

Hidden (and not so hidden) Treasures*

Estate sales hold the promise of wonderful bargains

Writer: Courtney Burkholder

Photographer: Liz Garza Williams

A Lalique rose bowl, a set of embroidered hand towels, picture frames, ladies' shoes in a size 7 narrow, a vintage fur coat, sterling silver, an original oil painting, bric-a-brac, tools, glassware, antique salt cellars, a 17th-century secretary, a comfy sofa, a lawn mower, bed linens, lamps, books, fine and costume jewelry, a bicycle, kitchen appliances, children's clothes, dishware, Oriental rugs and more books. These are just a few of the items one can happen upon at an estate sale.

Every weekend, avid estate sale-goers scavenge the local papers, forage the Internet and haunt the streets in search of hidden treasures to be unearthed at these popular events. I myself have been known to U-turn in the middle of a busy intersection upon spying a yard sign pointing the way to an estate sale. There is just something about the endless possibilities an estate sale holds. What could they have that I might need? What bargains would I miss out on if I were to drive by without stopping? My car invariably finds its way to the curb, and I rush to the door, eager to see what treasures await.

The women in this article have built strong reputations in San Antonio and the surrounding areas when it comes to estate sales. Their vast knowledge of residential content, antiques and fine art, plus their empathetic natures, have taken them to the top in their field and provide San Antonio with a much-needed service from which many can benefit.

Joy Curnutt and Peggy Calhoun

Professional Estate Sales, LLC

Joy Curnutt and Peggy Calhoun are more than just sisters; they are partners who share a passion for business, a love of fine things and a heart for people. "Even though we are very much alike, we are very different, too," Joy says. "We have different strengths. We complement each other."

The new kids on the block, as they refer to themselves, held their first estate sale in 2006 and never looked back. According to the sisters, the key to their success mirrors their company name: professionalism. "We saw a need for outstanding customer service in the estate sales business, so we made the decision to open an office and have a very professional business," says Peggy proudly.



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“We put together a team of individuals, such as Maryanne Leeper, who were very knowledgeable in all aspects of this business from Scrivener’s, Bering’s, Frost Bros., and others who know the prices of items and have knowledge of collectibles, antiques, Texas primitives, books, jewelry. We brought on board a variety of people to support what we wanted to do because we felt that no one person in an estate sale company knows everything.” With over 15 members available to assist them as needed, Joy and Peggy have quickly earned a reputation as one of the top estate sales companies in the business, and they are not slowing down.

“Our philosophy is that every sale is different and unique,” says Joy. “A sale is really a museum of someone’s life. We are respectful of that. We consider ourselves the professional company with compassion.” Extending that compassion to those in need is an aspect of their business that Joy and Peggy take great pride in. “Not everyone has antiques, fine art, sterling and china,” states Joy. “It’s about what a person needs and how we can assist them. We’ve done sales when the bottom line wasn’t profitable, but we felt good about it because we helped someone.” In the end, the sisters agree, it’s all about customer service. “Our goal is that our customers are very satisfied. With happy customers, referrals come, and referrals build your business,” they say.

Apparently so, as Professional Estate Sales conducted 41 estate sales in 2010 alone. “We average about one sale per week. Besides referrals, we get much of our business from our website and the Internet,” says Peggy. As the sisters’ previous business was an online company, this was a natural progression into the estate sales business. “The Internet is everything! All of our employees have laptops so that we can quickly and easily research things as needed. This is just another aspect of the professionalism we want to portray.” Peggy also writes a weekly newsletter that goes out to over 7,000 recipients with information and pictures of upcoming sales items.

Joy and Peggy stress the importance of professionalism in the actual sale. “We do sales of all sizes,” Joy says. “When you have a great-looking sale and everything is organized, you are doing a better job for your client. We price to sell the first day. The more we sell on the first day, the better.” And according to Peggy, “We want the sale to be efficient. We wear uniforms during our sales so that we are easily identifiable and limit the number of people in the house at one time. Most sales last three days, typically Thursday through Saturday, although this can differ according to the needs of the client.

“Everyone’s needs are different, and we really try to go in and identify exactly what their needs are,” says Peggy. “If they are moving or downsizing, we can help them with their new floor plan and deciding what to take. We can pack up their things and get them moved if that is what they need. We are a full-service business. We try to customize each sale for that individual liquidation.” Joy reiterates, “It’s really about guiding and directing.”

For many seeking the services of an estate sale company, the compassion that Joy and Peggy promise is key. “We do a lot of hand-holding and really try to walk the family through the process,” Peggy says. “When people have had a loss in their life, sometimes they are so emotional they can’t make decisions. They absolutely do not know what to do. And there have been times when we have said, ‘It’s too soon. You aren’t ready. Call us in six months. We will be here when you are ready.’”

When the sale is over, and the last trinket sold or donated, Joy and Peggy promise their clients three things: a clean and completely empty home, a check and a tax receipt for all donated items. Though they will set up the final donation to the client’s charity of choice, Joy and Peggy are great supporters of the Assistance League of San Antonio. “They have many worthy projects,” Joy says. One special project is Operation Schoolbell, which provides clothing to needy children in San Antonio. “The Assistance League told us that since we have been assisting them, they have been able to clothe over 1,000 more children in San Antonio. We are very proud of that.”

Joy and Peggy are members of the Better Business Bureau, the American Society of Estate Liquidators and the Alamo Heights Chamber of Commerce.

Professional Estate Sales

900 N. E. Loop 410, Suite E-102

San Antonio, Texas 78209

(210) 826-7653

www.professionalestatesales.com