

Out with the old, in with the \$

Rafael Brusilow for Metro Canada
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While most entrepreneurs try to sell something new, Warren Hales is happy helping people get top dollar for their old furniture.

Hales, 44, is the entrepreneur and owner of Around the Block, a consignment store specializing in antique furniture in the heart of Toronto's Avenue Road neighbourhood. People bring their antiques to the store to have them evaluated by Hales and then put up for sale inside the store – Hales takes a small cut of the final price and clients take home the rest.

The store, opened four months ago, is self-funded by Hales and represents more than a decade of his own experience in the cataloguing, buying and selling of antiques. Hales says the key to mastering antiques is rooted in research and study.

"You have to have strong research skills and a really good sense of what the market needs and what things will sell for. I hesitate to call myself an expert though – there's just so much out there to see," Hales said.

Hales worked as a commercial photographer before getting into the consignment business almost by accident. He was living above a consignment shop and started working there part time. Before long, he realized he had a real knack for spotting materials and other crucial crafting details. He also enjoyed hearing the stories behind each item, since by definition any antique has been a part of people's lives for a long time.

"Every piece that comes in has a sentimental value because it's coming from people's homes, and people open up their lives to you. Everyone has a story to tell," Hales said. When it comes to buying and selling antiques, Hales says trust is key because of the subjective factors involved in evaluating many antique pieces.

"There is a large element of trust involved. It is absolutely crucial we are trusted by our customers," he said.

The trickiest part, Hales says, is finding the right price to make both sides in a transaction happy.

"I want to get to that median where the customers who are buying from us are happy with the prices they pay and the clients consigning with us are happy with the prices they get," Hales said.

Hales admits that part of the fun of antiques is finding an heirloom or antique that is surprisingly valuable despite having languished in a closet for years. The other part is dealing with furniture that is truly worth owning and keeping for generations. Sitting at an exquisite oak desk, Hales points to a set of 200-pound solid wood dressers.

"If there's a nuclear war, those dressers will survive. That's where the bugs will live," he joked.

Around the Block is located at 1903 Avenue Rd. in Toronto. For more information see aroundtheblock.com.



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Warren Hales says one of the trickiest parts of consignment is making both the buyer and the seller happy. He tries to do so at his store Around the Block in the Avenue Road neighbourhood.