



highest quality. That is no small achievement in these pinch-penny days. Long lost is the fine art of hand-binding books in leather and half-leather, but this book comes as close to the sensual delights of a handmade book of the 18th century as any I have ever seen. Some of this praise must, of course, be reserved for the author. Some of the sensual delights of this book arise from the integration of black and white advertisements from historical sources, color pictures of painted furniture, close-up images of painted surfaces and ancillary images such as pictures of mocha ware, doll houses, quilts and folk portraits. The conscious effort to vary our range of focus adds a whole new dimension to the experience of reading the book. I think that Priddy has an esoteric argument to make in his text, and I'm not sure he entirely makes his case. Sometimes, the words fight against the images, but the book is so beguilingly beautiful that the reader is ultimately won over by the sheer fancy imbedded in the effort. Most of the time, we buy a book for its subject matter and treatment. Here there we have an additional reason. *American Fancy* is simply one of the finest books made in modern times. It is pure a delight.

Between 1790 and 1840, millions of middle-class Americans throughout the nation encountered "Fancy": they rode in a Fancy sleigh, dressed up in Fancy clothes, blew their noses in Fancy handkerchiefs, bought goods at Fancy shops, ate at Fancy tables on Fancy dishes, and slept under Fancy coverlets. Not just fancy but Fancy: an early nineteenth-century cultural phenomenon born out of new and enlightened ways of seeing, understanding, and responding to the surrounding world. Fancy expressed itself in just about everything that pleased the senses; generally colorful and boldly patterned, it elicited delight, awe, surprise, whim, and caprice. Whether experienced in the form of painted surfaces, kaleidoscopic quilts, or imaginary landscapes, Fancy engaged the emotions and expanded the imagination, expressing the core of human fancy. *American Fancy* offers an appropriately fantastic experience of this uniquely American sensibility. Author Sumpter Priddy has assembled and produced an original oeuvre in the field of decorative arts, going beyond the traditional modes of furniture analysis, which concentrate on style, history, and construction, to consider the perceptual and emotional responses through which the original users and viewers would have interacted with these material things. To this end he employs the interpretive methods used in the fields of literature, fine arts, philosophy and even psychology. Rich, fully illustrated, wondrously researched, and bound in a cover that imitates a typical Fancy pattern, *American Fancy* does its marvelous subject true.