

The 5 Step Guide to Buying Thrift Store Furniture

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When buying thrift store furniture, you want your piece to ultimately look nice, serve it's intended purpose, and be economical. This five step process has always gotten me the perfect pieces for my home, so I'm really excited to share it with you!

1. Ask yourself: What do you need? Are you in need of a desk to tackle home paperwork? Or maybe a big table for your kids to do homework? Or storage areas that a dresser could provide? That, and that alone, is what you are looking for.
2. Develop a maximum price you are willing to pay for your item. I've provided a guide for some typical items below, but your area may be more or less expensive than mine. Also, keep in mind that you may need to purchase other supplies (paint, stain, etc.) to perfect your item once it's purchased.
3. Go thrift shopping! See list on next page of places to shop. As you shop, remember that you area looking for an item that suits your purpose.
4. When you've found an item, run through these five tests:
 - Is this item in your set price range? If not, move on.
 - Is this a high quality piece? I avoid particleboard- it's a cheap material that typically has a laminate coating that is more difficult to paint or stain, plus it doesn't hold up being moved around very well. It also loses structural stability if you try and cut it at all. You can tell if a piece is particleboard by finding a rough exposed edge. If it looks like a bunch of ground up wood fibers stuck together, it's particleboard. If it looks like normal wood, it's wood.
 - Do any drawers smell bad? Smells are notoriously hard to get rid of, and this may be the one thing you can't fix. If you smell something funny, move on.
 - What repairs need to be done? Frequent issues include:
 - Scratches, dings, and paint on the surface, meaning you'll need to refinish the piece
 - Missing hardware (pulls and such,) so you may need to purchase new hardware
 - Missing or broken drawers

Make sure that you're aware of any problems, and able to fix them. If you can fix them- great! If not, keep looking.

 - If you are thinking of bringing home something upholstered, a sofa or recliner for example, does this item have bedbugs? You can start by asking the thrift store owners if they have any preventative bedbug measures, such as heat treatments. If not, look carefully under cushions and at the seams for bedbugs or droppings. If you see any signs, stay away, no matter how much you love the piece. A possible bed bug infestation is not worth it.

5. Purchase the item!

Pricing Guide

Below I've listed out a variety of common household furniture and what you can expect to pay for each item. Note that the "typical price" is not an average, but the lowest price that I most frequently see a basic version of this item in fair condition priced at (aka, the mode.) It's the price I have in mind when I go looking for an item in thrift stores.

Item	Typical Price	Lowest Price Seen
Dining Table and Four Chairs	\$50	\$30
Desk	\$30	\$6
Bookshelf	\$30	\$10
End Table	\$20	\$8
Dresser	\$30	\$10
Barstool	\$25	\$5

Where To Buy

While there are a number of national chain stores, I've found that pricing tends to vary by location. For example, the Savers stores in the California Bay Area mark their furniture to sell quickly; most items are under \$20. In comparison, the Savers in the St. Louis area price their items a little higher; most furniture items are in the \$20-\$60 range.

As a result, you'll need to scope out the stores near you, and find which ones have the best selection and value. The list below contains a number of national chains that I've had success with.

Goodwill

- In my experience they have a good variety of common items- tables, desks, dressers, etc. There is definitely some sort of filtering system; not everything that is donated to them makes it to the floor, reducing the variety of what you'll find to what people will commonly purchase. If you're looking for something more unique, this may not be your place.

Habitat For Humanity Restore

- Store selection varies considerably from store to store. Some stores have a large selection of well-priced furniture, others tend to focus on building materials. I love visiting stores when I'm traveling just to see what they have in comparison to my store. In the various Restores I've visited, I've seen cabinet doors, vanities, tile, flooring, replacement doors, shutters, replacement windows, electrical components, paint supplies, Christmas lights, and I'm sure many other things that I've forgotten about. It's definitely worth checking out your nearest store!

Salvation Army

- The Salvation Army stores in my area only sell furniture in good to excellent condition, and they price it pretty high compared to other thrift stores. I don't frequent them much, but it might be worth checking out your store to see how their prices compare.

Savers

- Savers is the only store on this list that is a for-profit company. Prices vary widely based on location, so check yours out to see if the prices are low enough to be worth visiting frequently. Additionally, if you donate your own items to Savers, you get coupons to save up to 30% off your purchase.

You are ready to go! Good luck, and let me know how it goes!