

THERE'S NO use searching for an ordinary mug inside Barbie Brandes's charmingly crooked kitchen cupboards. As far as she's concerned, every day's an exquisite teacup day, and there's no occasion too mundane for an elaborate cereal bowl, pretty cake stand or beautiful antique plate, either. "I get that attitude from my grandmother," says the 37-year-old real estate agent fondly. "She never saved her good china dishes to pull out just for special occasions—to her, every day was special!"

In just two years, Barbie has transformed her one-bedroom rental apartment—located on the third floor of an old New York-style four-storey walkup in Toronto's Forest Hill Village—from drab to darling. "A lot of people who visit me for the first time say I live in a doll's house," says Barbie with a smile. She then admits, "It *is* perfect and very precious... but it's me!"

Barbie's affinity for all things floral, pastel and shabby chic is evidenced everywhere in her

RULES OF *Attraction*

If it's pink, floral, distressed and not nailed down, chances are this Toronto collector has the perfect place for it





apartment. Her favourite pieces, painted tables, dressers and chairs, have all been distressed to a patina-rich surface, either by the hands of time or purchased as is from a store.

Not surprisingly, flea market finds, vintage pieces and treasured hand-me-downs all figure highly in Barbie's home. She'll give any store with a decor section a chance—it's the thrill of the hunt and that magical sense of destiny in every unexpected treasure that keeps her quest going.

"You don't have to go to the poshest antiques shops to find the best things," she states, citing amazing scores from just doing the rounds at local flea markets and weekend trips to HomeSense and Canadian Tire, as well as free picking parties in



Barbie's TOP STORES AND WEBSITES

My Back Shed

WWW.MYBACK
SHED.COM

(905) 847-2922

"Inspiring and
affordable
distressed
furniture."

My Back Shed Too

WWW.MYBACK
SHED.COM

(905) 637-1171

"The turnover
here is
phenomenal.
They also do
custom painting
and upholstery."

Patty George Pressed Glass

WWW.PATTY
GEORGE.COM

(416) 788-7289

"A great selection
of Depression-
era glass."

Sean George Pressed Glass

WWW.PRESSED
GLASSAND

GOBLETS.COM

(519) 848-2200

"A gold mine of
pitchers and
tumblers."

The Elegant Garage Sale

(416) 322-9744

"A year-round,
indoor garage
sale overrun
with treasures."



Best Budget Tips

BARBIE DISHES HER BEST ADVICE FOR ACHIEVING SHABBY CHIC ON A BUDGET

- * **Become a garbage picker.** "Drive through upscale neighbourhoods on garbage day and keep your eyes open for slightly damaged or well-loved pieces of furniture that you can re-paint, refinish or use in a surprising new way."
- * **Bring cash and don't be afraid to bargain.** "I'm always surprised at the number of discounts I'm offered, all because I simply asked."
- * **Pack your eco shopping bags** for trips to the attics of your grandmother, aunt or mom, then fill'er up: "Generous family members may have china, silver and needlepoint treasures they're more than ready to pass on to you."
- * **Go to retail stores you** wouldn't think of at first after visiting boutiques for ideas and inspiration. "Some of my best *tôle* (painted tin) and linens were from Winners. And the \$10 lace café curtains in my kitchen window were a score from Canadian Tire!"
- * **Be prepared to leave with** nothing. "Pace yourself, and don't buy for the sake of buying. The search is half the fun."

Barbie thinks outside the box. Her green bench (above) often doubles as an *hors d'oeuvres* table, the ladder holds blankets one day and magazines the next, and her bedside table (right) is actually an old dresser. Bed linens, night gown, Au Lit Fine Linens.



"People say I live in a doll's house—it *is* perfect and very precious... but it's me!"

INSPIRATION

Having a budget doesn't mean sacrificing style. Barbie's antique French writing desk (right) was pinched from her parents, the blue pitcher was a flea market find, and the lamp came from HomeSense. The floors were lightly sanded and re-urethaned instead of being re-finished. Ribbon, Mokuba.



the attics of friends and family. "Even so, when I go to high-end stores that sell items I love but could never afford, I always come away with something tiny—like an egg cup or a single pressed-glass tumbler—and I'm just as thrilled as I would be had I went in and bought an entire chandelier!"

The key is patience. "I don't make impulse buys," attests Barbie. "Ever." In fact, most of the time she leaves markets and antiques stores empty-handed. "You have to be willing to walk away from the first, second, fifth or sixth thing that catches your eye before you find the perfect thing that's meant for you," she says. You also have to be willing to bargain. "You'd be surprised at the discounts I've gotten, all because I asked. It lets me savour the process long after I take my treasure home."

Barbie's favourite antiques markets

Aberfoyle Antique Market

WWW.ABERFOYLE-ANTIQUES.COM
(877) 763-1077

Open Sundays, April to October "They don't make deliveries, so if you're looking for furniture bring a big car."

400 Flea Market

WWW.400MARKET.COM
(705) 436-1010

Open weekends, year-round "China, glass and teacups galore, plus a good selection of painted step stools."

Cookstown Antique Market

WWW.COOKSTOWN-ANTIQUEMARKET.COM
(705) 458-1275

Open 362 days a year "Room after room filled with vintage chandeliers, painted farmhouse chairs and coloured glass."

Heritage Antique Market at Bayview Village

WWW.HERITAGE-ANTIQUESHOWS.COM
(866) 285-5515

Runs seven times a year "I found my Lucite teacup display holders here! It's also stuffed with silver, vintage linens and china."

Sherway Gardens Antique Sale

WWW.ASINTER.COM
(613) 521-1970

Runs once or twice a year "Miles of vendors selling everything you can imagine."



**Pink Artisan Series
Stand Mixer, \$469.99,
KitchenAid**



**Paint, Celery Bunch
420C-2, Behr;
3J3-3, Beauti-Tone**



**Porcelain cake stand, \$25,
Danica Imports**



**Bed linens, from a selection,
Au Lit Fine Linens**

**Royal Albert teacups, \$100 for
3-piece set (patterned),
\$38 each (solid),
Royal Doulton**



Barbie's PRIZED FINDS LUCKY LOOT THAT WAS WORTH THE WAIT

*** Sterling silver rose bowl**

"I picked it up at the Antique Market in Bayview Village. Filled with flowers, it's the most beautiful sight!"

*** Round needlepoint rug**

"I got this seven-foot oval rug on eBay for \$220 from a dealer in Manhattan. It was the inspiration for the entire room!"

*** Pink-painted blanket box**

"I found it at My Back Shed Too and turned it into a sweater box. It's at the foot of my bed and lined in vintage pink floral wallpaper."

*** White-painted harvest table**

"This distressed table, only \$200 at My Back Shed, is the perfect backdrop for my vintage placemats and scalloped-edged plates."

*** Framed vintage Barbie print**

"When I saw the print at Nestings Kids in Toronto I had to have it! The light green background and hits of pink in her floral tea dress match the decor in my bedroom."