

## Gently used decor may be the ticket in tough times

January 08, 2009

Muriel Draaisma

SPECIAL TO YOURHOME.CA

Warren Hales says buying gently used home furnishings may not be for everyone, but it is an affordable way to decorate a home in the midst of an economic downturn.

Hales, owner of Around the Block, a consignment store in north Toronto, says consigned goods can add comfort and character to a house, condo or apartment without costing a lot of money.

He says what a consigned item lacks in newness, it makes up for in quality. Plus, he says, consigned goods come with a history from their original owners.

"Our customers always ask us, 'What's the story behind this?'" he says. So, Hales and store manager Jane Haslett ask a lot of questions about the history of an item, such as where it was purchased and when and where it was made. If the seller cannot answer all of their questions, the store will research the background with the information they do have.

The two floors of Hales' store are crammed with goods with a history, such as oval mirrors, pine dressers, leather chairs, original art, wine glasses, china cabinets, mahogany dressers, teacups, candlesticks, knick knacks, armoires and wall clocks. One cannot walk two feet without pausing to look.

"If you have something very specific in mind and you saw it in the IKEA catalogue, then this is not the place for you," Hales says while giving a tour.

"We find our customers are looking for things you would not find in the big boxed stores. They are looking for quality, something unique. People come in with one idea and leave with four. They want something with a history. It's a different way of shopping."

A wrought iron love seat with dark red cushions stands out in the basement of the store. It sells for \$195. Upstairs, a black leather couch beckons. It comes with six down-filled removable cushions and is being sold for \$1,495.

Next, Hales points to a round burgundy leather chair that looks like it came straight out of the 1970s. It costs \$395.



COURTESY MURIEL DRAAISMA

"Everything here has a story and our customers want to hear it," says Warren Hales, owner of the north Toronto consignment store Around the Block.

1/8/2009

<http://www.yourhome.ca/homes/articl...>

He says when he first saw it, he thought: "Holy cow, look at that crazy leather chair."

But he knows someone might want the chair for a living room because the leather is good, it was well designed and the chair has a unique chrome base.

His typical customers are treasure hunters — people looking for the unusual, the different and the special — and they want quality items at a discounted price. But with the current economy, he thinks his wares might appeal to a wider buying public.

"Even in an economic downturn, people still want to be comfortable and happy in their surroundings," he says.

Hales says the best way to enhance a living space through consigned goods is to choose items that fit well into your home. That means not only falling in love with a particular item, but also mixing and matching.

Ideally, a piece has some element that will help it blend into a room or that matches the design of the customer's existing home decor. In other words, it just fits.

For example, he says, a customer recently bought a bar made in France 25 years ago that looks like a server for \$275. The customer liked art deco furniture, and while the bar was not art deco, it had similar elements.

The top of the bar opened to reveal mirrored shelves on which bottles could sit. "It worked with what she had," Hales says.

A decorator recently bought a 1930s walnut sideboard for \$300. It was consigned to the store by a man who had inherited it from his parents. The decorator plans to paint it antique white to match her client's decor.

"It's a lovely piece. It has great structure. It has good bones and it's nicely proportioned," Hales says. "A lot of decorators are looking for things that they can transform into something else."

Business, since Hales opened the store in August, has been brisk. "It's been steady," he says. "People are looking for good quality things. Sales are better than expected."

Customers are taking their time with purchases, however. "Instead of saying, 'Oh my god, it's perfect,' they are being a little more cautious," he explains.

After giving the tour, Hales sits down on the black leather couch. He says the business is never dull.

"I really enjoy the different materials. I really like the customers. I like seeing new things. You are always confronted with new things, people and stories," he says.

"Everything here has a story and our customers want to hear it."