

# When is a Brander Back not a Brander Back?

The Brander chair is a well-recognised Scottish form but has many similarities to what others call Country Sheraton — square back with a number of narrow splats. Antique dealers appear now to be using the Brander terminology rather loosely to describe significantly different designs of chair — ones I would have called Country Sheraton. I note silver hot water jugs are now invariably advertised as ‘claret jugs’ even though they have insulated handles and were clearly designed to hold hot liquids. So in this commercial age the desire to sell is altering terminology — but it probably always did. (Page cutters became known as page turners when books’ pages were cut during manufacture and dealers wanted to go on selling the items.) While this ‘rebranding’ is understandable, it introduces at the least a lack of precision and at worst confusion. By comparing a chair described as Country Sheraton and one described as a Brander Back I will try to highlight the differences between these two specific chairs and suggest how those wishing to add distinction



*above* The Country Sheraton chair on the left and the taller, more elegant Brander Back on the right.  
*Photo Jeremy Rycroft*

*right* Back view of the Brander Back showing chamfering on the stiles and rails, and moulding on the rear edge of the seat. *Photo Jeremy Rycroft*







Side view of the Country Sheraton showing the slighter and more angled curve of the rear stiles. *Photo Jeremy Rycroft*



Side view of the Brander Back showing the elegant continuous curve of the back stiles. *Photo Jeremy Rycroft*

to their terminology might use the two terms discretely. I have not quoted precise measurements because there will be variations between examples and I can't know if the measurements of these particular chairs are typical of the type, whereas I am confident, stylistically, that they are representative. The right hand chair I accept as a Brander Back for this comparison:

- \* The chair back is slightly taller and the splats are triple-reeded on the front and more closely but not evenly spaced; the back's bottom rail is higher above the seat and the stiles are thinner; looking at the back reveals very deep stiles and a top rail with rounded rear corners.
- \* The flat one-piece seat has a rounded top edge on all sides and the seat rails are less deep.
- \* The legs taper more strongly and are tapered on two internal faces. The stretchers are thinner and the back stiles form a smooth continuous curve from the ground up.

This provides the chair with a lighter more elegant look primarily from the front — extra strength being provided by the depth of various elements. But I think the key point is that the back is FLAT — as a brander -

or grill — should be. (Note a grill is made of parallel metal bars; a griddle is a solid plate; and a gridiron has two sets of bars at right angles.)

The left hand chair which I accept as a Country Sheraton varies from what is described above in every major respect listed above.

- \* In addition to a wider lower back with wider and less deep components, the components are generally of a square not a deep, double chamfered, cross-section.
- \* The front moulding on the wider splats is slightly more complex with a central cavetto and the top rail joint is pegged.
- \* The top has a rudimentary yoke.
- \* The back stiles of the seat are gently rounded at their rear.
- \* Most importantly, the top and bottom back rails are CURVED.
- \* The two-piece seat is only rounded on three sides.
- \* The front legs are only tapered on the internal surface visible from the front.
- \* The rear legs descend almost vertically to the ground with a tapering of the front face, and they rise to form the stiles of the seat back by turning through an angle

— they certainly do not form an elegant continuous curve.

So what are the key differences?

One stands out — the straight or curved back which should be a sound criterion for making the distinction between Brander Back and Country Sheraton.

The higher back and extra thinner splats appear to be a useful distinguisher of the Brander too — more grill-like.

Subjectively the Brander looks lighter and a little more elegant, although strongly made. This one has clearly been made by a good craftsman, and is well finished so the elegance might be specific to this chair. But this one is certainly a chair to put on show.

Subjectively the Country Sheraton looks a bit less attractive, a bit clumsier and heavier although with slightly fancier moulding. With its rounded back it will be more comfortable to sit in! It is slightly easier to pick up and move. It is perhaps more a chair for regular use.

However, you can't help but see it as 'Sheraton minus' because of simplified elements like the rudimentary yoke, and half-hearted leg chamfers. Some Country Sheratons have an open diamond in the central splat, others have incurved top corners, so our example is clearly at the bottom of the range.

It would be interesting to hear how other readers see the Country Sheraton - Brander Back divide?

*Jeremy Rycroft*