



See how far Chicagoans
go to carve out juicy

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GAZE YOUR INTEREST at antique jewelry, musical instruments and more at the fair.

Shop talk

Booth lectures make
antiques more accessible.

By Madeline Nusser

This weekend, the Merchandise Mart will transform into a veritable History Museum. The International Antiques Fair, part of the Mart's Artropolis offerings, will teem with period furnishings and historical objects hawked by more than 130 reputable dealers. If you've been thinking about starting your own antique collection, the Mart's booth talks—educational lectures about purchasing—will spell out the ropes of the trade. To give you a head start before you arrive, we queried some of the speakers for pointers. If you're in a look-but-don't-touch mode (thanks, sluggish economy!), we also snagged some tips on budget buying, in case you decide to splurge.

Jewelry

With more than 15 years at the business, Philadelphia jewelry dealer Michael Haber has literally been around the world and been searching for and selling antique and estate jewelry. His words of wisdom for shoppers: Buy what you like. "I've had groups of women that were amazed and say the same thing for each item: expensive than the last. But you should always go with your gut

because you're going to have to wear it," Haber says.

Haber also starts by checking out the jewelry purveyor or purveyors. While jewelers can be a real mess as institutions, Haber says picking a jeweler based on word-of-mouth reputation is the best way to go.

Haber encourages you to assess the worth of jewelry as your own, by looking at its intrinsic value. "If you take the diamonds out of the piece, is it worth anything if based on the nature of how it's made, the rarity and the design?" The piece's condition, maker's marks and history also add value. Haber recommends that first-timers with a budget (open up smiles, soon-to-be engaged couples) choose higher-quality gems over big, mediocre pieces—especially when buying diamonds, which, if you don't appreciate as much. As Haber puts the decision between size and quality: "I have a trade-off in life we all have to make."

Art

Joe Pincarelli, whose North Carolina gallery McCall Fine Art specializes in 17th- and 18th-century European and American painting, says the first thing you should do in a fair or gallery is make a decision on the painting that's attractive to you. "Don't look for down the road, parents' appreciation,

because if it doesn't happen, you're going to be really unhappy."

Pincarelli also warns: "Don't be intimidated making a purchase." Get comfortable with a gallery by asking questions about their artwork as well as the gallery's policies. Since the Antique Fair features work by live artists, the dealer should have information on an artwork's history and provenance, or origin of ownership. As for policies, Pincarelli says a gallery should be willing to make artwork back and, in the latter, the dealer should also agree to work with you to make up. "If a representative is selling a work for piece of art, they should be able to stand back if it really is that good," says Pincarelli.

For folks on a budget, Pincarelli encourages sinking all your allotted money into one piece of art. "It's a better investment than trying to 'fill up walls.'"

Furniture

Allen Conlan hawks 18th- and 19th-century English and American furniture and folk art—he has and treated class collector before opening Curran St. John's Antiques, his Massachusetts dealership. Conlan's talk will feature his personal anecdotes—an especially valuable chestnut for first-time purchasers. First on his list: When you find an

item of interest, start by asking the dealer about the piece's period. Beware of scheming dealers: "Furniture is legally different than 'art' because period refers to the date, not just the decorative qualities." Then, look at the object and consider whether the lines and color are pleasing to the eye. Find the number of repairs, which dealers at the fair are required to document. If a piece of furniture has had too many repairs, don't buy it; it might have little originality and therefore lack value.

Once that list is checked off, Conlan maintains there's no right or wrong item to buy. "With antiques, most people feel too uncomfortable because they're thinking about Granger's house," says Conlan. "It's really like drinking wine: If you like it, it's right." Conlan encourages burgeoning collectors to avoid pricey furniture and begin humbly—go for a lamp or a porcelain history box. "In the beginning buy small, but buy right. Your collection will increase in value overtime," he says.

Pincarelli speaks about "The Art of Buying Art" Fri 25 at 2pm. Conlan gives "Top Tips for Acquiring Antique Furniture" Sat 26 at 2pm, and Haber's "Buyers' Guide to Antique Jewelry" Sun 27 at 2pm. See TimeOutChicago.com for listings.