

Life&Style

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SOLUTIONS | SHOW STRATEGY

Daunted by pricey antiques shows? Don't be!

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The Journal News

There's a bumper sticker that proclaims "I brake for garage sales."

And many people do.

A garage sale is a casual adventure, a place to pull over and maybe drop a few dollars on an old vinyl album or a vintage vase.

A formal antiques show can be more challenging, especially for beginning collectors.

Shows with high-end reputations, such as the 52nd annual Winter Antiques Show, which opens Thursday night in Manhattan, can be more than a little intimidating.

But they don't have to be, says Catherine Sweeney Singer, executive director of the show, which is considered the nation's top antiques event.

"Everything is very high quality, but it's not all million-dollar pieces on pedestals under spotlights," Sweeney Singer says.

Shows still need to make money for the dealers, promoters and, often, charities, and do this by continuing to draw new audiences.

Sweeney Singer says the antiques show stays fresh by offering antiques of all kinds. These include museum-quality works but also plenty of things destined for collectors of modest means.

Newcomers might not be able to jump in and buy Old Master paintings, Sweeney Singer says, but they might be able to enter the market via Old Master drawings and prints. When it's time to select new dealers, Sweeney Singer turns to emerging fields.

That means beginning collectors can take a chance on what may be the next hottest thing.

"(American) Folk art has become all the rage right now ... but European folk art?" Sweeney Singer asks. Both types of folk art will be represented at the show.

As at a number of top shows, the antiques at the show are vetted, or authenticated. That gives buyer confidence and lets browsers know they are looking at quality merchandise.

Visitors to the Hirschl & Adler Galleries' booth can see museum-quality works from legendary furniture-makers. There will be a Boston banquet table attributed to Thomas Seymour and a set of Duncan Phyfe chairs.

Stuart Feld is the president and owner of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, which has exhibited at the show for more than 30 years. Feld, who lives in Manhattan and Westchester, says the point of these prestigious shows is far from a survey of price tags; it's having an opportunity to see so many quality works and meet the dealers, who may help build a collection.

"I think visitors need to find a dealer or dealers whose taste and presentation ... melds with your way of thinking," Feld says.

A collector can then ask about pieces that might not have been brought to the show, he says. This exploration could lead to finds that might be more affordable.

As Sweeney Singer says, there is one approach that never seems to go out of style.

"The advice that most dealers give when starting a collection is to buy the best of what you can afford of what you love."



Hirschl & Adler Galleries

A clock with a full-length figure of George Washington circa 1825 from Hirschl & Adler Galleries.