

# Re

RESCUE,  
REWORK,  
REUSE,  
REIMAGINE

The art of finding  
and buying vintage  
furniture

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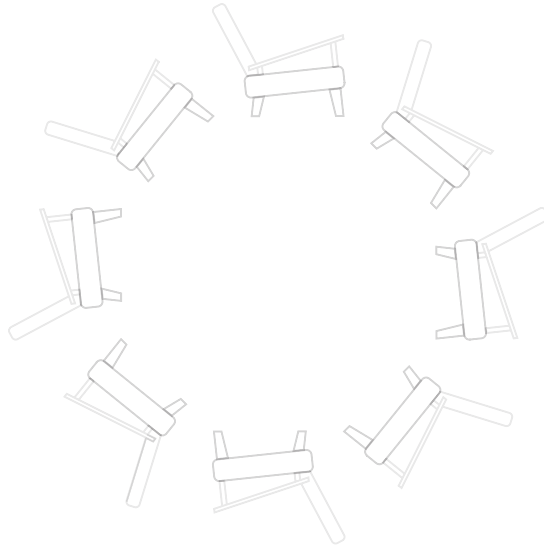






Home is where we are surrounded by the people and things we love. It's where we share a small part of ourselves with our family and friends. It can be a part of that very personal expression of who we are because it's where our souls live. Our homes' interiors reflect our style, our histories, our lives, our goals, and our connection to the world. The places we live must make us happy, inspired, and joyful, with the personal and intimate pleasure we feel in a space that is undeniably our own.

Vintage furniture can provide the opportunity to articulate personal style and create a space that is unique to you while spending a bit less money. It's also a way to participate in and contribute to a more ecologically responsible world. Many great vintage pieces have ended up lost or destroyed, the victims of under-appreciation and changing taste, sent to the local landfill to make space in the attic or the garage.



Typically, home furnishings fall out of fashion after 10 years or so and begin to look either tired or dated. Many are discarded, sold, or given away. Interestingly, after 30 or 40 years, we begin to again appreciate these same “tired” pieces. When distinguishing between “antique,” “vintage,” and “used,” a good rule of thumb is to consider the piece's age. Generally, used furniture is 30 years old or younger. Vintage is 30 to 100 years old. Antiques are more than 100 years old. However, there's more to vintage than just age. Vintage furniture should be representative of the style that was popular during a particular era or time period.

Mid-Century Modern, a widely recognized and significant design movement, is one of my favorite design periods. It describes the design style that took place between 1933 and 1965. George Nakashima's work provides an excellent example of wonderful vintage Mid-Century Modern. His work is highly sought after and very collectible (code for expensive) and is a definitive example of what was popular during that period. In fact, some Mid-Century furniture such as the iconic Eames lounge chair have never gone out of production. While there are certainly very expensive vintage options, there are more affordable options if you have a bit of patience and can spend a bit of time scouting.





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Interior decorator Dorothy Draper embodies the glamour and glitz of the 1930s, known now as Hollywood Regency. The hallmarks of Hollywood Regency — large prints; black-and-white tiles; bright colors; elegant lines; and lacquered, glossy finishes were popular among movie stars and was appreciated by Nancy Reagan, former First Lady. A more modern version of this exaggerated style is making a comeback today in the details of design: decorative, intricate lampshades with hem fringe; brightly colored fabrics; damask cotton slipcovers; and Chinese hardware. The clean minimalist lines of Mid-Century Modern and the over-the-top glamour of Hollywood Regency are at opposite ends of the design spectrum — the former an example of less is more; the latter an example of more is better. The timelessness of these two fashion eras underscores their importance and should encourage us to use them, or other vintage styles, in our homes.

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When shopping for vintage furniture, don't get hung up on provenance or recognizable name brands. So long as a piece of furniture is representative of an era that you love and suits your personal design style, it should be considered. Here are some key shopping tips when looking for vintage pieces:

- Quality and condition are important. Find things that are gently loved but aren't beaten up, and have solid frames.
- Upholstery can be replaced relatively inexpensively. Reupholstering a piece can freshen and update it while also maintaining its vintage integrity.
- Old English Scratch Cover Furniture Polish (widely available at grocery and big-box stores) nicely touches up lightly scratched or scarred exposed wood and legs.
- Spray paint can help a cool vintage piece emerge from its previously discarded life, and only requires a little imagination and individual taste.
- Before shopping, identify how you want a room to function, establish your priorities, and set a realistic and manageable budget.
- Look for things you like and then build around them. You will love and appreciate a piece of furniture longer if you buy what fits your personality and individual style.



