

## green saver

Rae Doble

## Less is more

Reusing instead of buying new is good for the planet and your budget



**T**HOSE OF US WHO CAN'T RESIST checking out those twice-a-year suburban throwouts know that, with a bit of spit and polish, furnishing a house can cost next to nothing. And with reuse being the most energy-neutral form of recycling, it's good for the environment too.

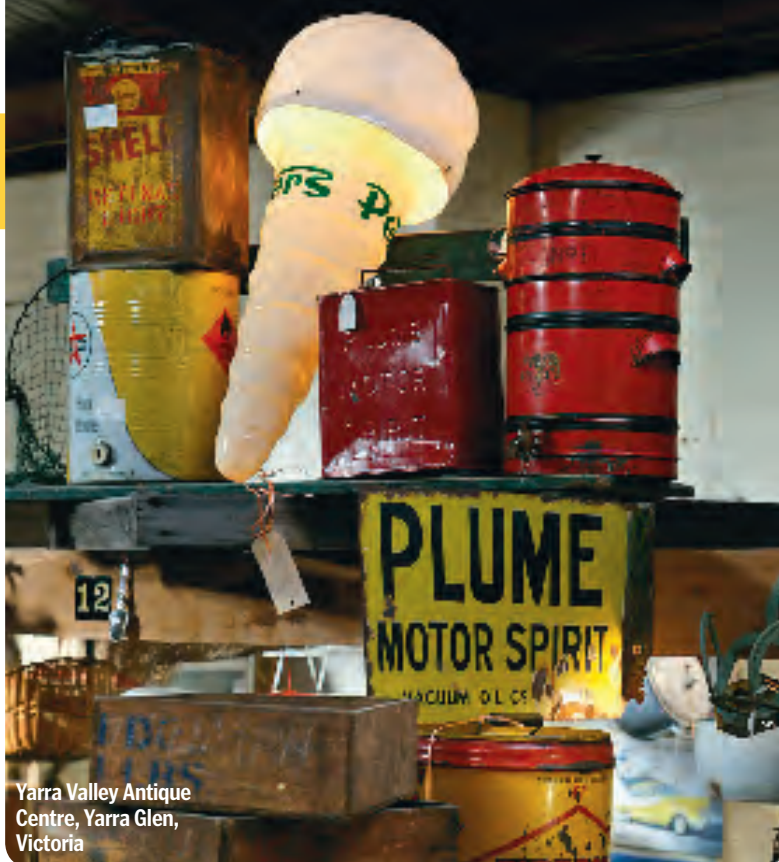
There's a growing worldwide "keep it simple" trend towards responsible consumerism. And the resources of the internet make finding secondhand – or even free – goods easier than ever.

You can get just about anything secondhand and at a bargain price if you know where to look. Garage sales, auction houses and charity shops are good for pre-loved furniture, clothes and homewares. To find a garage sale in your area, check the classifieds in your local newspapers or visit websites like [www.egaragesales.com.au](http://www.egaragesales.com.au) or [www.tradingpost.com.au](http://www.tradingpost.com.au).

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If you're after jewellery, cars, electrical goods and similar products, check out auction houses and websites (such as eBay and graysonline), antique dealers and pawnbrokers. A secondhand trading business needs to be licensed and is subject to the Trade Practices Act. This means you have the same protections and consumer rights as you do when buying a new item. If you buy an item from a private seller you don't come under any consumer protection umbrella, so check the item out carefully.

If you're after something cheaper than secondhand, there's a variety of ways to get good items for free. Classifieds often have "freebie" or swap sections worth checking. You can also try Freecycle ([www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org)). This is a global net-



Yarra Valley Antique Centre, Yarra Glen, Victoria

work where people can offer or request anything from baby clothes to building materials. The rules are that all items must be free and legal. There are over 3 million members worldwide.

Similar to Freecycle is Bookcrossing ([www.bookcrossing.com](http://www.bookcrossing.com)). Here members review books and provide them with an ID number. These are then "released" in a public place and other bookcrossers "catch" them by finding the location through the website.

If you want a plumber to fix your bathroom but don't have the cash, you can try bartering. Bartering is a cashless exchange of goods or services between people. There are several barter schemes in Australia, ranging from business-only operations like Bartercard ([www.bartercard.com.au](http://www.bartercard.com.au)) to community-based programs such as LETS ([www.lets.org.au](http://www.lets.org.au)).

LETS is an Australia-wide, non-profit trading network made up of local LETS groups with their own currency. For example, the Sydney LETS group calls its currency "Operas". A member's time is calculated at 20 Operas (equal to \$20) an hour and includes everything from lawnmowing and cooking meals to bookkeeping and dentistry. The Sydney LETS scheme charges a 0.5 Operas administration fee on every transaction, and annual renewal fees are \$5 and 20 Operas.

While these are cashless transactions, the ATO regards barter exchanges as income and liable for tax and GST, so it's important to keep receipts and invoices.

### Green tip

For champagne fashionistas on a beer budget there are ways to get the look without breaking the bank. Op shops have always been a good starting point. Some canny op shops now vet their donations for quality items, but you can still find a preloved bargain. The Treasure Hunter's Guide ([www.treasureguide.com.au](http://www.treasureguide.com.au)) makes the hunt easier, reviewing hundreds of thrift outlets in Melbourne and Sydney.

If you don't live in one of those two cities, or you're after the latest fashions, you can try SwapStyle ([www.swapstyle.com](http://www.swapstyle.com)) The brainchild of Sydney designer Emily Chesher, SwapStyle is a worldwide forum where you can swap, buy and sell quality clothing, accessories and cosmetics for a small annual subscription fee.

With a similar format to eBay, members post photos of their swaps and sales and a swap wishlist. There's also a rating score for each member, so you can check the feedback on previous exchanges.