

# Seek and You Shall Find

by Sandra Chambers

March 2007

**A growing number of upscale consignment shops** in the area are changing the landscape and image of the typical thrift or second-hand store. These redesigned shopping meccas are drawing a new clientele of shoppers who typically would not frequent second-hand stores. Kendall Williams has been shopping and consigning in Wilmington's consignment shops for the past 10 years. "I love our local consignment shops," she says, "not only because of the good prices, but because of the diversity and the fact that you can find quality-made items of furniture that are unique. I purchased a china cabinet and buffet to go with a 1940s mahogany dining room table that had been passed down through our family. I couldn't go into a regular furniture store and find such pieces."

Williams also found a Henredon coffee table and what she says is her most treasured piece — an original Venetian glass mirror — at a local consignment shop.

Williams, who has recently moved into a new home in Landfall, says she has found several pieces for the new house. "I was looking for a new kitchen table, and my decorator, Marsh Mallet, of Interior Transformations, suggested a table by Nichols & Stone. One day I walked into one of the consignment shops and there was a Nichols & Stone table with two leaves and six chairs for \$800 compared to its original value of \$2,000-plus."

Williams adds that consignment shopping has a nostalgic appeal for her. "It takes me back to my youth and reminds me of my grandmothers' homes. In fact, I have several pieces of glassware similar to what my grandmothers had."

Williams was recently shopping in one of her favorite consignment shops where she says she witnessed a touching event — a fellow shopper in tears because she had discovered the exact set of china that her grandmother had owned, and she was able to purchase it at an affordable price.

"Another reason I like consignment shopping is because it's a pleasure to shop in these stores," Williams says. "The shops' owners are a great team of business people who are personally involved in their businesses and who care about the people who shop and consign there."

Sybil West and her husband Bill moved from Virginia to Wrightsville Beach five years ago. "I mostly consign because I've had to downsize," West says. "We moved from a five-bedroom house to a two-bedroom house. And my philosophy is that if it sits there and nobody uses it, it goes."

West says that a lot of people who are retiring and moving to this area are not only downsizing, but also going from one lifestyle to another — usually to a more coastal look.

"I also think the retail stores are becoming more and more homogenous [in what they sell]," she adds. "But in consignment shops, you have an amazing variety of original items from which to choose."

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The largest and most widely known Wilmington consignment shop is **The Ivy Cottage** on Market Street. Now in its 10th year, The Ivy Cottage has expanded to three shops, a warehouse and a bargain center. With more than 25,000 square feet of furniture, antiques, home accessories, rugs, china, crystal, silver and fine jewelry, shoppers can furnish or re-furnish their homes from top to bottom.

Owner Sam Dunn says she originally planned to open a bed-and-breakfast when she moved to Wilmington, but changed course when a friend gave her the idea of opening a consignment shop.

"I had spent years as a volunteer in the Army's thrift shops, which are operated at all Army posts worldwide," Dunn says. "I worked my way up and eventually set up an entire shop in Frankfurt, Germany."

In addition, Dunn and her daughter Kelaine used to spend hours exploring antique shops and flea markets in Europe and in the U.S. Armed with this past experience and a lot of courage, Dunn and her daughter opened the first The Ivy Cottage in January 1998.

Dunn says she loves to shop for items for her own house. "It's like Christmas every day," she says with a twinkle in her eye. "We have 300 to 400 new pieces come in every day. But I make it a rule that if I find something new for my own house, I have to take something out to replace it. Otherwise, I'd live in a house that looks a lot like The Ivy Cottage."

For those shoppers who prefer to shop online, The Ivy Cottage posts several new items and photos weekly on its Web site at [www.threecottages.com](http://www.threecottages.com).

Dunn says the best part of the job is the people. "We have a variety of guests who come in, including several movie and TV stars from the former 'Dawson's Creek' TV series as well as those from the current 'One Tree Hill' TV series.

"Movie stars mostly buy our jewelry," says Dunn, "but some consign here when they move back to California."

Pait Skipper is the owner of the jewelry department, which sells everything from estate jewelry to contemporary and art deco pieces, including engagement rings.

"We get people and items from all over," Dunn notes. "Some people come to Wilmington on vacation and bring a whole carload of items to consign. Some even pay for their whole vacation that way."

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While the **The Ship's Wheel** is off the beaten path, it's a great place to find antique period pieces more than 100 years old. Owners Curtis and Carol Martin moved their store and custom woodworking and antique restoration business from Greensboro to Wilmington in 1998.

"We left Greensboro because we wanted to raise our three children on the coast," Carol says, "and I love the marriage of our three businesses" — The Ship's Wheel, (consignment shop) Martin Custom Woodworking & Antique Restoration and her CPA office.

At their current location since 2004, several area designers frequent their shop looking for period items including tables, beds, sideboards and so on, as well as decorative items.

"We get some very interesting pieces," Carol says, "such as the Otto Zencke tilt-top table and four upholstered chairs currently on consignment. We also have a copy of a Hal Taylor rocker."

"One of our pieces — a professor's desk — was used in the movie, *The List*, which was recently filmed at Orton Plantation," Curtis adds.

And if you can't find exactly what you're looking for in the store, Curtis will build a piece to your specifications. With an industrial engineering degree in furniture manufacturing and design, Curtis says his passion is to build furniture made of logs reclaimed from the bottom of the Cape Fear River.

The Ship's Wheel displays beautiful hardwood flooring made from this Cape Fear Riverwood and a few custom-made pieces of heart pine furniture, which are worth the trip just to see.

Curtis also does restoration projects for Latimer House, Kenan House and Orton Plantation.

Carol says consignees at the store can choose to consign for 90 days up to six months.

