

Find treasures at vintage, antique, thrift shops

By Jeannie Matteucci

Generation Z is leading a shift in how people are shopping with 64% of shoppers ages 14 to 29 looking for secondhand items first before buying new, according to RetailBoss. Downtown Santa Cruz is ready to welcome those shoppers and others with 18 thrift, vintage, antique and collectible shops.

Small eclectic boutique Miss Jessie May's Antiques & Collectibles on Pacific Avenue is a great first stop. Owner Tyra Vaughan opened her shop with her mother, Margaret, 27 years ago. It carries new and vintage jewelry, antiques, home décor and unique gifts.

"I had a clothing business and was kind of phasing out of that and looking for another business to get into," Vaughan said. "My mother was retired and always interested in antiques. This shop came up for rent, and we decided to just go for it."

The boutique's name has special meaning to Vaughan, her late mother and the rest of their family.

"We named it after my grandmother," Vaughan said. "During the war, she would buy old furniture, refinish it and sell it to make extra money. She always wanted to open a shop of her own but wasn't able to, so we named this shop after her."

When she opened the business, Vaughan recruited several other dealers to create a collective.

"Each of the dealers brings their own personality and creativity to the shop, so we have a wide variety of merchandise," Vaughan said.

Prices in her shop range from \$3 for a vintage postcard to \$2,500 for gold jewelry, she said. Vaughan shared a great example of why you never know what you might find.

"We had some old handwritten letters from World War II that people would buy for art projects," Vaughan said. "One of my customers was reading those letters and found one of them was written to my mother from her boyfriend who was at war. It was so random. They weren't mine; they belonged to another dealer who found them at a flea market or something."

Her boutique attracts a wide range of customers, including locals and international travelers as well as college students from nearby UC Santa Cruz.

"They buy things because they like the look of it, but I've noticed a lot of the younger customers also like to hear the story behind an item," Vaughan said.

She equates thrift and antique shopping in Santa Cruz to a treasure hunt.

"There are small businesses tucked into corners and great collectives," Vaughan said. "It's fun to go shopping here. There are some wonderful little restaurants and tasting rooms for wine. There are also people playing music on the corner. It's a festive atmosphere."

Shoppers looking for rare antiques, crystal barware, unique lamps and fine art can visit Nicely Gallery on Pacific Avenue. Owner Michelle Nicely is an artist who chooses the timeless pieces that shoppers can bring home to personalize their interiors.

"I really wanted a connection with my community and to make a difference," Nicely said. "Being older and with all my kids grown, I had time to poke around and see what I wanted to do."

Her current gallery opened last year, what she calls her "final destination" after operating in two other locations. She offers items priced as low as \$1 for



PHOTOS BY LAURA MORTON

Clockwise from above: Shoppers peruse the items for sale at Miss Jessie May's Antiques & Collectibles in downtown Santa Cruz; a photo of Margaret Vaughan, who started the shop with her daughter, Tyra, hangs in her honor at the shop; Damini Sodera, left to right, Nancy Kanda and Saniya Kanda shop for jewelry together at the antique shop; a sculpture of a Borzoi dog greets people outside the store. Miss Jessie May's is one of almost 18 vintage, antique, thrift and collectible shops in downtown Santa Cruz.



vintage matchbooks and postcards to much more than that for fine art.

"It feels like walking into a piece of time when you walk into my gallery," Nicely said. "Some people say it's like walking into the '60s or '70s or walking into a European shop."

Nicely features work by 20 local artists in her gallery at any one time. She also sells her own art, a collection of coastal pastels that represent the Central Coast and often come in vintage frames. She believes downtown Santa Cruz is a great place for hunting unexpected finds.

"Almost all of us are open Thursday through Sunday," Nicely said. "You may want to check the hours before you come. I'm also available by appointment."

Artifact is another spot to check out, a locally owned and curated vintage clothing and

Details

Miss Jessie May's Antiques & Collectibles: 1533 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz, 831-458-9131, www.instagram.com/missjessiemays

Nicely Gallery: 1349 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz, 831-588-4748, www.nicelysantacruz.com

Artifact: 104 Lincoln St., Santa Cruz, 831-266-7845, www.instagram.com/artifactsantacruz

Pastime Vintage: 108 Walnut Ave., Santa Cruz, 831-266-7845, www.instagram.com/pastimesantacruz

accessories community. Co-owner Isabel Alt, who owns the store with her boyfriend and his best friend, oversees this small business collective. Her family previously sold at community markets and at Pastime Vintage, a sister store on Walnut Avenue the trio now owns.

"It was a no-brainer for me to open something bigger than we

were doing," Alt said. "We were already rooted locally in Santa Cruz selling."

The team opened Artifact in October 2023 on lower Pacific Avenue but moved to a larger location on Lincoln Street just off Pacific Avenue last year. Artifact focuses on slow fashion, inclusivity and sustainability.

"We offer a wide range of

sizes and styles," Alt said. "We wanted to make sure we were bringing a lot of different options to the people of Santa Cruz. The sustainability aspect is very important to us. It's a beach town and people want to shop with the least impact to the environment as possible. People also like to be different, and you get that by thrifting."

True vintage, Y2K, streetwear and contemporary are some of the styles found in the store. Prices range from \$6 for scarves to \$100 or \$150 for a true vintage piece.

"We have a really good price range, and we try to keep things affordable," Alt said. "Thrifting has always been a part of Santa Cruz. We're now keeping it alive with a different age demographic. If you want to find something quirky, that's always something you can find in Santa Cruz."



Left: Tyra Vaughan, left, and her sister Susan talk with customers in their shop Miss Jessie May's Antiques & Collectibles. Right: Antiques of all sorts are displayed at the shop.