



Clockwise from above: antiques markets are a good source of light; Rose barters for a lamp; outside the entrance to Alfie's; sitting pretty among some period furniture

Alfie's Antiques Market

Alfie's Antiques Market, 13-25 Church Street, NW8 (020 7723 6066). Open Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm

'Alfie's is good value and great for Forties and Fifties pieces,' explains interior designer Rose Uniacke. Rose co-owns an antiques shop in Pimlico with her mother, Hilary Batstone, and has been going to markets since she first came to London from Oxfordshire aged 18. As a teenager her favourite was Kensington Market, but today she is much more likely to be found trawling Alfie's for herself and her clients.

Since 1976 over 200 dealers have been trading in this labyrinthine hull of an Edwardian department store. In recent years it has become popular with famous homemakers such as Madonna, Liv Tyler and Kate Moss, who come here for quirky, individual pieces. Even Michael Jackson visited once - to buy memorabilia of himself.

Something soon catches Rose's eye among the vast array of furniture from all over the world. The object of her desire is a chandelier from Vincenzo Caffarella - one of the most interesting stalls in the market - made of C-shaped pieces of frosted glass that can be moved around and repositioned. 'I'd put it in a small space, possibly over a desk, but I

would change the chain to something less shiny,' she says. The price is rather steep at £1,500, but Monica, who is on the stall, says she'll take £1,350 in cash - it is always worth bargaining. Francesca Martire's neighbouring stall also has some impressive 20th-century pieces including a lip-shaped chair with a tongue that you can pull out.

'In markets you'll often find things that have been cobbled together, for example a table that's made up of different legs and a top,' says Rose, 'so always look to see if the legs are original. It's the same if I'm buying painted furniture - I'll want the paintwork to be original.' She tells me to keep an eye out for old window frames that have had a modern mirror glass put in them. 'Firstly, I only ever buy old mirror,' says Rose 'because it gives a softer reflection. And secondly, if the frame is really great then I might hang it on it's own. It shouldn't have to pretend to be something else - the intrinsic value of the piece is enough.'

Rose's style is about balancing hard and soft, mixing modern with old. 'The Forties and Fifties



are very in at the moment,' she says picking up some Fifties Murano glass ashtrays (from £40) from Paola & Iaia, a great find on the first floor. 'But I won't do a house in just one style. I like comfortable, eclectic interiors, with pieces that are old and new. It's a better reflection of the way we live; collecting and combining as we go.'

Although Alfie's doesn't open until 10am, don't get there too early - antiques dealers keep varied hours. On Fridays there's a street market, so it can be busy and Saturdays can be packed with tourists. So, if you can, go during the week when all the tradespeople are there. Rose tells me that it's also worth looking in the other antiques shops in Church Street which are more upmarket. 'You can always find a bargain,' says Rose, 'particularly if a dealer has something that he doesn't usually specialise in. But remember if you're not sure about a piece, then don't buy it.'

As we leave, the fast-talking owner of one of the stands hands me his card. 'Do you want one, Rose?' he asks, as she shakes her head. 'Shame, I've been trying to give her one for years.'

FIVE BEST BUYS:

- Sixties chandeliers from £1,000
- Murano glass ashtrays from £40
- Tall Fontana Arte lamps from £2,000
- Copper desk lamps from £550
- Antique mirrors from £500

ALSO TRY: Gray's Antiques Market, 58 Davies Street W1. Open Monday-Friday, 10am-6pm. Best for silver, books, antiques and memorabilia. Chelsea Antiques Market, 245-253 King's Road SW3. Open Monday-Saturday, 10am-6pm. Best for clocks, watches and collectable knick-knacks.