



Fabulous Fleas

Foraging Ontario's flea markets for fanciful and functional finds.

BY KIMBERLEY SELDON

Photos: On Display, Displaying Your Treasures with Style, by Lesley Dilcock

Flea market shopping has universal appeal, whether it's a souk in Marrakech, a soggy field in Aberfoyle in south-central Ontario, Mahone Bay's Great Scarecrow Festival and Antique Fair in Nova Scotia, or the grande dame of all flea markets, the Marche aux Puces in Paris.

At flea markets around the world, the promise of adventure synchronizes with the thrill of discovery, a tempting lure



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for design enthusiasts everywhere. So, don your most comfortable casuals (wellies and a rain slicker for outdoor events), grab a tape measure, swatches and floor plans, and rush headlong into adventure in search of those items that give interiors a truly personal, distinctive look.

The fanciful, the witty, the extravagant – those fabulous fleas! Here's how to find them, buy from them, and use those buys back home.

French fleas

Scattered throughout Ontario, like glitter-



ing gems on a necklace, are flea markets that offer unique delights. Though our urge to uncover fabulous finds at bargain prices is not new (flea markets have been around for hundreds of years), our enthusiasm for bringing these finds home and

using them in creative ways is new.

Whether you're on the search for that one final addition to a treasured collection, a perfect memento, brocante (vintage collectibles or small antiques with charm but little monetary value), or for a specific item of furniture, you'll find it at a flea market.

The art of flea marketing

There's an art to successful flea marketing. Some tactics are useful at any flea market (you'd better keep money tucked away). Others are specific to a particular place. In

France, if you don't begin an exchange with *bonjour Madame* or *Monsieur*, you are finished. Ontario's dealers stand less on protocol still; I've known several dealers who refuse to sell to buyers who are 'unappreciative.'

Show your enthusiasm for a dealer's goods before venturing to make a deal. Negative comments ("You can't be serious, that isn't worth that much!") are unlikely to result in positive negotiating. Remember that the dealer has probably spent weeks and weeks acquiring these items to sell.

If you are considering a particular item for purchase, keep your hand on the goods. This signals to the dealer (and other potential buyers) that you were there first.

Determining the size of a flea market find, especially a big one, can be a chal-



DID YOU HEAR...?

- While 60% of shoppers make one main grocery shopping trip each week, 93% say they also have to make top-up trips during the week.
- In the next 30 years, 3 million more people are expected to move to the Greater Toronto Area.
- Today, 11 million English-speaking Canadians regularly read books, twice as many as did in 1978.

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lence as few of us carry a tape measure. Here's a very handy tip – know the dimensions of your hand (mine is 4 in. wide) or the size of Canadian bills (6 in. long).

Kimberley's classic flea finds

Part of a flea market's allure is the variety of tempting possibilities. These are some classic flea market finds.

■ *Copper cookware* – with its mellow glow, it adds a classic French accent to the kitchen. In France, copper cookware was

produced in large quantities, starting in the 17th century. Chefs prefer copper because it distributes heat evenly and quickly.

■ *Garden furniture* – especially classics such as 1940s and 1950s motel chairs with their rounded backs and 'S' curve legs. Also look for classic garden urns. Some scraping with a wire brush and a new coat of enamel paint will have these items looking mint again in no time.

■ *Buoys* – colourful painted wooden buoys from the 1940s and 1950s add a nautical flare to interiors. Collect a series of five or more and hang them on a wall.

■ *Antique mirrors* – are a welcome addition to almost any interior. A small amount



Variety is the allure

of black dotting on the mirror is considered desirable, indicating spots where the backing has worn thin.

■ *Architectural salvage* – pieces from old buildings such as brackets and finials (especially a pair!), or even small portions of columns or pedestals can be introduced into contemporary interiors, adding Old World elegance. Wrought iron gates look fetching as sculpture on interior walls, and any of these pieces look just as good outdoors as they do indoors.

■ *Limoges boxes* are highly favoured by collectors who appreciate their tiny



DID YOU HEAR...?

- Experts who study kissing are called philematologists.
- The Nanticoke coal-fired electricity generating station on Lake Erie is Canada's single largest source of air pollution.
- Over 80% of Canadian-authored books are published by Canadian-owned publishing firms.

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charms. Produced since the 17th century, these little treasures were originally made to hold snuff, perfume or small gifts. The name Limoges doesn't refer to a company, rather it refers to a county in France – much the same way that champagne refers to a region.

■ *McCoy Pottery* – especially popular is the pottery from the 1930s and 1940s. Many buyers prefer to collect one particular colour; white and aqua are popular, while burgundy is often overlooked.

■ *Lighting* – chandeliers, sconces, table lamps and floor lamps are typically plentiful at flea markets.

■ *Stools and ladders* – vintage milking stools and ladders of virtually every height are great finds. Use a stepladder as a side table, adorning the steps with books and collectibles.

Ontario flea markets

■ *Flavours of France*: Liz Hawley travels to France and returns to Canada with a container-load of fabulous finds, which she offers to Canadians at private sales. Don't miss it. For information please call 416-488-2706 or 905-468-2766 or visit www.flavoursoffrance.com.

■ Also watch for **Christie's Classic Antiques Show** – the Spring show is May 29, 2004, and the Fall event is Sept. 11, 2004. With more than 300 booths, this show is rated by collectors and dealers as Canada's favourite antique show. Where? Christie Conservation Area in Dundas, Ont., on Highway 5, 9 km west of Highway 6.

■ **The Aberfoyle Antique Show**, May 8, 2004, August 14, 2004 and October 30, 2004, features 150-200 dealers. Where? Near Guelph, Ont. – continue up Highway 6 to 1.6 km north of Highway 401 at Exit 299. Check out the website at www.flamboro.com.

■ **Kelso Conservation Area Antiques Show**, June 12, 2004 and September 25, 2004, has 150 dealers specializing in antiques and collectibles (no reproductions or crafts). Where? Milton, Ont., about 35 minutes from Toronto. 🍁

■ *Kimberley Seldon is an internationally known designer and writer, as well as host of Design for Living with Kimberley Seldon on Toronto One, and a regular guest on City TV's CityLine. For more information, visit www.kimberleyseldon.com.*



DID YOU HEAR...?

- Canada's population on Jan. 1, 2004, was 31,752,842, up 276,843 from a year earlier. Ontario accounts for 12,293,669 (roughly 40%) of the total.
- Of Canada's 13 provinces and territories, only five have populations that exceed a million: Ontario (12.3 million), Quebec (7.5 million), British Columbia (4.1 million), Alberta (3.2 million) and Manitoba (1.2 million).