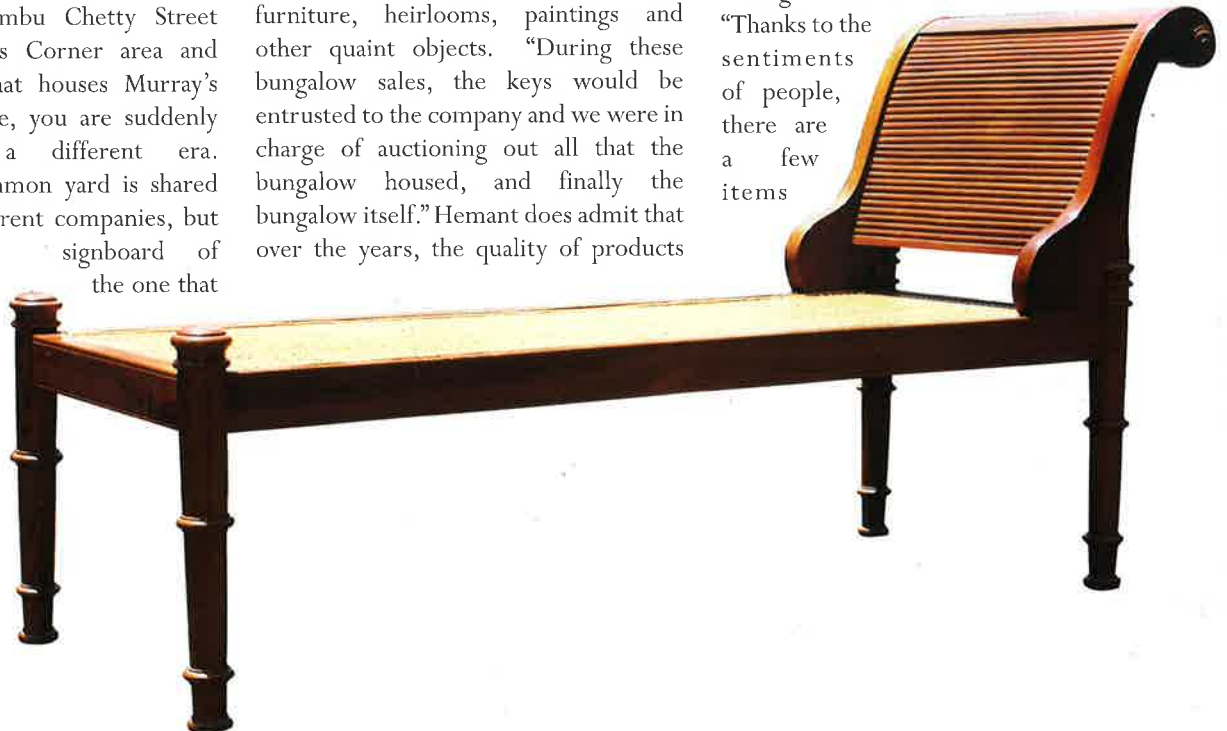
Madras terrace roof, wooden beamed ceilings, and old Madras maps, everything screams 'Madras' instead of Chennai! "An auction is basically another form of sale," explains Hemant Srivatsa, Partner, Murray & Co. To put it crisply, "It is an organised method for people to get a fair value for things that they no longer find a need for in their lives or home." "Though the company started off as property auctioneers, it soon branched into furniture, curios and industrial disposals too." Story has it that Sir Murray Coutts Trotter, former Chief Justice of the Madras High Court first came up with the idea of setting up this auction house during the last leg of the Raj. So with the English making their way back to Britain, many bungalows were left locked up, still housing the furniture, heirlooms, paintings and other quaint objects. "During these bungalow sales, the keys would be entrusted to the company and we were in charge of auctioning out all that the bungalow housed, and finally the bungalow itself." Hemant does admit that over the years, the quality of products

coming into the auction halls has been diminishing. "One doesn't find that kind of workmanship in the mass and machine-produced goods that we have these days. Most furniture claimed as antiques are nothing but mere replicas."

Today, one can find a whole range of products being auctioned at Murrays. Starting from white goods such as refrigerators, washing machines to musical instruments (dad's guitar!), furniture and real antiques, this might be the place where you would want to shop or sell to get your money's worth.

THE S WORD

The lyrics, "You will get a sentimental feeling when you hear," hold true during auctions. "Thanks to the sentiments of people, there are a few items



that just don't sell, at least not too easily," discloses Hemant. These 'sentimental' items are normally beds, cradles and regular puja items. Questions such as, "Did the couple selling the bed have a happy life?", "Was the cradle lucky enough?" or statements like "Hope the baby enjoyed good health while the cradle was used." often crop up!

But there are a few things worth being sentimental about. "If you own some thing which you know you'll never find

AUCTION SCHEDULE

The weekly auctions are held at 10:30am, every Saturday and Sunday. Quaint furniture and curios get special auctions, the dates of which will be announced through newspapers and the website - www.murrays-auctions.com

FYI

Antiques are items that need to be registered with the government. For any item to qualify as a genuine antique it needs to be at least a century old. While the term 'antiques' is widely misused, doing so is actually a punishable crime!

belongings here, then it has to be valued and hence should reach Murray's as the company is not into offsite valuation. Murray's helps by arranging the logistics if requested for. The best base value for the item is then determined by a team of experts. "We rely on our experience for valuing a product and of course the internet helps a bit too."

Murray and Co works toward getting its clients the best deals at auctions, so worry not, you are in safe hands! If you are on the



again in a store, you're probably better off holding on to it," advises Hemant Srivatsa. For instance, the grand old safe locker that has been in your home longer than you have? Definitely stick to it; apart from the value of age, Hemant believes every Indian home needs one. "Where does one keep the jewellery one brings from the bank for a wedding?" he says, substantiating his point.

The Chettinad jhulas, grandfather's study desk, the carved cradle lying in the

attic, crafted pens, old clocks and more impressive furniture of every type; these are a few things that one should probably take pride in. "When these kind of pieces do come into the auction house, we can only put a price on the tangible worth, but the intangible sentimental attachment makes these pieces invaluable."

VALUE PACKED

If you are planning to auction one of your

other side, bidding for something, make sure to read the guidelines available on the website beforehand. While Murray's gives the best and the most honest description of the item on auction, one universal rule still applies—Caveat Emptor or Buyer Beware! Just show up at the weekly or special auctions held at the auction hall in Anna Salai. You never know what treasures you will find in good old Chennai.

Murray and Co. is at 340 (Old # 164), Thambu Chetty Street, Chennai – 600001. Contact Number – 2534-1748, 2534-0612 or # 151 (Old # 101), Anna Salai, Chennai—600002. Contact Number: 28600880, 9790922437