

Tips for Shoppers

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Estate Sales: 15+ Popular Items & Tips for Shoppers

Are you someone who gets excited to visit an estate sale? Getting a great deal? Or finding that perfect item once you uncover what you have been looking for? We understand! Silver can be polished, gold jewelry is always a good buy, and costume jewelry is downright cool! Even if you don't make a purchase, simply attending an estate sale is enough to put a smile on your face. Think about an estate sale as a garage sale on steroids. Estate sales can be thrilling.

When [shopping at an estate sale](#), there are steps you can take to *improve your chance of getting exactly what you want at a price you can afford*. Some items are worth buying while others are not. So, we've written this guide for you to help you find what you are looking for and know how and what to buy when it comes to:

Furniture, Antique Jewelry and Sterling Silver, Rugs, Electronics, Designer Items, Vinyl Records, Watches, Power Tools, Kitchenware, Home Office Equipment, Sports Equipment, MLB Autographs, Motorcycles, Jukebox, and Holiday Shopping.

Answer these Questions before Making a Purchase

- Are you okay with the quality of the item? Remember, most of the items for sale have been "broken in" by somebody else. That being said, this won't always impact the overall quality.
- Is the price fair? The more estate sales you attend, especially those managed by a reputable company, the more you will realize this to be true: the pricing is typically dead on. Even so, you owe it to yourself to compare numbers to make sure you are comfortable with the price.
- Is it something you have been searching for? If the answer is yes, don't hesitate to pull the trigger. Based on our experience, the longer you wait the more chance there is that somebody will swoop in and grab the item.

1. Furniture

From tables to chairs to dressers, solid wood furniture never goes out of style. Shopping for furniture at local estate sales gives you the opportunity to buy high quality pieces at affordable prices. Particularly for younger buyers, estate sales allows them to furnish their homes with items of such quality that they normally wouldn't be able to afford until they are decades older.



Why not consider refinishing an old piece of furniture from an estate sale before you spend money on something new? Solid wood furniture is an estate sale buyer favorite because it is durable, built to last, looks good in many rooms, and is easier to restore. If a piece is solid wood, it is almost always better quality than furniture that is made from wood veneer, plywood, etc. There is nothing more exciting than finding a durable, attractive piece for your home. With wood furniture, check the joints to get a better idea of the integrity of the construction: are the joints so tight you have a hard time finding them? Are the joints loose to the point that the furniture is almost pulling apart?

With upholstered furniture, check the foam. A density rating of 1.8 pounds or higher typically signifies a high quality piece. If possible, unzip seat cushions and take a look inside. Is the foam block wrapped in fiber? It should be. High end upholstered furniture typically includes a protective inner cover as well.

Finally, one piece of advice, when furnishing a home it is important to be patient. The beauty of an estate sale is if you can wait, eventually exactly what you are looking for will be offered for sale.

Tip: don't buy anything you can't get home. Though, most estate sale companies will hold your purchase until the final day of the sale giving you time to make arrangements for you to pick-up the item. Good quality estate sales companies also have built relationships with good local movers willing to move individual pieces at reasonable prices.

2. Antique Jewelry and Sterling Silver

You can find unique items as well as sterling silver at a reasonable price. On antique pieces, make sure to check for an initial or company symbol. If a piece of jewelry was made before the 1950's it is likely to have some type of mark. Also, when it comes to antique jewelry, signs of wear are common. From tarnish to small imperfections, this is something you should expect. If a piece looks brand new but the seller is telling you it is an antique, be sure to find out why. Has it been restored? Is it a fake? Finally, high quality antique jewelry is not going to be sold for a few bucks. For this reason, if a piece is priced extremely low there is a good chance it is a fake.

Sterling silver is a hot item for buyers. Some finds are silver plated utensils, tea services, plates, etc. instead of sterling silver, but some are actually sterling. You can still find some good buys, like \$5 to \$10 for a silver-plated teakettle. To identify sterling



silver from silver plated items, look for the mark. Sterling silver is marked “sterling”, “925”, or “English hallmarks”.

Make sure you inspect pieces carefully before making purchases since most estate sales companies sell all items as all sales final, no refunds, and no returns.

3. Rugs

Purchasing handmade rugs can sometimes be tricky. So, you need some knowledge to avoid mistakes. There are 1) genuine handmade rugs that are copies of famous patterns or 2) rugs that are unique or one of a kind. Generally speaking, Persian, Caucasian, and certain Turkish rugs are in the second category. There are numerous rugs available that were made in Romania, China, India, Turkey, and Pakistan in which the designs are copies from Persian rugs, Caucasian, etc. You should be aware that these rugs’ colors change from time to time to reflect current fashions.

Tip: ask 3 questions: Where was the rug made? What is the knot count? (Low quality or coarsely made rugs are 25-50 knots per square inch). What is the condition of the rug? (Almost all Persian rugs or those made under the influence of Persian rugs should be symmetrical. They should be without moth damage, patches, touch-up paint, dry rot, and pet stains as well).

