

How to shop the Nashville flea market like a pro

Stephanie Van Hoesen of Flock South, for 12th & Broad Published 6:02 a.m. CT April 11, 2016 | Updated 5:54 p.m. CT April 15, 2016



(Photo: Stephanie Van Hoesen)

Ever wonder how designers and retail owners score big at the flea market? Are they a part of a secret club? Is the good stuff in an off-site location? Is this a sorcery thing? What are they doing that I am not, and how can I get in on it?

Antique and vintage shopping is a perplexing challenge, and many walk away feeling defeated. The reason? You likely lack a plan and don't have the trade secrets. But don't fret, I'm spilling the beans.

Below are 10 tips on how to shop like a design pro at the next [Nashville Flea Market](#).

1. Arrive early.

Early, early, early! I cannot stress this enough. If you want to find those incredible, rare finds you see posted on Instagram and your favorite blog posts, be at the gates on Friday morning at 8 a.m. Of course, there is plenty to buy later in the day and weekend, but the rare stuff is gone within the first hour of opening day.



Antique photos and ephemera at the Nashville Flea Market. (Photo: Stephanie Van Hoesen)

2. Bring a list and have a plan.

Why are you going? If you want to shop like the pros, do your homework before heading to the market. To avoid getting distracted or overwhelmed, create a list. Spend a little time online researching the items you are interested in. Get to know the brands, style and finishes. This will help you determine whether an item is authentic or a reproduction.

3. Bring cash.

Admission is free, but parking is \$5 (cash). Some vendors now take credit cards, but most take (and prefer) cash or check. If you plan to haggle, cash is an absolute must.

4. Start big, then go small.

When you first arrive, you are going to see a million little sparkling treasures. Ignore them! You want to start your shopping by perusing the larger items, aka furniture and rugs. Do a quick walk-through of the market, scout out the big stuff and make a quick list of vendors that stand out to you. Then do a second walk-through, and begin purchasing your larger items. Once you've snagged those special items, take your time perusing the market and begin shopping the small things, aka décor and artwork.



Vintage cowboy boots in multiple sizes and styles at the Nashville Flea Market. (Photo: Stephanie Van Hoesen)

5. Avoid new stuff.

Unless an item is hand-crafted by an artisan, avoid buying new items. The flea market is a sea of rare antique and vintage finds. It's an experience unlike any other. Don't waste your time on tube socks, cheap bags and plastic furniture made in China.

6. Get your hands dirty.

When you go to a flea market, you should have one thing on your mind: "Dig, climb, crawl and leave nothing unturned." The flea market is a dusty treasure hunt. Dress appropriately, plan to walk for a few hours and be prepared to get your hands dirty. The good stuff is never front and center.

7. Splurge on uncommon goods and furnishings.

Look for furnishings that have great bones, a unique shape and are made of high-quality material. My personal favorite styles are Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Mid-Century Modern. Remember, you can always reupholster a sofa or refinish a table. So don't be afraid to purchase an ugly piece of furniture and bring it back to its original glory.

Keep your eyes out for an antique or vintage rug. The prices are a third of what you would pay in a store, but they still cost a pretty penny. These beauties are often one of a kind, hand-knotted, and in incredible condition — a worthy splurge item.

Don't forget to look for lighting in unexpected places. I have found stunning chandeliers hidden in corners covered in years of dust. Don't worry about old wiring, it can easily be replaced by your local hardware store . [Vintage Lighting](#)



Antique brass candlesticks, green glass bottles and home décor books, sold by vendor Brook Windsor, at the Nashville Flea Market. (Photo: Stephanie Van Hoesen)

8. Avoid cheap thrills.

"It's \$1, so it must be a steal." "I don't need it, but it's such a great bargain." Don't be a hoarder! Be intentional about your purchases. Unless you love the piece and have a place for it, don't buy it.

