

Street smarts - Buy originality from sidewalk vendors

By Tracy E. Hopkins | AM New York - September 4, 2007



New York is known for its shopping. But you don't have to hit the high-priced, trendy boutiques to find clothing and accessories that stand out. Street vendors sell a plethora of handcrafted, unique items that can't be beat.

The sidewalks of SoHo and the Village are paved with vendors hawking artisan and costume jewelry and hand-printed T-shirts at reasonable prices.

Up-and-coming recording artist Emily King proudly models a huge pair of gold bamboo earrings with a Nefertiti symbol that she purchased from a SoHo vendor for \$15.

"They're not generic," the Lower East Side resident says. "Street vendors are one of the last independent businesses in New York City."

In August, sisters Jensen and Patricia Jacobs brought their crafty women's accessories and knitwear made from recycled and vintage materials from London to the revamped outdoor flea market, the Shops on Broadway, next to the old Tower Records store on Broadway and West 4th Street.

Items from Jensen's Revisited Vintage line of plastic toy earrings cost \$10 (we love the pair made from bright yellow 45-rpm record center adapters), and her Phylosophy of Softwear knits range from \$30 for beanie caps to \$45 for scarves and \$300 for sweater coats.

"I already sold one of my cashmere beanies to a Portuguese tourist," Jensen boasts. "She said it doesn't really get cold there but had to have it anyway."

Another prime area for vendor shopping is along Canal Street, where thrifty fashionistas flock to purchase the latest designer knock-off handbags.

"Chinatown is the best by far," says personal shopper Meghann Early, who scored a turquoise, knockoff Dolce & Gabbana hobo bag for \$20. "It's easier to haggle because they know you will go to the next guy [if they don't lower their price]."

For a groovy selection of vintage clothes and accessories, on weekends check out the Annex/Hell's Kitchen flea market (39th Street, between Ninth and 10th avenues) and the P.S. 321 flea market in Park Slope, Brooklyn (Seventh Avenue, between 1st and 2nd streets).

Some less desirable areas for perusing street vendors are the overcrowded tourist traps of Times Square and Herald Square and near Bloomingdale's on 59th Street and Lexington Avenue.

While most street vendors cater to women, Flatiron district seller John Cortes tailors his business to men with a rocker-worthy selection of skull belts (\$15) and sterling silver and stainless steel jewelry (\$15-\$80).

"The myth about vendors selling only cheap items is changing," Cortes says. "I sell high-end products in the street."

Luis Terreros has been vending on Broadway near Prince Street for three years. The native of Peru quickly became popular for his eye-catching handmade earrings made with metallic and silk thread.

In July, he started making rings fashioned from wood and imported bull's horn, which he sells for \$30-\$40.

"Selling on the street is hard," Terreros says. "But you make more profit when you sell something different."

The best of the bargains

Shopping at street vendors can be hard on your feet but easy on your wallet -- if you know where to look. From downtown to midtown, here are a few of the items you'll find at a nice price:

- sunglasses, \$5
- skull caps, \$10
- fashion earrings, \$1-\$5
- men's neckties, \$5
- pashmina wraps, \$5