

Vintage shopping: the experts spill

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You love vintage, and your wardrobe and living room are crying out for it. But how do you get started? We asked three experts for their tips on vintage shopping in Tucson. By Joan Calcagno. Cover photo courtesy of Francine Vacca Smith/[Hot Cool Vintage](#)

The three vintage mavens we spoke to have lots in common: they are hunter-gatherers; they love the thrill of the find; they shop at many types of places - thrift stores, second-hand stores, vintage specialty shops, Craigslist, rummage and yard sales. And they all consciously developed their eye for vintage.

The fashion stylist

Syd Ballesteros in a 1960's satin jumpsuit from Desert Vintage. Photo by Puspa Lohmeyer

[Sydney Ballesteros](#) is a vintage stylist, creative director, buyer, and consultant extraordinaire. This Tucson Modernism Week, you'll see her styling an exhibit of 1950's and '60's fashions at the [opening reception at Chase Bank](#).

Syd has had "an appreciation for old things" since she was a girl; her stylish grandma and mother took her to yard sales foraging for clothes and other treasures. When she started shopping for herself in high school, she went for the cuts and styles that appealed to her from many eras. That was the start of building a wardrobe, jewelry and handbags included, which is now 90% vintage.

Mix it up. Wearing or displaying all vintage can be a bit much. Syd blends in contemporary, buying

various “filler” pieces, like jeans or a good black turtleneck. And since it's hard to find vintage shoes that fit, she likes to use modern shoes to add that "mix it up" element. She also mixes “high” - expensive, designer, mint condition (finding a piece like that is "a *really* good day," she says) - with “low” - inexpensive things she likes.

Syd in a brocade suit from Black Cat Vintage. Photo by Puspa Lohmeyer

Invest in staple pieces. Buy a good vintage dress, possibly a little black dress (expect to pay \$50 to \$75) and a coat in good condition (\$50 to \$200, unless you come across a killer deal at a thrift store for \$15), some jewelry and a handbag.

Go for what you love. Look through vintage magazines, read books, watch old movies and see what you like. “Everyone's eye favors a certain aesthetic. Vintage just gives you the opportunity to be original with styling it. Wear what you love. Wear it with confidence. Express your individuality!”

Where she shops in Tucson: : [Buffalo Exchange](#), [How Sweet It Was](#), [Desert Vintage](#), [Razzle Dazzle](#), [Black Cat Vintage](#), [OZMA Atelier](#).

For more on Syd, read our feature, [Golden Girl of the West](#).

The blogger

Francine displays some of her spoils. Photo by Joan Calcagno

Francine Vacca Smith writes the blog [Hot Cool Vintage](#) in tandem with running her [Etsy shop](#), which

focuses on home accessories - “smalls”, as they are called in the biz. She grew up in a family of antique jewelry sellers and in a home with stylish pieces that sparked her aesthetic senses. Over time, her taste moved to Scandinavian/Danish-modern, partly because she grew up with it.

She is particularly fond of Catherineholm enamelware – those lovely pieces with the leaf-like design you see in the photo. Moving from New York to Tucson three years ago with "virtually nothing" and a spacious home to furnish, she looked to the second-hand market. Then it occurred to her, "Hey, I could be selling this stuff", and her [Etsy shop](#) was born.

One of Francine's finds: a like-new vintage snack set and [Blenko](#) bottle. Photo courtesy of Francine Vacca Smith/Hot Cool Vintage

Research it. See a particular piece you like? Root around on the web so you get to know designers' styles and price ranges. If your research says an item might be worth its price, but it's outside your budget and you love it, you might ask if there is "any room" on the price. Sometimes a seller can do better and sometimes not. Sometimes a knock-off can be touted, and priced, as the real thing. So if you're not sure, do research on the spot. Look for the telltale details, and use your smartphone to help.

Mix it up. Like Syd, Francine likes to add modern to her vintage collection. Her dining room chairs, for example, are from Target.

Some of Francine's Scandinavian glassware. Photo by Joan Calcagno

It's OK to make mistakes. Francine loves mid-mod Scandinavian glass, but it can be hard to find authentic pieces because they aren't marked. Over time, she developed an eye for the subtle differences. For example, maybe you can see that the tall piece on the left in the photo is a bit thicker on the rim. It's just less refined throughout, even though it is the same pattern. So it's possibly not an [Oiva Toikka Flora](#) piece like the one on the right. If you are decorating for yourself, it doesn't really matter, unless you are set on having designer pieces, says Francine. What does matter is that you don't want to pay designer prices for a knock-off. Although "it happens. You just have to get out there, have fun and make mistakes, that's how you learn".

Where she shops in Tucson: She's not telling! This lady is in business, after all, and doesn't want to reveal her sources. But she did tell us she likes the Tanque Verde Antique Fair, at 11100 E. Tanque Verde Road, first Sunday of every month.

