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OLD SCHOOL

TURN TO VINTAGE AND ANTIQUE STORES TO FURNISH YOUR NEW PAD

BY GENEVIEVE RAJEWSKI

NOT LONG AFTER you finish unpacking your boxes and milk crates, they're sure to find you. Catalogues from the likes of Pottery Barn, Crate & Barrel, and Williams-Sonoma piled up in your mailbox — addressed to your mysterious predecessor "or current resident."

But there's no need to pine after pricey tables, dressers, lighting, and other furnishings "inspired" by vintage or antique pieces, when you can opt for the real deal. Antique and vintage pieces have considerable advantages over copycats — not the least of which is that they are often less expensive.

"It all comes down to the craftsmanship, really," says Mara Loeber, owner of Absolutely Fabulous. "Antique furniture has better wood and hardware. You'll find dovetailing, whereas most newer pieces are simply hammered — not perfectly fit — together. And more work, such as intricate carvings, has also been put into a lot of older pieces. Even with old '50s kitchen tables, you'll find that the Formica top and bolts are much thicker than those found on reproductions."

Colin Nealon, owner of Consignment Galleries, agrees. "The furniture up through the 1940s was usually solid wood. If it had a veneer, the veneer was over solid wood. Newer furniture may look good, but often a piece labeled as 'cherry' is actually cherry-stained particle board."

Better quality is also seen in vintage housewares, says Nealon. "You often don't realize this unless you compare the old versus the new. But take, for example, old sterling-silver



BRICK AND CLICK: Boomerings offers traditional secondhand stores, along with an online auction of donated furniture and housewares.

flatware, which is far more substantial than what is currently produced."

Brooks Morris, owner of Buckaroo's Mercantile, notes that, quality and cost aside, the uniqueness of vintage pieces helps individualize décor. "Smaller, collectible pieces are an inexpensive way for people to mirror their personality in an apartment," Morris says. "After all, many people only live in a place for a year or so. They either don't want to or aren't allowed to spend time and money painting their apartment. However, some interesting antique glass-

ware can do double duty as a decoration for the shelves in their kitchen."

When it comes to what type of vintage furnishings to buy, the experts agree that quality and individual taste are more important than time period. Similarly, saving money has less to do with a piece's era than its quality.

"The better the quality, the more expensive a piece is," says Loeber. "However, you can find good antiques from any period — many of which can be cleaned up. You'd be really surprised at what you can do with polish. You can save pieces without having to re-stain. Rockler Woodworking, in Cambridge, carries Italian Craftsman polish, a really professional polish that will take a beat-up piece and really mask any nicks and scratches."

Likewise, Loeber notes that missing hardware shouldn't deter you from buying a piece you love. "You can find really wonderful vintage hardware at flea markets and junkyards. The important thing is to stay to good woods."

Of course, once you're ready to scout for vintage furnishings, it can be difficult to know where to look. The following offers a road map to some of the more interesting places around town.

CAMBRIDGE

For starters, head to Inman Square, where you'll find two shops with a revolving selection of vintage wares. **Absolutely Fabulous** sells an eclectic mix of antique furniture in addition to vintage clothes and new "boutique-y" housewares. A 1950s-era red-topped Formica diner table (\$200) surrounded by a set of four orange diner chairs from the same period (\$125), would nicely fill out a kitchen nook. If you have room only for an island, you could opt for a set of four red-vinyl-and-chrome bar stools (\$225) instead.

Some may swoon over **Absolutely Fabulous's** Art Deco walnut vanity with three-panel mirror (\$475), which could make even bed head look like it belongs on the silver screen. However, the store also sells a less costly and perhaps more practical Art Deco dresser (\$115) that could infuse a bedroom with some of the same glamour. Other standout dressers include a 1920s mahogany dresser (\$165) with subtle detail, and a more rustic, pink-painted bureau (\$115). If the smoking ban has cost your favorite local lounge some of its allure, swank things up at home with a retro black-and-chrome standing ashtray (\$45).

Neighboring **Buckaroo's Mercantile** carries a kitschy alternative — a 1950s standing black ashtray with a pink-squiggle design (\$45). Buckaroo's also carries a number of vintage home goods perfect for lending a bachelor pad

personality. Colorful CB jargon glasses (\$6) feature trucker slang (such as "brush your teeth" and "pregnant roller skate") and their meanings ("radar ahead" and "Volkswagen"). Fans of the increasingly popular lawnmower beers might appreciate finds such as a vintage Schlitz stein (\$20) and a rotating Schaeffer clock and lamp (\$80). Those still stuck in a dorm can upgrade with a sparkly red chest/bench from the 1950s (\$28).