If a rug is a Persian or certain unique piece from Turkey, such as Oushak, or an old Agra from India, or an authentic Caucasian: the older the better. Look for beauty.

4. Electronics, TVs and Computers

Check if the electronic item works before buying. This is usually as simple as powering up the item, by plugging it in or relying on battery power. It’s not uncommon to find a television (or several) for sale at an estate sale. It can often be difficult to decipher one model from another. For example, Dell has manufactured hundreds of computer models over the years. The best way to know what you are getting is a simple Internet search. At first glance, what do you see? From there, dig deeper in an attempt to find the model number. TV labels on the back of the TV offer a wealth of information. Some models even have a label indicating the year of manufacture. With all this information in hand, do a quick online search. Seek information on the new price, features, user reviews, and reliability ratings.



Do your best to get a better idea of the electronic/television's age, as well as how often it has been used. A make, model, and serial number should help you learn more about the age.

Tip: if it looks beaten up, such as scratches on a TV screen, it is likely that it hasn't been treated well over the years. A reputable estate sale company will have priced the item accordingly.

Finally, check for damage. Is the screen cracked? Is the exterior shell damaged? Normal wear and tear is natural. Don't expect the item to be brand new. You want to look for something major, something that proves that the computer has not been kept in good condition.

5. Designer Purses and Shoes

Make sure you are getting the real thing. Ask yourself: are you okay with the condition? Is it still hot or trendy? Let's face it: the most popular designer purses and shoes from 2010 may *not* do much for you right now. Before you buy, take a close look at the item. Don't make a purchase simply because of the brand. Do know this: estate sales can actually be a GREAT place to buy designer shoes and purses and scarves, etc. It is up to the buyer to determine if the items are real, but some brands never go out of style, such as Gucci, Fendi, Ferragamo, Hermes, Bally, etc. Also women's clothing sells better than men's clothing.

6. Vinyl Records

If you are interested in buying vinyl records, you know you can't visit the local Wal-Mart to find what you are looking for. Instead, you will have to get creative. In addition to shopping online (such as on eBay), don't overlook the benefits of scouring local estate sales. Everybody has a different taste in music, meaning that the records you are searching for may not be the same as the next person. Like most, you will probably search for records based on your personal taste in music or for the cover art. Vinyl is not purchased only for the album, but also for the cover art. As with everything, albums are about condition, condition, condition.

See if you can find some of the most popular vinyl records of all-time, including: The Beatles – Revolver, Bob Dylan – Blonde on Blonde, and David Bowie – Ziggy Stardust. Most vinyl albums will be inexpensive but first pressing and popular artists with longevity, like the Beatles, may be priced higher.



7. Watches

When shopping for a watch at an estate sale, it is important to differentiate high quality from low quality. There are people out there who think that heavy watches are old and unreliable. This is not true. A high quality watch feels like a high quality watch. When you put a watch on your wrist you want it to feel sturdy, not like a plastic toy.

Before you ever consider a purchase, you should learn more about the watch itself, including the maker. For example, the Rolex name is one of the best in the industry. As long as you are buying a real Rolex, not a fake (Fauler), you can be rest assured that it is of the highest quality. Watches from the Great Depression era and railroad watches are also popular; these are pocket watches that are marked 18K (gold) but are actually no-K since they were from the Depression. However, the movements (the mechanics inside the watch) are fantastic.

Tip: consider the sweep. What do you see as the second hand moves around the face? You don't want to visibly notice any stoppage in movement. It should glide around the dial, never missing a beat or appearing "clunky."

8. Power Tools

A good wood working shop is an excellent draw to an estate sale. Power tools and hand tools, such as nail guns, hammers, saws, and drills are popular. Larger tools like air compressors, air filtration systems, jig saws, band saws, table saws, planers, etc. are also bought and sold regularly. Test the tool if possible. This will give you a clear idea of whether or not it is in good working condition. How much wear and tear is too much wear and tear? Are the grips worn out? Are there missing parts? Also, pay attention to the power cord and/or battery. Some power tools have a cord, while others are run on battery power. Either way, this is the power source. Without one or the other, the tool is not going to work. A power cord that is taped together or frayed is a bad sign. A tool without a battery cannot be tested. If you aren't happy with the power supply, you may want to think twice about making a purchase.

9. Kitchenware: Silverware, Dishware, and Used China

Why pay a lot of money for new glasses? You can find glasses as cheap as \$1 or so. Who wants to spend their hard earned money on brand new, expensive kitchenware? Here are several tips to help you purchase silverware or dishware at an estate sale:

Focus on quality. Don't purchase silverware or dishware that is stained or littered with debris. With used china, you may find unique discontinued patterns that fit in with the



rest of your kitchenware. How often do you use your china? Like most, your answer is probably “not often.” For this reason, most used china is in good condition. Don’t be surprised if you find a set that looks like it has never been used.

Can you buy the whole set? If you have the opportunity to purchase an entire set of silverware, for example, it is better than simply buying a few pieces.

