

The Washington Post

Friday, May 7, 2010

Antiquing in New Oxford, Pa.

By Ellen Perlman

In the back of the Center Square Antiques shop in New Oxford, Pa., my friend Paula examines a yellow wooden box near an intricate birdhouse. She admires the dovetailing that substitutes for nails and guesses that the painted design is original. She points to another feature. "It's got great hinges."

Great hinges? Not something I've thought much about. But I do know one thing: \$4,900 for an old box is out of my price range and beyond my comprehension.

I favor contemporary furniture and accessories. If I'm going to shell out hard-earned cash, I want the goods to be shiny and new. No cuts, cracks or chinks. If I find that something I've bought is peeling or chipped, I return it for a new one.

To me, therefore, antiques stores look like junk shops. Places that charge astronomical prices for dusty used stuff.

So when Paula suggested that I spend a weekend antiquing in a little town called New Oxford, home to 500-plus antiques dealers, I told her that she had to come along. Someone was going to have to explain what I was missing.



That's how we ended up in "the little town with the beautiful circle," as the Chamber of Commerce Web site calls it. We pulled into the one-horse town, nine miles east of Gettysburg, on a sunny Saturday via a two-lane road and parked in the circle, the town's center.

An orientation walk had us gazing up at the clock tower of the 1887 Emory United Methodist Church and peeking into the windows of the historic 1763 Kuhn Tavern, the oldest building in town. When we reached Center Square Antiques, Paula's heart melted at the sight of two of her loves: antiques and garden supplies. And

we hadn't even gone inside yet. The grounds were filled with fountains, sculptures, trellises and large pots.

Paula exclaimed over the treasure trove. She loved a stone rabbit, among many other things. "It's somewhat realistic, but quirky," she said. "Which I can be." For a brief moment, I thought about pricing a metal trellis and plant holder for my balcony. But it was rusty.

Some people scrape off the rust and repaint, Paula explained. Others leave it as is. "If it's cheap enough, who cares? Some people really love rusty," she informed me. Hmm.

CONTINUED

Where I grew up, surrounded by Danish modern furniture, the only thing rust indicated was time for a tetanus shot.

Inside the shop, we walked among the fine furniture, clocks and stoneware. Paula pointed to a folding “tilt” table that she described as being good for small rooms. She called a metal-bar structure near the door a towel rack. “It could be,” she said. “That’s how I see it.”

It was clear that, like the young boy in “The Sixth Sense,” Paula could see things that I couldn’t.

Before I knew it, we had spent almost an hour at the shop. Shockingly, I wasn’t bored. But I was ready for a rest after our drive. We commandeered a booth at a restaurant called On the Square. Despite the fact that it’s On a Circle. Almost as perplexing as antiques shopping.

After lunch, we headed to Golden Lane Art & Antique Gallery, a three-story antiques “mall” containing hundreds of dealers’ goods. Glass cases held Civil War artifacts, small French papier-mâché soldiers (eight for \$695), handcrafted baby shoes from 1896 (\$125), old ice cream scoops. “It smells musty in here,” I said. “Welcome to antiques,” Paula replied.

With her help, my vocabulary broadened as we scrutinized items unusual and mundane. Gateleg tables. Plank-bottom chairs. A Hoosier cabinet. Side-by-sides. A cane-bottom highchair. A pie safe.

Pie safe! Heaven forbid that someone should steal the pie. Or a chunk thereof. Actually, the green cabinet on legs, with shelves and doors with screens, was used to cool pies if you didn’t have a screened-in window sill to rest them on.

Paula murmured “great” and “lovely” many times as we wandered. “The workmanship on this stuff?”

Information

www.newoxfordantiques.com

Playing There

Center Square Antiques
9 Center Sq.,
717-624-7125
Open Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Golden Lane Art & Antique Gallery
11 N. Water St.,
717-624-3800
Open daily 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Victor Victorian Antiques
104 W. Golden Lane,
717-624-2628
Open daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Collectors’ Choice Antiques Gallery
330 W. Golden Lane,

717-624-3440
www.collectorschoiceantiques.com

Staying There

Chestnut Hall Bed and Breakfast
104 Lincoln Way W.,
888-886-5660
<http://www.chestnuthallbb.com>
Furnished with Victorian antiques. Rooms start at \$105.

Eating There

La Fonte
7 Lincoln Way W.,
717-624-3287
<http://www.lafonte.jimdo.com>
Italian restaurant with pastas and entrees ranging from \$9.95 to \$21.

she said. “You can’t hold a candle to it unless you’re spending a lot of money.”

I became enamored of a Victorian side-by-side, an asymmetrical piece with a narrow desk on one side and a glass-front cabinet with shelves on the other. Almost looked new! But where would it fit in my contemporary home? Style-wise, that is. Putting it in my home would be like wearing a cowboy hat in Washington after returning from a Colorado ranch vacation. Something wouldn’t be quite right.

I didn’t buy anything during our trip, although I was momentarily drawn to a hand coffee grinder. Paula bought a few Depression-glass drinking glasses. She collects the green-glass pieces and was thrilled with her find.

At the cash register, I asked a guy

buying a \$165 felt Baltimore Colts pennant whether he was a fan of Baltimore or the Colts. “Pennants,” he replied. “Felt pennants.”

Geez, my brother had scads of those on his wall when we were growing up. We coulda been rich.

Before we left on Sunday, we were chatting with Steve McNaughton, one of the innkeepers at our B&B, which is filled with Victorian antiques. “What is the attraction of rust?” I asked him.

“It reminds you of what it was,” he explained.

“I’m sorry, I just don’t get it.”

His threw back his head and laughed heartily. I still have plenty to learn.

Perlman is a consultant and freelance travel writer who blogs at <http://www.boldlygosolo.com>.