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Buyer beware. I've seen worse. Like the Perry St. \$50 albino nut-toting squirrel, so horribly shriveled that he looked to be in a death struggle with his goiter. Or the badly damaged \$85 Atlantic Ave. raccoon who looked like he'd lost his butt in an explosion. Or the Mercer St. \$200 nicotine-stained, ratlike deer head.

Conversely, there are inexplicable deals. Like the \$200 Perry St. dolphin, the \$100 Sunrise Highway sleeping bobcat or the \$65 Bronxville gemsbok skulls.

To get your bearings in the used taxidermy market, deer heads are a good baseline. They're about the most common of mammalian mounts. If you shoot a live one and take it to a taxidermist, it will cost maybe \$500 to mount the head. But that's what you pay for the luxury of having preserved remains of the trophy *you personally bagged* staring at you, just the way it did before you plugged it. It is not the price for having *somebody else's* trophy. At genuine antique fairs, deer heads commonly start at \$25.

CONDITION

The mount has got to be healthy. Sure, sounds funny calling a dead animal healthy. But your hair isn't alive and they tell

us Pert makes *it* healthy, don't they?

Shedding, shrinkage, lip curl, bug shucks, tears, broken ears and cracked noses are all signs of a mount's worst enemy: dry heat. Depending on the animal in question, some if not all of these conditions can be alleviated. But once excessive drying begins, the "life span" of the dingus is drastically shortened. For example, once most real-skin fish mounts start to shrivel, there's no turning back. The cracks in their skin aren't hidden by fur. You'd do just as well to have them redone in fiberglass.

Birds, on the other hand, often conceal cracks and dents under their plumage, though bug infestation and beak-peeling can be tough to beat. Wild pigs are sturdy stuff. I have one that's dried rock-hard, but the hide won't buckle. Lip curl and cracks in the nose have been trimmed, puttied, sanded and painted.

Bugs on many mounts (usually tineid moths) can be eliminated with a flea collar or cedar oil. I recommend quarantining the mount as soon as you detect the tiny brown shucks in the fur.

Old doesn't necessarily mean bad. Skull mounting, in which the animal's actual skull is used as the mounting form, is an old technique. This has the added attraction of using the animal's real teeth. And while some of the chemicals used by the old-timers were a bit on the toxic side, they have the advantage of being very bug repellent, but not smelly. Pets ignore them completely. If an old mount has been kept away from heat, sunlight and children, it could be in excellent condition.

If you have an idea of the environment from which the mount came, you'll be ahead of the game. Tip: never buy a mount that's resided in a barroom; it will forever smell strongly of



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cigarettes, if not beer. Tip: be very leery about buying a mount that's been over a fireplace (talk about dry.) Tip: basements are often damp and musty; attics are ungodly hot.

The best place a mount can come from is a museum, where presumably it's been behind glass, protected from dust, excessive temperature and sunlight. "Museum quality" pieces also tend to be done with more care and detail.

SPECIES VS. PRICE

Common critters are less expensive than rare, exotic or imported animals. The following is a rough price guide.

\$25-\$150: Deer, unless they have atypical (haywire) antlers, are two for a quarter to those who know. So are pheasants, rabbits, turkeys, raccoons, squirrels, woodchucks, possums and quail. Domestic fresh-water fish like bass, trout and pike should be in this range.

\$100-\$300: Head mounts of the plentiful black bear are the next step up and can be had at real bargain prices if you shop around. Armadillos are plentiful too, not just around New York, which affects prices. Bobcat, lynx, beaver, wild pig, crows, coyote, fox, weasel, mink, bat and skunk would be in this price range, and I'll include porcupine because even though they are plentiful, most taxidermists don't want to tangle with the quills.

Among fishes, you'll find bigger fresh-water species like salmon, steelhead and muskellunge; smaller salt-water species like runty dolphin, grouper, barracuda and pocket-sized sailfish.

\$200-\$500: Wolverine, flying squirrel, badger, otter and marten—what I'd consider exotic domestics. Salt-water fish such as sailfish, small shark and tarpon.

\$300-\$1000: Domestic big game like moose, mountain sheep, pronghorn, elk, cari-

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