

This month, we're talking...

How to buy vintage

Introducing old furniture full of character into your newly renovated home can help transform it into a charming and stylish space – but there are a few things to think about before you invest

Words: **Yvette Murrell**

Mid-century, Art Deco, 70s-inspired – many retro trends crop up time after time. But often, nothing is better than getting your hands on an original piece. “The history and craftsmanship of vintage furniture is very appealing to 21st-century homeowners who are turned off by the throwaway culture associated with mass-produced goods,” says Will Hanness from The Old Cinema, a vintage shop in Chiswick. While finding pieces to suit your home and needs will likely take longer than buying brand new, there are benefits to time spent researching and reclaiming. Many vintage designs are available “at the fraction of a cost” of new pieces, as interior designer Jen Morton highlights. “And design classics can often be picked up for a snip of their current retail value,” she says. So where should you begin looking for these prize pieces? Websites such as Ebay and Gumtree are popular, but there is something to be said about heading out to the shops, too. “There are some fantastic vintage fairs and specialist stores around the country,” says Carl Morenikeji, director at online shop Scaramanga which specialises in vintage interiors. “You’ll get the chance to have a good look at the furniture and ask the seller about its history and provenance.” Interior stylist Amy Fewtrell, who also co-founded Devon-based Relish, a shop and online store selling antique finds, encourages thinking outside the box when searching for vintage products. “Keep an eye out for house clearances, visit an auction, or look in your local paper for advertisements – you’re likely to find pieces for great prices.” Some destinations come up often when we talk about retro furniture: Ardingly Antiques & Collectors Fair at the South of England Showground, Sunbury Antiques Market at Kempton Racecourse in Surrey, and Newark Antiques & Collectors Fair in Nottinghamshire. “You need to get there before 7am to get the best deals, but don a warm hat and bring a flask of tea and the haggling can be a lot of fun,” Jen tells us. “But if that doesn’t sound right for you, take a look at online stores specialising in certain products or eras – theantiqueshop.co.uk, for example. They will post regular updates on what they have to sell, and often have a bit more background information on each item.” When shopping online, narrow down your search by including key wording such as ‘Mid-century chest of drawers’ rather than simply ‘vintage storage’ and look out for companies that restore original products such as wooden floorboards and tiles, which can bring real character to a space or even replicate your property’s original features. The likes of Woodworks by Ted Todd salvage rare antique and reclaimed floor-coverings from all over the world. As with any furniture purchase, it is important to measure up your space before you shop – but there are some additional considerations to bear in mind, too. “Come with a plan,” advises Sonia Pash, founder of interior design and build company Temza. “You only have one



Image: James Balston

chance before someone else snaps up the best bits, so go in knowing exactly what you want to buy and how much you are willing to pay for it. More of your time and energy will be taken up, compared to the process of buying new pieces, but it’ll be worth your while once you uncover something really special that you love.” Whether you are shopping online or in person, remember there may be a no-returns policy and you could have to arrange your own delivery. “If you’re buying at an auction, don’t forget their fees as well as VAT which can add up to as much as 20%,” adds Carl. Ask lots of questions on the quality of the product, its size, and where it has come from. Also do plenty of research if you’re after a certain style or item, to avoid getting ripped off. “This is especially important if you are looking for genuine pieces by a certain maker. Ercol is a prime example – there are many other manufacturers from similar periods who closely followed Ercol designs and as such may appear to be the genuine article to the untrained eye,” she explains. “Having said that, if you merely want to buy into the look, there are many bargains to be had.” And how easy is it to incorporate vintage into your interior scheme if you haven’t done so before? Quite simple, say the experts. “Juxtapose old and new to keep a scheme looking contemporary and repurpose vintage finds to give them a new use – an old chest of drawers, for example, could be used as a bathroom vanity unit,” suggests Rhona Jack, an interior designer. “A good idea is to theme your vintage finds,” Carl recommends. “So if you like travelling, pair a vintage trunk with some old framed maps and an antique globe. In the end, it comes down to being confident about what you like and developing your own style.”

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- 1 Vintage finds, including a Singer sewing machine in a table and a chest of drawers, in interior designer Rhonda Jack’s home.
- 2 The Rare Finds Northbank pine boards, £204.12 per sq m, from Woodworks by Ted Todd are from a Liverpool warehouse.
- 3 Online shop Scaramanga specialises in vintage finds, such as this Indian antique blue cupboard, £900.
- 4 Inside The Old Cinema, a department store in Chiswick, south west London, specialising in antique and vintage furniture.



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