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HOME

SPRING 2015

FURNITURE *FASHION'S* HIGH POINT

209

Easy, elegant ideas
for every room

DIY DIVA

Ana White's toolbox tips

Renovate, innovate this spring

+ tech, tile & textures



PHOTOS: RACHEL YIMOYINES

TAKE A NEW LOOK AT *Consignment*

Cultured secondhand and thrift stores offer more than a good value

BY JENNIFER E. MABRY

Everyone from lifestyle bloggers to well-dressed celebrities has touted the value of secondhand shopping. And as more people turn to consignment- and thrift-store shopping as a way to score deals on unique items and pieces that can be “upcycled” into budget-friendly décor, the stores themselves are finding ways to enhance the customer experience. Gone are the stuffy, midwesty shops that make treasure-seeking more of a chore than a joy. At these

new thrift stores-turned-“lifestyle centers,” you don’t just go to shop. You browse for that perfect period piece while sipping fresh-brewed coffee and listening to a local band. The past decade has seen a proliferation of such full-service centers. In places such as 3Fifteen Rescue Mission in Syracuse, N.Y., and Wanderlust Road in Salida, Colo., coffee, live music and wine tastings fit in with the funky, vintage finds. Unclaimed Baggage Center in Scottsboro, Ala., resells items discovered in, you guessed it, unclaimed luggage. But the store also

has a barbecue restaurant, coffee store and Dippin’ Dots ice cream shop — fuel for finding treasures in those lost bags, including a Versace gown and a 5.8-carat diamond! Another such center can be found at Middlebury Consignment, part of the collection of The Shoppes at Whittemore Crossing in Middlebury, Conn. It’s arguably the largest and one of the most unusual furniture consignment stores in North America. Here, you can spend “from \$5 to \$50,000,” says owner Dean Yimoyines. That cash can be put »

The Shoppes at Whittemore Crossing in Middlebury, Conn., upper left, is home to Middlebury Consignment, upper right, arguably the largest and one of the most unusual furniture stores in the country. You can also find design help, food, drink, lush gardens and more at the four-story “lifestyle center,” bottom left. There’s a gourmet chocolate store, bottom right, on the first floor, where fresh fudge is made daily.



Chef Sherry Johnson, above, instructs students during a group cooking class in The Kitchen, a state-of-the-art stop at the Shoppes at Whittemore Crossing. The four-story, 20,000-square-foot complex is owned by Dean Yimoyines and his wife, Linda.



The lush outdoor garden at Whittemore Crossing features Italianate statues and fountains.

toward furniture, fine dining, décor, sweet treats, home accents and more, all found under one roof.

Yimoyines, 67, a retired surgeon, and his wife, Linda, 60, first bought an 8,500-square-foot, post-and-beam barn built in the 1870s to use for personal storage. In 2009, they opened a store in about 1,800 square feet of the building and have expanded since to fill the building — and then some. The 20,000-square-foot center now has several floors of retail and an impressive outdoor garden complete with Italianate statues and fountains.

"[I wanted] to make it look like it'd been here a long time, built with architectural

detail that most current commercial buildings don't have," Yimoyines says.

The structure resembles buildings and farmhouses from the late 1800s, with an original stone foundation, copper flashing and gutters and a shake-shingles roof. On the first floor is a gourmet chocolate shop, where fresh fudge is made daily. Customers go for the imported truffles, too.

On the second floor, there's a 70-seat café and state-of-the-art kitchen where you can not only eat, but learn to cook — over cocktails, if you want! There's an outdoor patio, part of the expansive backyard and lush garden.

"It's a beautiful place to

visit, (and) you can have a nice meal," says Henry Borzkowski, who comes with his wife, Toni. "It is really an all-around enjoyable, fun, shopping experience and a very cost-effective way to shop for furniture."

For those seeking to meld new and old furnishings or blend contemporary and antique pieces, experts are on-hand at Middlebury Consignment. Staff at the design center work with customers to gather swatches, review color palettes and discuss décor ideas.

Linda Yimoyines says the store seems to fill a need in the community. Adds her husband, "In a way we're an old-fashioned department store." ●

RACHEL YIMOYINES; TEXTURE; GETTY IMAGES

TIPS FOR FINDING SECONDHAND PIECES

John Kaulzarich of Consign Design, a furniture and home accessories store in Seattle, writes a blog (consigndesign.us) with suggestions on how to infuse new life into existing spaces. To those new to shopping at furniture consignment stores, Kaulzarich advises:

Do your research. Identify and define your own taste in design and furniture. Browse through magazines to get a better understanding of the variety of furniture styles (think art deco, midcentury modern and traditional) as well as fabrics and color palettes. You may hear decorators or shop owners use these terms in conversation.

Be specific. Or at least have an idea or description of what you're looking for (i.e. an antique treadle sewing machine or a midcentury tufted red-leather couch).

Ask. If you don't see what you're looking for, ask the shop owner to take your con-

tact information, keep an eye out for the item and call you if something similar comes in.

Check back regularly. The best stores are constantly receiving new inventory and swapping out existing inventory.

Express yourself. Have fun. Let your creativity play out in each room of your home. Don't get attached to trends, and don't be afraid to mix and match modern styles with more traditional pieces.

Be patient. Contemporary or common items are often more plentiful, but collectibles or antiques may take more than one trip to find.

— Jennifer E. Mabry

TAKE A NEW LOOK AT
Consignment

DETAILS MATTER
You'll find what you want easier if you specify color, size and design style.



HARD-TO-FIND ITEMS
An early 20th-century sewing machine would be a great find.

PLUSH OR AUSTERE
Don't be afraid to mix and match modern styles with more traditional pieces. Have fun!



9 vintage treasure troves

Even in this age of online commerce, shoppers still flock to flea markets and antique shows. "Dealers come from so far away, and they bring all sorts of things," says Pamela Keach, author of *The Best Flea, Antique, Vintage and New-Style Markets in America*. Here are her favorite markets from across the country.



BROOKLYN, N.Y.
BROOKLYN FLEA
brooklynflea.com

Keach calls this curated weekly gathering the nation's best flea market. "It's just the hippest thing you can imagine. You'll find a lot of midcentury furniture, lots of vintage clothes, lots of handmade items." It's also where to find Smorgasburg, a gathering of 100 food trucks and vendors, making it a fun place to snack as well. >>