9. Haggle with respect.

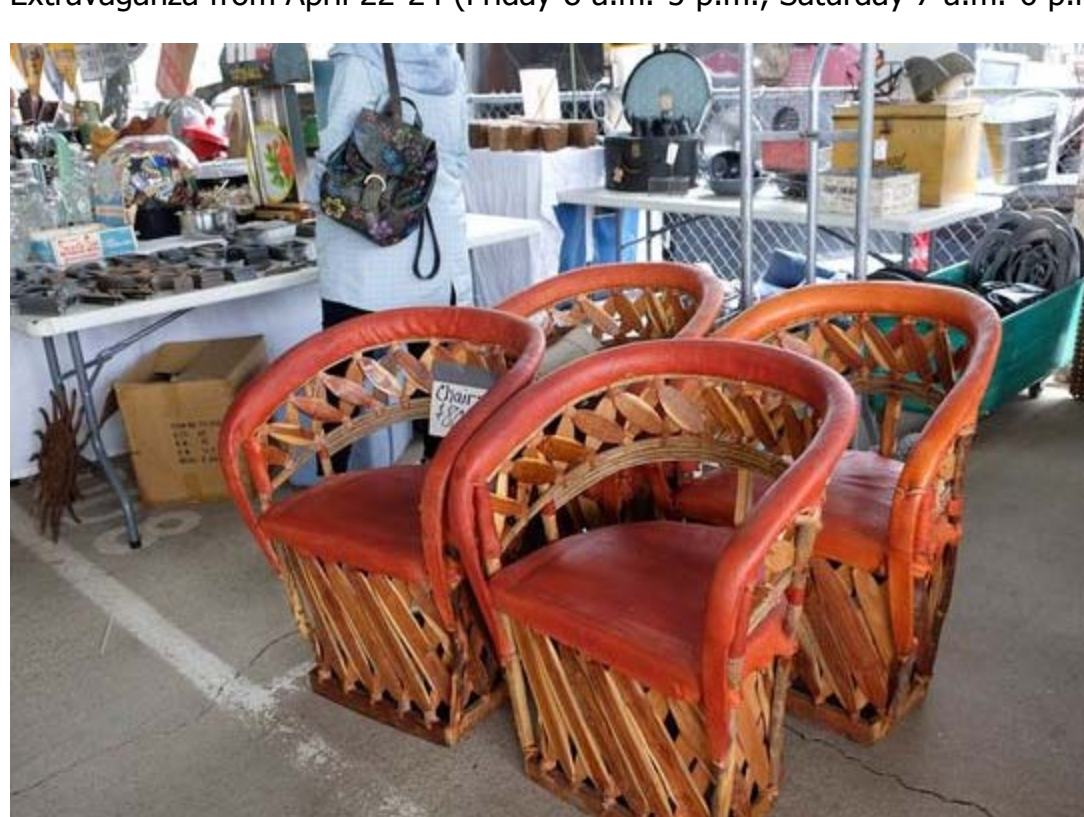
Be kind to the vendors, and be reasonable with your haggling. These vendors are hard-working people who spend a lot of time buying, loading/unloading, repairing and storing these rare finds.

10. Know what to look for.

Here are my top five items to look for:

1. Mid-century modern furniture and décor
2. Antique/vintage rugs
3. Vintage paintings: portraits and unusual landscapes in bold colors
4. Brass anything
5. Ornate lighting: chandeliers, sconces, floor and table lamps

The Nashville Flea Market is on the fourth Saturday of every month. The next flea market is the Spring Extravaganza from April 22-24 (Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturday 7 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday 7 a.m.-4 p.m.).



Vintage rattan and leather dining chairs at the Nashville Flea Market. (Photo: Stephanie Van Hoesen)



Stephanie Van Hoesen (Photo: #StyleScout)

Stephanie Van Hoesen is a Nashville-based scout, curator and stylist. She currently lives in Germantown with her husband and two pups, Jack and Luna. After closing, Nest Interiors, she began freelancing as an interior stylist and designer. You'll find her most days scouring quirky boutiques, salvage yards and antique malls for unusual décor. She often works with tastemaker's, entrepreneurs and creatives for whom nothing is too over the top or bizarre. When she's not styling or shopping, you'll find her writing for [Flock South](#). A design blog featuring home décor, styling tips, trade secrets and local finds.