- Don't look for things that match. Buying vintage allows you the freedom to create your own style. An Asian garden seat, a small bench, or a large stool can easily be repurposed as interesting and pleasing end tables. A turn-of-the-century Turkish trunk can become your coffee table. Install an Art Nouveau mirror over a powder-room vanity for an interesting twist.
- Measure, measure, and measure again! I have unfortunately "enjoyed" the awkward experience of finding an ideal, flawless treasure, the justly earned spoils of an extensive search, only to get home and discover that it doesn't fit anywhere. Thankfully, this happens rarely. But when it does, there's some "freaking out" that occurs. I often use painter's tape to outline something I am considering on the floor to give a better visual understanding of its size and shape, and I keep notes of measurements of wall lengths and ceiling heights.

Vintage furniture can also present you with opportunities to expand your artistic instincts. You can reimagine something you buy without too much financial risk. For example, I found a solid, traditional sofa; cut the arms off of it; put an edgy, up-to-date fabric on it; and transformed it to suit a modern space. You can express yourself and create something people will love. Imagine how to transform something you find, creating a work of art that is both within your budget and unique to itself.

There are a number of interesting local sources for vintage furniture and other such things. Auctions, estate sales, flea markets, and yard sales are among the most common. My favorite sources, though, are vintage stores where the owners almost always have a unique, and very individual, curating rhythm. I recently discovered and purchased a rockin' Art Deco mirror at Junkprince. Rickey and Denise Robson have owned and operated this store on South Florida Avenue for the past three years and have an eclectic, constantly evolving, blend of furniture and other curiosities. Rickey's father was in the furniture business, and as a child Rickey would comb his neighborhood for discarded furniture that could be reworked or reused. This has led to a lifelong love for all things vintage and a passion that is both wide and deep. You never know what you might run across in Junkprince!





Dixieland Relics, another local treasure, is located in a former Dixieland-area service station and is owned and operated by native Lakelanders Karen Dasher and Luke Dickerson. Over breakfast at Reececliff two years ago, Dasher and Dickerson decided to open Dixieland Relics on South Florida Avenue. They love the vibe they have established and maintained by owning a place to display and sell their vintage, salvage, and industrial furniture.

Amy Howard's one-step chalk paint can transform a piece of furniture to give it a new, sensational life of its own. Simple Vintage with Scout & Tag on North Kentucky Avenue carry this miraculous paint along with an array of hand-painted home-decor items, vintage furniture, antiques, and industrial design pieces. Owners Kim Hancock and Nikki Hunt specialize in resourcing and restoring furniture, and even offer instructional painting workshops.

Visit the vintage stores that you love regularly. Inventory changes, and the great things often don't stick around for long. Ask questions and discuss your taste and preferences with the owner or salesperson so they get to know you and your style. They will likely be happy to give you a call if something they think you will like comes in. Check fit as well as finish. Structural integrity counts. Open and close drawers and doors. Look for splits and breaks. Check the hinges, hardware, tracks, and rails for alignment and operational efficiency. You probably don't want to buy something that isn't suitable for your purposes or that needs to be rebuilt.



Vintage stores, and the simple but always sublime treasures they contain, are a natural gravitational force, drawing me to them with an energy of their own. I can't resist them. They somehow distill everything I love about style and design, and then combine this primal brew with the excitement and energy of the hunt. Splendid vintage furniture can cunningly cause either great pleasure or sudden suffering (see "freaking out" as mentioned previously).

But vintage stores seldom betray my need for their heavenly soothing of my design instincts. They are simultaneously spiritual and temporal for the true design addict. Shopping for vintage furniture, whether in stores, estate sales, auctions, flea markets, or yard sales, is a great way to bond and share moments with a spouse, sibling, parent, friend, or even your kids. Everything you find has an experience and story with it; discovering these stories can create lasting memories. A great vintage find can become part of your personal, unique story; your family history; and will help make your home a reflection of you. 🐼

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