

THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO CHELSEA...

...what to see, where to go, what to buy

By Michele Keith

Photographs by Atsushi Tomioka

While many long-time businesses have disappeared, some of New Yorkers' favorite resources for fabulous things to wear, invest in, and simply add sparkle to life continue to thrive; and many of the new ones that have sprung up are most welcomed additions.

Some of the best are difficult to find due to deceptively uninspired storefronts or locations on upper floors, so *New York Living* turned to three experts for help. From calla lilies to cuff links, art work to armoires, Helena Lehane, Benjamin Huntington, and Lorinda Ash share their well-honed knowledge and offer valuable tips to help us get what we want.

A PASSION FOR POSIES

"I paint in three-dimension," says "couture florist" Helena Lehane. And like any great artist, her flower arrangements reflect her skill with composition, color, shape, texture, and balance. In the twenty years since Lehane began her business, she has redefined the meaning of "florist," directing everything she feels necessary for a beautiful environment, residence, or commercial space, from lighting to menus, napery to the flowers inside and out.

Among her A-list clients, Lehane is known for her voluptuous use of "a million stems in vessels great and small." Always on the lookout for out-of-the-ordinary vases in which to put arrangements—one of her secret sources in the city is antiques dealer Scott Drevnig—she takes the precaution to enclose beautifully inscribed cards with instructions for their care.

According to one wholesaler, the floral market is 12 to 15 percent smaller than even five years ago. But the handful that Lehane deals with has been in the area for at least 20 years. "All are to-the-trade only," she explains, "and experts in their field." Part of the "6 AM Club," as she calls the group that regularly descends upon G. Page Wholesale Flowers, she has relied on this family-owned business for "the very best, best, best quality in

cut flowers imported from Holland and France" for two decades. With electronica playing in the background, owner Gary Page or daughter Lauren are always on hand with the newest hybrids and most extraordinary blooms. Lehane loves the ombre affect produced with one variety of roses there that gently range from white to champagne to bisque, and such rare beauties as the orange-toned sweet peas.

For orchids and potted plants, Lehane goes to Foliage Garden located in the same building. Owners MaryAnn and John Finnegan are representative, she says, of those select few with the depth of understanding needed in her business. While you can provide your own pots for them to fill, she adores their hand-distressed terra-cotta ones covered with moss and looking like they've been buried in the garden of a Parisian hotel particulier since 1825.

"The importance of the right container cannot be overemphasized," stresses Lehane, "When right, it adds so much, but when it's wrong..." For contemporary ones she relies on Paula at Planter Resource. "At times highly unusual, the stock—ceramic to fiber glass to wood, along with new terra-cotta ones—turns over frequently."

One of Lehane's signature treatments for large, high-ceilinged spaces is a massive spray of 500-plus stems of quince. And for that, no one compares with U.S. Evergreens. "Quince, magnolia, weeping willow, plum, cherry, and forsythia are in the gorgeous selection, and if you don't know what might work best for your home, owner Gus Theofanis will guide you wisely." He also carries a few whimsical, toddler-size chairs and benches of birch or wisteria and grapevine wreaths.

Each of these places will request your resale number, Lehane points out, and she recommends the surrounding area for necessities like ribbons and knives.