Dishes are often times sold at a cheap price. While fine china may set you back an arm and a leg when buying new, this isn’t typically the case at an estate sale.

10. Home Office Furniture and Equipment

Do you need file folders, printers, copiers, or drafting tables? How about racks for stacking ingoing and outgoing mail? You may be surprised at how many miscellaneous items you come across at a well-organized estate sale. The benefits of buying office equipment at an estate sale are: lower prices, no high delivery charge, and the ability to inspect the item before making a purchase.

11. Sports Equipment

Like many, you may be a big sports fan. Even if you aren’t as active as you used to be, there is a chance you have a child or somebody else in your life who enjoys playing one or two sports. Rather than overspend at a local store, such as Dick’s, you can browse estate sales for a great deal on a variety of items: bats, balls, hockey sticks, bikes, jerseys and other gear. We know that you want to look good while playing your favorite sport. Don’t be surprised when you find gently used equipment or gear at a bargain price.

12. MLB Autographs

Every MLB collector dreams of adding a Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Honus Wagner, or Lou Gehrig autograph to his or her collection. While these autographs exist, they are extremely difficult to find. Not to mention the fact that they can cost tens of thousands of dollars. Other autographs are more readily available such as: Pete Rose, Nolan Ryan, Ted Williams, Derek Jeter, or Sandy Koufax. Keep a close eye out for MLB autographs. We have sold some!

13. Motorcycles and Cars

You never know what you will find at an estate sale and there is no guarantee you will find a motorcycle or car, but if you keep an open mind, while continuing to search, you will eventually find what you are looking for. We sell them all the time! And it is usually a great deal for the buyer. When you find one, learn more about the fair market value. It



doesn't matter where you are shopping for a vehicle; you need to know how much it is worth. Ask questions. How old is the bike? Has it ever been involved in an accident? Where has it been stored?

Tip: Remember, you don't have to be in a hurry. The first bike you find may not suit your needs. As long as you keep an open mind, as long as you continue your search, you will eventually find what you are looking for.

14. Jukebox

As you shop estate sales, don't expect to come across a large number of jukeboxes. With the right level of patience, however, you will eventually find what you are looking for. The [oldest jukeboxes](#) date back to the 1920's, making them almost 100 years old. As a consumer, it can be exciting to buy a piece of music history. Before you buy, keep in mind: *condition*. Is it fully restored? Buy it if not only looks good but is also in working order. Is it in good condition? While not fully restored, a jukebox in good condition will have most of its original features. They work reasonably well and are priced lower than those that have been fully restored.

If you come across a jukebox at an estate sale, don't hesitate to inspect each and every inch of the machine, but realize it is not off the market until you commit to the purchase. And of course, find out if it works before making a purchase.

15. Holiday Shopping

Holiday shopping at an estate sale is a great way to save money; stretch your cash as far as possible, get unique items, and avoid the crowds at the mall. At estate sales, shoppers might expect to see popular items such as: necklaces, rings, bracelets, houseware items, holiday decorations, lighted yard characters, tree ornaments, nativity scenes, candle holders, and more.

To go along with Christmas decorations, you will also find those for many other holidays including: Thanksgiving, Halloween, Easter, and Fourth of July.

Rather than buy new items from big box stores, such as Wal-Mart and Target, you can find gently used decorations at an estate sale.

Tip: keep an eye out for items that are no longer sold in stores, as these older decorations are often times coveted as they are hard to find in today's day and age.

So, Are You Wondering How Can You Get Started?



Estate sale crowds at opening can easily reach 100 people or more. If possible, *arrive early*. This gives you first crack at every item for sale, thus improving your chance of getting what you want. Once the house is setup and priced, the sale will open on the day and time advertised. All items are available from the time the sale opens.

Because of the interest in our events on the opening day, the manager on duty will “*sign in*” everyone when he or she arrives at the event site around an hour and a half before opening on the first day of the sale. Doors open promptly at the time advertised on the website. Please note: Four Sales has not accepted or honored so-called “*numbers*” and as a result we have created a level playing field between individuals purchasing for their own use and persons buying for resale. Though, if we have a significant volume of items in showcases, like a coin collection, we may issue access *numbers* for that area of the sale until the initial opening rush is past. This will be announced by the manager at the opening of the sale.

Realize that all items are *priced fairly* from the beginning to the best of our team’s ability. Also, ask for help. Don’t shy away from conversing with the people working the estate sale. They are more than willing to answer your questions and point you in the right direction.

No two estate sales are created equal. You owe it to yourself to [check out each one](#) that fits into your schedule. Review our frequently asked questions (FAQs) [here](#) as well.

We are here to solve problems that are meaningful to you and demonstrate our vast knowledge, expertise and tools to help you get what you need.

About Four Sales

Four Sales (<http://www.foursales.com/>) presents estates with energy, integrity and intelligence. The company has over 40 years in the estate sales business. Four Sales’ method of disposing of household contents helps the seller realize top dollar for the sales household property, and helps buyers get household goods for a fraction of the price.