For the ultimate in treasure hunting, head to **Antiques on Cambridge**, which offers 12,000 square feet of antiques and collectibles from more than 100 dealers. Whatever your style — colonial, Victorian, mid century — you'll find bookcases, bureaus, servers, and tables to match, as well as the appropriate lighting, glassware, pottery, clocks, and more. While all that is well and good, it would be easier to distinguish yourself with some of the shop's more random items. In one room, a mechanical seal from a 1940s store display (\$300) twirls a ball on his nose. In another, a framed print (\$50) features a stately Spanish Riding School performer on a rearing stallion.

BOSTON

When it comes to Boston's North End, "old school" usually evokes images of spaghetti and red sauce, not campy furnishings. However, all that has changed thanks to **Cadia Vintage**. In the cozy shop, you'll find a 1950s TV lamp shaped like a pagoda (\$40), a ceramic panther lamp (\$20), deer-hoof coat hooks (\$40), and a combination lamp/smoking stand/magazine rack (\$65). You can also find an assortment of less outrageous but equally unique wares, including a 1950s chrome-plated cocktail shaker with martini glasses (\$25), assorted antique suitcases and hat boxes, tea sets, salt and pepper shakers, flower vases, and school clocks.

In Boston's South End, locals turn to **Rewind** for both its extensive selection of well-priced vintage clothing and its DJ booth, where you can listen to records before you buy them. However, the store's owners also go out several times a week to find interesting vintage furniture. For example, **Rewind** recently carried a leather-topped coffee table (\$60) that would up the sophistication level of most living rooms. It also offered a curvy beige-fabric sofa (\$400) that comes in two pieces — making it easy to move up narrow staircases. Meanwhile, a 1930s kitchen set (\$485) featured wide-backed green and yellow chairs and an enamel-topped table with a wooden silverware drawer.

SOMERVILLE

Outside Davis Square in Somerville, **Consignment Galleries** could easily serve as a one-stop resource for vintage furnishings. The store's selection of lighting is especially fine and reasonably priced, with recent finds including a chevron leaded-glass trophy lamp (\$95) and an Atomic Era-looking chrome-and-glass chandelier (\$75). A green-vinyl telephone table (\$50) would work well in the hallway of almost any triple-decker unit, and the mahogany end tables (\$30) are simply a steal. Art Deco storage pieces include a compactum (\$395) — or large cabinet — and a five-drawer walnut chest (\$385).

ONLINE

Finally, if you feel antique shopping is boring without the competitiveness of eBay, there's an easy way to get a rush while enjoying a clean conscience. **Boomerangs** holds online auctions of furniture and housewares donated by individuals and businesses to help support the HIV/AIDS community. Items recently up for auction included a delphinium-blue Hall teapot, a silver-plated Champagne bucket, and a pink-speckled lamp with a telephone base featuring a working clock in place of the rotary dial and a working lighter in place of the handset. New furniture — donated by major furniture retailers — is also auctioned online. Recent pieces included a contemporary mahogany sofa with brushed-cotton pillows, and an armchair with detailed carving. Best of all, you can preview all auction items at the company's Brighton store. ■

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WHERE TO FIND IT

- ▶ **Absolutely Fabulous**, 1309 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, (617) 864-0656.
- ▶ **Antiques on Cambridge**, 1076 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, (617) 234-0001; www.antiques-on-cambridge.com.
- ▶ **Boomerangs**, 716 Centre Street, Jamaica Plain, (617) 524-5120; 298 Washington Street, Brighton; www.aac.org.
- ▶ **Buckaroo's Mercantile**, 1297 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, (617) 492-4792; www.buckmerc.com.
- ▶ **Cadia Vintage**, 148 Salem Street, Boston, (617) 742-1203.
- ▶ **Consignment Galleries**, 363 Highland Avenue, Somerville, (617) 629-4900.
- ▶ **Rewind**, 1736 Washington Street, Boston, (617) 424-7677; www.rewindinboston.com.

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GRANDMA'S ATTIC: **Absolutely Fabulous**, in Cambridge, sells an eclectic mix of antique furniture, vintage clothes, and boutique-y housewares.