The B&B owner

Charlotte in the 'Atomic Room'. Photo by Joan Calcagno

Charlotte Lowe-Bailey is the proprietor of [Bailey House](#), an artist B&B/retreat near the Tucson Mountains. A year ago, when she moved from Patagonia back to a family home, planning to open the B&B, she was faced with furnishing five guest bedrooms, as well as common and outdoor spaces. The house was built in 1966 and has good mid-century bones: floor-to-ceiling windows, angular styling, floor tiling indicative of the era. So Charlotte chose mid-century décor as the focus. While she enjoys houses where people have absolutely everything of an era, she used a more pragmatic, practical approach – starting with some pieces she had and some which reflect the sentimentality of blending in family heirlooms.

Look for bargains, but don't haggle Charlotte, like our other experts, usually doesn't haggle if the price is reasonable. She will make an offer if things are overpriced or have been on display a long time. She also tracks various thrift stores that have percent-off days, like The Girls Estate Sale Shop. "They mark things down on an announced schedule, so you know what the opportunities and risks are," she says.

Be on constant lookout. Hitting the thrifts and vintage shops is usually part of any travel itinerary for these gals. Charlotte checks bulletin boards whenever she's in small towns, looking for rummage and estate sales. At home, she – like the others - integrates vintage shopping into her week by stopping at a thrift or secondhand store when running other errands.

The "Atomic Room" at Bailey House. Photo by Joan Calcagno

How she puts a room together. Charlotte's "Atomic Room" (pictured) started with the blond console piece given to her by a family member. Then she found the atomic-patterned convertible chaise/bed on Overstock.com. Then she started doing what she usually does - filling in. An authentic swag lamp (from Tom's Fine Furniture and Collectables. \$95); the marble coffee table (from The Girls Estate Sale shop. \$85); the [Flokati](#) rug (she loves these wool shag rugs because they are iconic to the 60s, easy to clean and

easy to find. This one's from Craigslist, \$75); two black side tables (one from a rummage sale, the other from St Vincent de Paul thrift, about \$5 each. "They weren't great, but I sprayed them black and they work"); a TV (from HabiStore, \$3); rummage sale side chairs, and smaller accessories, like the ashtray (Goodwill, \$5); and, of course, wall art - an [Albert Kogel](#) poster, an abstract painting, and vintage album covers she displays in cases from Target.

Where she shops in Tucson: Charlotte seems to have good luck at what she calls "junk shops" - places that have a lot of inventory scattered outside, like [Gersons Used Building Materials](#) or the back yard at St. Vincent DePaul thrift, 820 S. 6th Avenue. Some of her favorite places are thrifts where wealthy, stylish clientele provide the donations, like [Assistance League Thrift Shop](#). "They have killer sales". Other places include: [The Girls Estate Sale Shop](#); [HabiStore](#); [Goodwill](#); [Savers](#); Tom's Fine Furniture and Collectables, 5454 E. Pima Street. When she is reupholstering: [SAS Fabrics](#) and Baca Upholstery, 2100 South 4th Avenue.

And lastly...

* **Let the experts' advice inspire you.** Watch some old movies. Check out some vintage magazines. Get out there. Before you know it, your foraging instincts will kick in and your reward center will light up when you find something that is a good fit at a good price. And you'll know: you are hooked.

* **Speaking of movies...** We see that [Grace of Monaco](#), with Nicole Kidman as Grace Kelly, is coming out around Christmas. Judging from the promo pics, it should be full of 1960s eye-candy.

Photo courtesy of Hot Cool Vintage/Francine Vacca Smith

* **Vintage and mid-mod shopping in Tucson is easy when you know where to go.** There are mid-mod booths at the [22nd Street Antique Mall](#) and [Copper Country Antiques](#) (and don't miss Fred's Recycle Bin in the back). You can find mid-mod things at second hand stores like [Betty Blue's Junk Shop](#) (Betty's a bulldog. Say hi to her!), [Kismet](#) and Diamond Lil's Vintage & Gifts, 2201 E. River Road, and in Trail Dust Town, 6541 E. Tanque Verde Road.

* **And there are lots of thrifts where you might find a vintage bargain.** Try [Miracle Center Thrift Store](#) (great for glassware), [1st Rate 2nd Hand Thrift Store](#), [Humane Society of Southern Arizona Thrift](#) and Speedway Outlet Thrift, 5421 E. Speedway.

* **Retro Renovation and eBay.** While our experts were not using eBay much, we note that Pam Kueber, the woman behind the Retro Renovation [website](#), peruses eBay every day and creates [curated lists of the mid-century vintage items she finds](#).

* **The [Mid Century Marketplace and Expo at Tucson Modernism Week](#)** is a must. Visit it at the Murphy Building, 2959 East Broadway, Sunday October 6th from 8.30am to 4pm.

* **There are always vintage delights to be had at Shop Your Girlfriend's Closet.** This Voices for Education benefit takes place October 25th, 26th and 27th, 3822 N. Oracle Road. We're told Linda Ronstadt has donated a couple of purses, so make sure you get first dibs. [More here](#).

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