Protecting a Lifetime of Memories and Treasures

Most of us know how much our home is worth. Somewhere between the tax assessment and market value on a real estate app lies the real number. But that's the structure. Do you know how much your home's contents are worth?

Your furnishings, collectibles, personal belongings, jewelry, and other possessions are more than sentimental items. They add value to your net worth. Over time, that value can grow significantly. I often ask clients if they have items of value in their homes and they usually begin by saying there's nothing significant. Many, however, will later realize that their mother's ring, the clock handed down from grandparents, or other items collected over their life have more value than they thought.

Beyond net worth, it's important to understand what you have in your home should disaster strike. News stories are multiplying about floods, fires, and other extreme weather events. In the event your home and its contents are damaged or destroyed, knowing what you have of value in the home may help settle claims faster. Only 47% of Americans have a home inventory, despite the fact that more than 3 million Americans were displaced by natural disasters in 2023, the most recent data available.[1,2]

It's great to have insurance against damage and loss, but if you can't show proof of your possessions, it may result in a protracted settlement process with your insurance company. And some items may have significant enough value that they warrant being insured beyond standard home coverage.

Here are some tips for recording the value of your possessions.

Tip #1— Photograph or Videotape Your Possessions

A visual record of your possessions is the best proof of ownership. The added value of videoing your home contents is you can go through all your rooms and storage spaces and speak while you are taping to describe each item (e.g., This is a my great grandmother's clock from 1880, that she gave to my mother when she died.) Recording the provenance of the item if it's known helps to establish its value.

Tip #2—Document the Value of Your Items

Scan or video receipts of high value items in your home. Indicate the make and model where appropriate. If you have artwork or antiques, an appraisal is important to record the value. You'll pay an antiques appraiser for their knowledge, but it's well worth it should something get damaged.

Tip #3—Secure Your Inventory

An inventory doesn't help much if you keep it in the house and your home burns to the ground. If your video is digital (highly recommended), consider storing the file in a "cloud" account, rather than on your computer. Some people still maintain safety deposit boxes, which are another good choice. If you work with a financial advisor, they will also often keep a record of assets of value for you.

Tip #4—Keep Your Inventory Updated

Failure to regularly update your inventory may mean leaving off expensive new purchases. In addition, values for antiques and collectibles change over time – sometimes for the better, sometimes not. High value items should be reassessed every 15-20 years.

Tip $5 – Start with a checklist

Ask your insurance agent if they have an inventory checklist, which may help you remember to include items that you might otherwise overlook.

1. III.org, February 10, 2026
2. Census.gov, 2026