"Because of the high quality of the pieces we get, we don't do the typical markdowns that other consignment shops do," says Carol. "And we offer free delivery for our customers."

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### How to Shop Resale

- Shop often, since inventory changes daily.
- Check out the shop's Web site if one is offered. Often, new, incoming items are highlighted online.
- If you find an item you like but can't afford, check to see if the shop offers price reductions after the item has been in the shop a certain number of days.
- On the other hand, if you find something you absolutely love and can't live without.

don't hesitate. The item might not be there tomorrow.

- If you are looking for a particular item, check to see if the shop has a “request list” or “wish list.”
- Ask whether returns are allowed. Some shops allow you to take the item home for 24 hours or a specified period to see if it works in your home.
- If an item is “almost” right, check to see if the shop offers custom painting or re-design services.
- Make sure you have a way to transport large items. Larger shops will usually deliver for an added fee or can recommend someone who does. Shops may charge an extra storage fee for items purchased and not picked up within a specified time.
- If you are consigning items, abide by the shop's consigning hours and make sure you understand the terms of the contract. Some shops have a small yearly administrative fee for consigning with them.

— Sandra Chambers

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If you haven't visited the funky purple and green consignment shop on Oleander, be sure to check it out. **The Thrill of the Hunt** opened nine years ago across the street from its current location.

Linda Greco says she named her shop The Thrill of the Hunt because it perfectly fits the image of a consignment shop. “That's what it's all about,” she says. “There's always something fresh and new to find here.”

In addition to 2,000 square feet of antiques, vintage furniture, lighting and home décor items, the shop offers custom-made farm tables.

“We have the traditional consignment pieces, but sometimes we offer to buy furniture, then re-invent it with new paint, knobs, and so forth,” Greco explains. “We offer custom painting, and we have a lot of fun doing crazy and funky designs with great colors and fabrics.”

Greco says she also gets mahogany antique reproductions from Indonesia. “One of our best-selling items is the Indonesia Teak Root benches,” says Greco. “Each one is a piece of art. They are each uniquely carved according to how the root grows, and they will last a lifetime.”

“We do get unusual consignment items from time to time, such as the shoeshine stand from a Raleigh/Durham bus station,” says Greco, who has a degree in interior design. “It was purchased about a year ago by a hair dresser for her shop.

“And sometimes, if we get items and we don't know what they are — like the airplane propeller mounted on mahogany wood — we just have fun making up our own story about where it came from.”

Greco has also had plenty of famous people visit The Thrill of the Hunt.

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**More Than Enough** is located directly across the street from The Thrill of the Hunt on Oleander Drive. Opening its doors in November 2004, the white building with red doors and black trim has a unique history. Owner Florina Fineman says the name came from a God-loving and successful businessman who named his boat *More Than Enough* based on what he heard from Dr. James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family ministry: “Let us ask God not only to fill our needs but to give us more than enough so we can overflow and share.”

Fineman came to Wilmington in 2003 with her husband, daughter and family dog after spending 14 years in Connecticut. “I found myself in the consignment business by listening to the tiny voice, the same voice that told me to run a successful bagel shop in Connecticut. For me, both businesses have been about ministry and witnessing my faith,” Fineman says.

More Than Enough offers fine furniture, home furnishings, collectibles, lighting, china and art, including unusual items such as pieces from the 1800s and beautiful christening gowns from the Philippines. In addition, the shop spotlights several local artists with items ranging from custom tinwork, jewelry, papier mache, framed mirrors with teacups and saucers, poetry and handmade books to paintings.

Chandeliers are also a popular item. "We got into chandeliers when we did a fund-raiser for juvenile diabetes," Fineman explains.

More Than Enough also offers offsite consignment. For big items that cannot be displayed in the store, Fineman keeps a photo album with the for-sale items. The shop's Web site, [www.mtenc.com](http://www.mtenc.com), also posts photos of these items.

Another difference between More Than Enough and a traditional consignment shop is that the consignee sets the sale price.

"All of us have what we have as a gift for a time to use," Fineman says. "So when you have had 'more than enough' time with it, pass it on fairly to the next person so he, too, can have the gift."

### **Treasure Map**

#### **The Ivy Cottage**

**Owner:** Sam Dunn

3030 Market Street

(910) 815-0907

[www.threecottages.com](http://www.threecottages.com)

**Store hours:** M-S 10-5,

Sun 1-5

Consignments accepted

M-F 10-4 or by appointment

Consignee makes 65 percent

**Terms:** 120 days/markdowns at 45 and

90 days, except for fine jewelry

Appraisals offered

Pick-up and delivery service available

#### **The Ship's Wheel**

##### **Antiques & Fine Consignments**

**Owners:** Curtis & Carol Martin

3414A Merchant Court.

(Northchase Business Park)

(910) 793-5900

[martin-antique-restorations.com](http://martin-antique-restorations.com)

**Store hours:** M-F 8-5

Consignments accepted by  
appointment

Consignee earns 65 percent

Pick-up and delivery service offered

#### **More Than Enough**

**Owner:** Florina Fineman

4718 Oleander Drive

(910) 793-4556

[www.mtenc.com](http://www.mtenc.com)

**Store hours:** Tues.-Sat. 10-5

Consignments accepted daily or by  
appointment

**Terms:** 90 days

#### **Thrill of the Hunt**

**Owner:** Linda Greco  
4713 Oleander Drive  
(910) 796-0029

**Store hours:** M-S 10-5. Sun 1-4  
Consignments accepted daily M-Sat.  
Consignee makes 65 percent

**Term:** 120 days/markdowns at 45 and  
90 days

— *Sandra Chambers*