

unused, would look perfect with the chairs and in our new abode. Unbelievably, a cabinet with ideal dimensions for whisky bottles was standing right beside it: a classy mid-Victorian piece that a misjudged “distressed” paint job had reduced to £140.

The competition at Dagfields means striking a bargain is positively encouraged, despite ticket prices already well below the equivalent costs at even the cheaper high street stores. By the time the shutters came down we’d bagged the lot for just over £400 – less than the cost of the hated glass table from Habitat a decade earlier. Delivery to Manchester, a round trip of 85 miles, was £25, and a rapid survey of the other four sheds secured a Victorian woven linen chest and an Art Nouveau plant-stand for about the same amount. The excitement was so great, I barely slept all night.

Eager to gloat to those slaves to mass production I call friends, I totted up the cost of equivalent buys from popular high street retailers. At Laura Ashley, my £400 would have bought me about a third of an almost identical (repro) cabinet, while even at Ikea I would have paid around £1,150 for the closest equivalents in softwood or MDF and flat-packed for self-assembly. With the quality, condition and appeal of the furniture I’d found I was well and truly bitten by the non-new bug, and a wealth of other buying options soon started to reveal itself.

Researching a feature on Manchester retail gems I spent half my day in the Northern Quarter’s retro outlets, unable to resist a 1960s handkerchief bowl for £8 in the long-established Pop Boutique (branches in Leeds and Liverpool). And en route to a weekend in Scarborough I followed a maternal tip-off to the Georgian Rooms – a winning combination of old-fashioned tea rooms and meandering antiques shop – securing a 1930s vase and jug and a Victorian cake stand for a Kidston-busting £10 (reduced from £13.50 without my even asking) and a mean poached eggs on toast.

Only a fortnight later I was at it again, prowling Howards’ antiques fair at Stockport Town Hall to pick up six Midwinter-style 1960s plates for less than £1



Why spend high street money on something mass produced and soulless?

Top: vintage crockery can be picked up for less than £1 a piece. Above: Silver-plated cutlery starts from around £3.50 for a set of teaspoons. Left: not on sale at a high street near you

Where to look

Antiques centres: Dagfields Antiques Emporium, near Nantwich, www.dagfields.co.uk; Bygone Times, near Chorley, www.bygonetimes.co.uk; the Georgian Rooms, Old Bridlington, www.thegeorgianroomsbridlington.webeden.co.uk; Pickering Antiques Centre, www.pickeringantiquecentre.co.uk; Royal Arcade, Southport, www.visitsouthport.com/site/shopping/royal-arcade-p101643. Directory: www.antiques-atlas.com

Retro shops: Pop Boutiques, Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool, www.pop-boutique.com; Space, Harrogate, www.spaceharrogate.com; Atomic Retro, Todmorden, www.retro-atomic.co.uk

Charity homeware shops: Barnardo’s, www.barnardos.org.uk/shop/shops.htm; British Heart Foundation, www.bhf.org.uk; Salvation Army: www.salvationarmy.org.uk

Antique and vintage fairs: Howards Fairs, Stockport: 0161 428 4191; across the region, www.dualco.co.uk; Vintage Village, Stockport, www.vintagevillagestockportmarket.co.uk. Directory: www.vintagefair.co.uk

Salvage yards: In Situ, Manchester: www.insitumanchester.com; Viking, Doncaster: www.reclaimed.co.uk. Directory: www.salvo.co.uk

Auction rooms: Marshall’s, Knutsford, www.frankmarshall.co.uk; Capes Dunn, Manchester, www.capedunn.com; York Auction Centre, www.ylc.co.uk. Directory: www.auctionguides.co.uk/areaprot/auction_details/northern_england.htm

Online: www.ebay.co.uk; www.retrogalaxy.com; www.channel4.com/4homes/on-tv/kirstie-s-homemade-home

each. Stockport also hosts a monthly vintage fair in its Victorian Market Hall, offering a plethora of retro and hand-made goods as well as clothes and jewellery. Similar events are now held in York Hospitium, Leeds Corn Exchange, Manchester’s Triangle and the Workstation, Sheffield, suggesting demand for second-hand goods way beyond the boundaries of auction houses and “ring to enter” antiques shops.

I’d always thought I was a pioneer of using the used, having previously relied on salvage yards like Doncaster’s Viking Reclamation and Manchester’s In Situ to revive an Edwardian terrace suffering from a 1970s makeover, but my recent purchases have shown me that few day-to-day items aren’t also cheaper, better made and far more interesting when bought second-hand. Even charity shops and boot sales (especially those in better-off areas) still regularly turn up desirable crockery, cutlery, fabrics and furniture from across the last 120 years, often for small change and with all the Brownie points that come with re-using existing goods with plenty of life left in them.

Perhaps most importantly, finding unusual – possibly unique – versions of the things you need can be a great thrill, giving you a huge sense of achievement while saving money and waste. I may not like some of her politics but I have to concede Allsop’s point on this one: one man’s trash continues to be another woman’s treasure. ■