

# eBay, by design

Decorators go online in bid to create showhouse **BY ISABEL FORGANG**

If you're the kind of decorator who believes "one man's trash is another man's treasure," you'll want to check out the eBay Showhouse, which opens to the public on Saturday.

Eight designers were asked to each decorate a room — or in the case of Isabelle Bosquet, a garden — in a four-story townhouse on E. 63rd St. with the mandate that at least 90% of the contents in the room be bought on eBay.

With roughly 900,000 items available in the Home category on eBay, and 160,000 new listings added every day, the designers did not want for choice. "The challenge was to find everything you wanted within a month," says Matthew Patrick Smyth, who needed bookcases and seating pieces for the library he designed.

Smyth found a man in Atlanta willing to build bookcases to order for him in the allotted time, and he sourced the rest from several different sellers around the country. A chair and ottoman were, at \$150, cheap enough for Smyth to have slipcovered. He bought the brand-new Mitchell Gold sofa from a seller in the Midwest for \$900.

"That sofa was made for Pottery Barn and usually sells for \$2,000. I think

there's a furniture outlet store in the Midwest and people buy things and then sell them on eBay," he says. Smyth had an eBay budget of \$22,000, because he was asked to include some high-tech equipment such as a plasma TV and a DVD player in the space. The other designers' budgets ranged from \$8,250 to \$15,000.

Sheila Bridges, who designed a dining room, managed to combine decorating and storage in one inspired step. She spent about \$754 of her budget (plus an additional \$1,089 for shipping, handling and insurance) on dozens of plates, which she then arranged decoratively on the blue walls.

Furnishings in the showhouse run the gamut from stylish classics such as the Mies van der Rohe leather and wood bench and an antique fretwork oriental bed frame that Lulu de Kwiatkowski chose for a sunny bedroom, to the kitschy '70's hanging bubble chair David Netto suspended in a corner of the nursery. Shawn Henderson went for a little bit of notoriety with the tufted mauve modified-camelback sofa he bought for his sitting room. The Texas seller claims the piece is from Enron's corporate headquarters.

For a behind-the-scenes look at how the spaces developed, watch "Point Click Design," a one-hour special on A&E tonight at 7.

## How to be the last man standing

In the market for a Canadian warship, a used wedding dress or an old pair of dentures?

You can buy them all on eBay, the most popular auction site on the Internet.

Yet, despite its popularity — 45 million traders bought and sold more than \$8 billion worth of goods last year — eBay remains a mystery to many.

"A lot of beginners have one bad experience and get turned off to the whole eBay marketplace as a result," said David Karp, author of "eBay Hacks: 100 Industrial-Strength Tips and Tools."

"Of course, if they knew how to use eBay correctly, they wouldn't have this problem."

Here are a few tricks of the trade:

### BID FOR THE SKY

"To win an auction," says Marsha Collier, author of several books on eBay, "you bid high."

Collier's advice reveals a little-known eBay fact: An item up for bid is only worth what two people are willing to pay for it, plus a small increment more.

For example, if you bid \$1,000 on a Gucci bracelet and the next-highest bid when time runs out is \$20, you pay only \$20.50.

### READ THE FINE PRINT

Before you bid, browse all the listings for the particular item you're looking for. Savvy shoppers also know approximately how much that item would fetch in a store.

Pay particular attention to the bidding price, the shipping cost, how well the item is described, the picture, the seller's payment options and feedback rating. Ignore listings that don't receive any bids.

"Read the seller profiles," says Jim Griffith, dean of eBay education. "It's the only way to know what you're buying and who you're buying from."

### SPELLING COUNTS

Misspelled items usually attract fewer bidders, which increases your chance of winning the auction.

### TRICKY TRICKY

Take advantage of people's tendency to use even bidding numbers. "I always recommend bidding with an odd number," says Collier. "Adding a few extra cents to your bid price — like \$20.02 — can mean the difference between a win and a loss."

### WATCH OUT FOR SNIPERS

Sniping is placing a winning bid in the final seconds of an auction. Rival bidders typically have little or no time to react.

The success of eBay has spawned an entire cottage industry devoted solely to sniping, including the sites eSnipe, AuctionSniper and PowerSnipe, which will automatically snipe auctions for you.

"I've used both bidding methods," Griffith says. "To be honest, I usually just bid high early in order to avoid that last-minute adrenaline rush of sniping."

### BACK TO SCHOOL

The eBay university series usually takes place on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and costs \$39.

To learn more, go to [ebay.com/education](http://ebay.com/education).

"The important thing to remember about all this buying and selling is that it's all a good time," Karp says.

Steve Bryant



**DINING ROOM** Harlem's own Sheila Bridges has a novel way to store china plates — hang 'em on the walls. She scooped up 140 mix-and-matchers on the auction site.



**HALLWAY** Bridges makes a dramatic entrance using a panel of red fabric to define her room. The tufted ottoman and the Moroccan lamp table are also eBay treasures.