

# TOOWOOMBA



Detail double bow front with mother-of-pearl medallion



Double bow front with mother-of-pearl medallion



Double bow front currently under restoration for a client



## The elegance and style of the bow front

On average we spend more than one third of our lives sleeping. Beds have inspired furniture designers across centuries to produce a functional yet appealing piece of bedroom furniture. Whilst timber has certainly been a favourite to many and still remains so, with the many textures and its ease for carving.

Brass and iron beds have stood the test of time well. In the 1900s the bed designers entered a new design phase, moving away from the simple and/or intricate iron styles towards the more elegant and elaborate porcelain, glass mirrors and mother of pearl. Bed styles were varied and each bed was unique with its own personality, the simple, the elegant, the ornate, the very brassy, the cute, the patriotic and our personal favourite—the bow fronts.

Bow front, serpentine or wedding bed

Designed and marketed, through mail order catalogues towards the top end of the market, it was a total contrast to many household items being offered to buyers. The harsh economic climate of the 1920s was out of the reach of many families struggling with surviving the post-war depression years. The end result today is that this particular style is not readily found, especially in its low four poster style.

The *single bow front* so named for the single bow which scooped outwards from the bed, was made in both single and double beds. Generally adorned with three or five porcelains which were hand painted, usually in floral designs with a ribbon or bluebird, which were particularly done for the bed design only.

The *double bow front* was the top of the range and was adorned with either six or

seven porcelains, and some rare cases rather than having a simple back it too was designed to compliment the bow end with matching porcelains, taking the total of porcelains on the bed to ten and we have even seen one with 14. Perhaps with or without a matching porcelain medallion, some instead may have featured an etched mirror centre. Whatever the style or adornments, there is no denying that they attract attention in any bedroom they feature in.

There are also some variations where the end simply bowed upwards and can be in simple or elaborate styles; however they have not secured the distinctive name of bow front. In fact timber dressing tables, wardrobes and duchesses were made to compliment this impressive bed style featuring their own bow front, thus creating an entire bedroom of bow front furniture.

Queen size was uncommon (but was specially ordered) almost unheard of in normal family homes and it is only in the very recent years has become the more common bed size in our homes today. Bow front styles can be successfully restored and extended to queen size, and still maintain their original appearance without the unsightly gaps of some extension attempts. The bed artisan of the time knew their trade and their product well, and after we have studied many books, catalogues featuring designs, large six inch gaps in the beds are noticeably lacking. When restoring or extending any brass beds, using this information as a guideline, we are able to offer our clients the space of the queen size bed, with the character and design of the original bed design maintained.

Testers were still very much part of the bed, if not a necessity for the harsh Australian environment, as some of our more not-so-cute Australian animal kingdom members aim in life was to make our nights sleep as uncomfortable as possible. The creation of the aptly named mosquito net was a feature in many family homes, until the wide introduction of fly screens from approximately 1960s onwards on windows and doors.

Yet, low four poster beds did exist, though not in great numbers or in styles, including the single and double bow fronts, demand for this style today is constant, as their size is more suitable for the height and width of our modern bedrooms. Some found today are not original low four posters, but have been cut or sawn down in their lives to suit the new houses and roof heights that were being built.

Today, timeless treasures and reminders of our historic past are all around us, seen either in fashion trends or furniture styles. The purest form of honouring that work is continued by the trend of reproductions. However, nothing compares to the pleasure of feeling and owning the originals.

We truly enjoy our historical caretaker role of maintaining, restoring and educating our clients on brass and iron beds. Whilst loving the challenge of restoring mother-of-pearl, it falls a close second in styles behind the elegance and style of the bow front ■

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Above right: Queen extension with mother-of-pearl and nickel plated

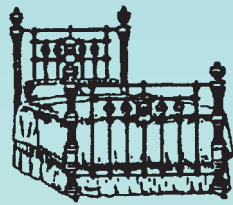


Right: Queen size low four poster double bow front with star mirror

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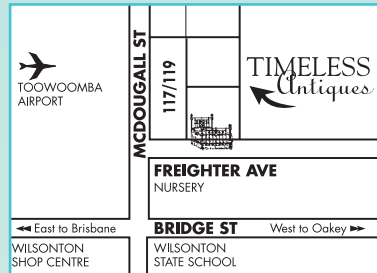
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