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BASEMENTS FULL OF TREASURES

A guide to shopping
Atlanta estate sales

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Photography by **The Sintoses**

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For savvy shoppers, estate sales are a bargain and an adventure all at once. You'll find home decor, appliances, clothing, and everything in between well below the original ticket price. At an estate sale, a homeowner's belongings are organized for sale, often after they've passed or are downsizing to a smaller home. Generally, the sales are managed by a third-party estate sale company, which takes a percentage of revenue in exchange for preparing the home's contents for sale. They usually take place in the home itself, so you can make your way through rooms full of interesting goods, priced and ready for browsing—all while taking a peep inside midcentury ranches, Victorian manses, and Craftsman cottages across the city.

"I feel like Decatur is kind of more your eclectic, artsy kind of town, and then Sandy Springs is a little bit fancier," says Kelsey Waterworth, owner of Fresh Start Estate Sales. "Different parts of town obviously have different things, but that's not true across the board."

Ruth Hartman, owner of Ruth's Reselling, has her time-trusted favorites. "Tucker, Avondale Estates, Stone Mountain, Decatur—those are our sweet spots," says Hartman, who has been in the business for more than a decade. Her client families in these neighborhoods are often the first and only owner of the home. "People have been there for 40 years or more. The basement is full of treasures," she explains. "The wallpaper is usually still up from when they bought the house. The green shag carpet is still there. It's going back in time."

Part of the magic of estate sales is exploring the world built by the homeowner, says Randall Hudson of Crystal Clear Advisors. "Everything that is in that house is somewhat of a treasure, otherwise it wouldn't be there," he says. "The stuff in the junk drawer or the little tchotchkes that a lot of the younger generation doesn't care about now meant something to them."

Estate sales aren't just a bargain; they're also a way to shop sustainably, giving used goods a second life. Younger shoppers are increasingly drawn to estate sales, according to *Modern Retail*. It's part of a larger secondhand trend among Gen Z shoppers, who are motivated by lower prices, sustainability, and the chance to find something unique and

special—such as 1996 Olympic merch, a current craze in the Atlanta thrift scene.

To make the most of estate sale shopping, try taking a photo of an item in the Google Lens app, which will pull up listings for similar items from eBay and Etsy, giving you an idea of its value, age, and origins. Estate sellers set their own prices, however, and may or may not be open to negotiation.

"If you're here at the beginning of the first day, don't start bundling [offering a discounted price for multiple items] or haggling," says Hartman. Waterworth agrees that on the first day, prices may be less negotiable. But don't be afraid to ask, she adds: "I wish people would haggle more—come and do the dance with me. But also be within limits. Be respectful."

To stay in the good graces of the fine people who operate estate sales, it's important to respect the home you're in, which doesn't function like a traditional store. Don't open closed doors or go behind taped-off areas. "Blue tape means don't go behind it," Hartman says she tells first-timers.

Waterworth even locks the doors of bathrooms because of past shoppers' behavior. "Remember the human element of people's homes," she says. "You know, this is someone's family."

These experts have seen just about everything, including thwarted theft, fistfights, and requests to purchase unusual items. Hudson even sold a car.

"You know what we sold at a recent sale?" Hartman says. "Dirt from the driveway." She chuckles. "How do you price dirt?" 📍





ESTATE SALE SHOPPING TIPS

FIND (AND CAREFULLY READ) THE LISTINGS

Most estate sale listings will be found on websites like EstateSales.net, local Facebook groups, or signs posted in the surrounding neighborhood. The listings provide the dates and sale location and generally include helpful information such as hours and parking details, as well as photos of select items to give shoppers an idea of what's on offer.

PAY ATTENTION TO DETAILS

Some sales are cash only, while others allow pay apps or credit cards (many charge a credit card fee). Others have limited parking and allow you to use the driveway only for loading large furniture. The listings can also tell you what kind of discounts you can expect: Most estate sales mark down items by 25 to 50 percent on the last days of the sale.

FOLLOW THE RULES

Some sales have a system for entry, especially if it's the first day or if there are highly sought-after items. You may have to physically wait in line to enter (sometimes people line up hours before opening) or be assigned a number so that when the sale opens, you can enter when your number is called. And, as previously mentioned, respect the space; this is someone's home.

LOOK CAREFULLY

While the photos in the listing are the best way to understand the "vibe" of a sale, the most unique items may not even be included. Check out the laundry room, garage, and other parts of the house often overlooked by the crowds, if they're marked open to shoppers: That's how one recent estate sale visitor found a Hermès scarf in a \$2 bin.

PRICES AREN'T ALWAYS SET IN STONE

While most items are prepriced, there is usually room for negotiation. Some estate sales offer discounts for "bundles," or several pieces purchased at once; you may see signs listing this option, or feel free to offer the deal yourself. But be respectful with your haggling—don't throw out ridiculously low offers and expect it to work.



● Clockwise from top: Randall Hudson of Crystal Clear Advisors before a sale at a Decatur home; vintage Barbies priced for purchase; midcentury glassware and ceramics on offer