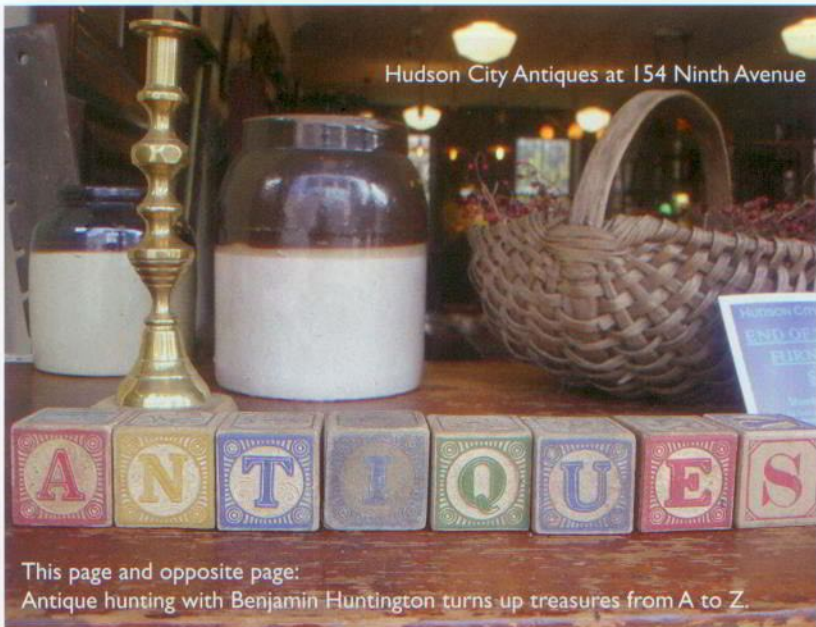




THE CHALLENGE IS IN THE CHASE

Growing up near King's Road in London, Benjamin Huntington, A.S.I.D., considered it "a treat to muck about Portobello Road looking for things that caught my fancy, valuable or not." He never outgrew this, and while today he designs high-end residences in New York, he still scavenges Chelsea's flea markets most weekends. So spot-on are his finds, Huntington says, that "probably half of my apartment is from these searches." And we're talking top-of-the-line here: an antique Putnam rolling ladder, the kind favored by Diane von Fürstenberg, for \$80; elegant Italian ties for next to nothing; and an early-18th-century silver salter for \$20, a "fantastic example of 'salvaging,' where hallmarks are cut out for use on fake antiques." One of his favorite haunts is the open-air flea market on 25th Street between Broadway and Sixth, similar to the many that disappeared due to the building craze. While nameless, it is simple to find, located next to a historic Serbian Orthodox Cathedral, and marked by a yellow banner. Huntington likes it especially for the few dealers who "do true housecleaning," bringing in items of an anthropological nature: photos, books, letters. It's where, he says, "you'll find the archetypal diamond in the rough." He also likes the decorative African and Chinese antiquities, "although most of them are reproductions," and the section devoted to used electronics—mainly televisions, cell phones, cameras, and DVDs. "Be prudent," he counsels. "Test before buying. Nearly all the dealers will allow you to

run across the street to a shop where you can do this" if you don't have the necessary component with you. Across the street is the Antiques Showplace with four floors of 200-plus galleries. Like a glittering mall for big spenders with boutique-like stalls and beautifully lit, glass vitrines filled with precisely laid-out treasures, it's "a flea market without the hunt; you can find what you want simply by asking." A good place for presents, he has found signed engravings, fine jewelry, watches, and silver. A reputable silversmith at the back of the main floor repairs and polishes silver items. His last "must" is The Antiques Garage, where amassed over two cement floors are huge selections of jewelry, vintage clothes, carpets, posters, fine silver, and even diamonds from a spectrum of eras. Though it looks haphazard, "these merchants really know their stuff, so prices are better than in stores, but are not bargains," he warns. With about 80 dealers total, Huntington suggests mapping a route. Attracting fashion designers, photographers, and other New York glitterati, it's easy to get distracted here. Smaller places frequented by Huntington include Housing Works Thrift Shop for furniture and vintage clothing and shoes; Angel Street Thrift Shop for decorative objects, clothes, and fashionable accessories; 17 @ 17 Thrift Shop for designer-label clothes for men and women (as at all the thrift shops, clothes are organized by color, so patience is needed to find the correct size) and furniture. The small, outdoor Chelsea Antique Collectible Flea Market can be good for small tools like screwdrivers and hammers, as well as for Russian icons and furniture.



Hudson City Antiques at 154 Ninth Avenue

This page and opposite page:
Antique hunting with Benjamin Huntington turns up treasures from A to Z.



Pippin Antiques at
112 1/2 West 17th Street



With Beverly Spurling of
Oddities & Eccentricities
at the Antiques Garage.



Searching for treasures at the
Antiques Garage

- Benjamin Huntington's insider tips:
- o Always buy with caution.
 - o The earlier the hour, the better the prices.
 - o All prices are negotiable. Don't be afraid to lowball. You're not insulting dealers; the worst that can happen is they'll turn their back.
 - o When items are neatly arranged, prices are usually higher.
 - o If you see something you truly want, but don't have the asking price, tell the dealer you'll be back at day's end. They might accept your lower offer on the spot simply to be rid of it.

