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Interior Designers Share Their Best Tips For Buying Antiques And Vintage Furniture

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Top designers share tips on picking the best antiques for any room.

If you're looking to furnish your home in the most unique way possible, you can't go wrong with antique or vintage pieces. However, unlike buying new things, these types of purchases aren't generally straightforward. Whether you're buying a chair, a sofa, or even a set of fine China, things can be costly, in need of refurbishment, and challenging to find. So, how do you find the right pieces for your space, make sure you've purchased something authentic, and style it in the best way possible? It's easier than you think. I recently spoke with several furniture experts and interior designers to learn their best tips for acquiring vintage and antique furniture.

Bring a Measuring Tape

[Reyne Hirsch](#), gallery owner and 13-year veteran of *Antiques Roadshow* highly recommends that no matter what you're buying or where you're buying it, bringing a measuring tape is one of the smartest moves you can make. "Often people buy large, impressive pieces only to find they can't get through the front door or are too massive for a space. Before you leave home, measure the space you have for the furniture you wish to acquire, then measure the piece you find to make sure it will fit the space and the doorway to your home."

Learn Before You Shop

Understanding the styles of a particular era can help you identify when something was made. Alex Epstein, lead interior designer at [Purple Cherry Architects](#) explains, "Anything turn of the century will rarely have nails and when they do — they have a square head. Case goods, anything made in the '40s-'80s will have the original manufacturer's a stamp or nameplate on the bottom (consoles) or in a drawer (chest or nightstand)."



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Check For A Maker's Stamp Or Tag

Are you considering making a purchase, but sure if it's a good piece, a reproduction, or worth the price? Hirsch tells me to look at the underside of the item to see if there is a maker's mark. "This can tell you a lot about your new find. Should you find a tag or mark, you can quickly find out more information by doing a Google search, or eBay search of the brand name and style of furniture to learn more about the piece, its current value and if there are any reproductions you should be aware of."

Always Have Your Finds Authenticated

Getting your antiques authenticated is easier than you think, "If you're lucky and it's rare, the piece will come with documentation authenticating its provenance, condition, and price," says Annette English of [Annette English + Associates](#). "If this is a piece you'd like to purchase or have already purchased needs its history certified there are many professional appraisers in the industry."

Beware Of Reproductions

The old adage is right: when something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. "If you think you just found a \$50 Eames chair at your local thrift shop, read online first to learn whether the one you found is an original or a newer reproduction," says Hirsch. "By doing a quick Google search you can find the correct markings and sizes for popular vintage furniture pieces. Knowledge is king."

Don't Be Afraid To Negotiate

Who doesn't like getting a deal? "One of the best perks of buying vintage furniture is that the price isn't set in stone as it would be from a big box retailer," says Audrey Scheck, Founder of [Audrey Scheck Design](#). "Examine the piece for damage before purchasing and use any defects to your advantage. If you'll have to invest in the piece to repair it, getting a cost break on the initial purchase will help offset that investment."



Vintage items can be used to create personality and character in a space.

Look At The Big Picture First

See something you like but it's damaged? Don't fret. Scheck tells me there is probably a way to work with it. "If you love the shape and the size is right, you can work with it. It's okay if you need to make a minor repair or reupholster something to freshen it up. The character that vintage pieces bring into your space is worth the time you'll invest in any necessary repairs or modifications."

Think Small

English tells me there are many ways we can use antiques, including breaking down the various components of something larger. "Think

decorative hardware to go on cabinetry and shelving, vintage tiles to use for fireplace surrounds, stair risers, vintage lighting to use in every room of the house. Not only do these items bring their own personality and character to a room, but they also have rich patinas, the craftsmanship that is harder to find these days, history, and stories and make for wonderful storytelling when you give an antique a new home," she says.

Get Out Of The House

While you can source vintage pieces and antiques on websites like [1stDibs](#) and [Chairish](#), brick-and-mortar store owners such as [Dennis Brackeen](#), who owns Moxie in Houston, says it's best to make a trip to your favorite store or dealer. "When shopping for antiques, for Moxie or a project, I like to examine items in person so I can touch and feel them. I purchase some pieces online for projects, but I will often travel to see them in person before finalizing the purchase, especially on high-ticket items," he explains. "If you must purchase from an online platform, ask the seller to send you additional images of the piece that may not be available on the original listing."

On the same note, interior designer [Margarita Bravo](#) recommends considering every channel in your search: "Always consider buying through an antique or auction house when thinking of purchasing a vintage piece; this allows for you to be surrounded by others who are knowledgeable about the vintage space. This will attract some of the best vintage pieces for sale because true vintage shoppers appreciate shopping in person."

If You're Looking For A Specific Piece, Just Ask

Jessie Neuman, Principal and Founder of [Numi Interior Design](#) says forming relationships with antique dealers is one of the best ways to find that piece you've been searching for. "This way you can always reach out if you're looking for something specific. Typically, these people keep a limited inventory in their shops' given space restriction, but they can certainly help with sourcing items and keeping you in the loop when what you're looking for comes their way."