

Red Bank Antique Center

Sixty Years of Fabulous Finds



Red Bank Antique Center, Building III, on the corner of West Front Street and Bridge Avenue, Red Bank.

In 1964, Nan Johnson opened on West Front Street in Red Bank what she dubbed the first permanent indoor “Antique Show” in the country. Sixty years later, the Red Bank Antique Center continues to thrive.

The Antique Center encompasses 27,000 square feet in three buildings (although Building I is currently being rented by an interior designer). Home base, Building III, is a landmark, red-paneled building located on the corner of West Front Street and Bridge Avenue. Building II is located about three hundred fifty feet down the road, also on West Front.

Johnson’s son, Guy, began working full time at the store after graduating high school in 1971 alongside his two siblings. “I got into the wholesale side of the business when I learned I could buy furniture for cheap,” Johnson said. “I’d travel to auctions in Ohio then sell the furniture here for a profit.”

Johnson took over managing the business after his mother passed away in 1980. Since then, he continued to amass both his vast knowledge of antiques and his own collection of wares. As his mobility deteriorated, he wasn’t able to climb the stairs any longer, so the upper floors of the Antique Center went untouched for years.

Johnson’s daughter, Kimberly Katz, operated a vegan and organic salon next to the Antique Center for ten years and noticed her father having some difficulties with managing the business. “It was too much for him to do by himself, and after a health scare, I knew it was time for me to help him.” She closed her salon, came on as manager two years ago, and infused new life into the Antique Center.

With a lot of dedication and hard work, Katz transformed the business back into a flourishing antiques hub that operates as a co-op with several dealers who rent space. In return, the dealers each work in the store one to two days a month. “That helps us keep our expenses down with hardly any payroll, and the dealers have the opportunity for face-to-face interactions.”

“She’s created quite a community here with the dealers,” Johnson said, “and everyone works together.”

Katz also helped to organize the second-floor space, where Johnson’s pieces for sale take up the space of ten booths. “Kim keeps pulling stock out of thin air,” he said, “and she really cleaned it up.”

While organizing the second floor, Katz entered her grandmother’s

office, a room that hadn’t been touched in almost thirty years. “It was amazing what I found,” she said. “She died before I was born, so I never met her. But I found her journals and papers, and through those, I got to know my grandmother.” Katz noted her grandmother was, like her, meticulous and neat. “Maybe I inherited those qualities from her,” she said with a smile.

One of the most impressive items on the floor of the Antique Center is a Regina Upright Music Box. Built in 1896, it used to stand on the Asbury Park boardwalk. “I bought it in Shrewsbury, and it was covered in layers of paint. I got the guts working, and a friend who was a cabinet maker fixed the exterior, and here it is, working as great as ever.” The music coming from the box transports customers back to a simpler and more innocent time. While the music box technically isn’t for sale, Johnson quipped, “that is, unless someone makes me a hell of an offer.”



Kimberly Katz, manager of the Red Bank Antique Center, and her father, owner Guy Johnson. To the left is the Regina Upright Music Box. Built in 1896, it used to stand on the Asbury Park boardwalk.

Visitors are greeted by the store's unofficial mascot, a life-size, stuffed billy goat, appropriately named "Billy." Displayed nearby, they can laugh at themselves in front of an old fun house mirror.

Both Katz and Johnson noted changes they've seen in the antique industry over the years. "The younger generation isn't into quality things like Hummel or Lenox," Johnson said. "They don't want to put dishes in a dishwasher and would rather use disposable plates."

Records and music CDs have made a comeback, and many younger customers visit the Antique Center in search of items for their collections. Johnson said, "Ten years ago we could hardly give away records. Now they've skyrocketed in popularity."



Vinyl records and CDs have skyrocketed in popularity with the younger generation in recent years.

Vintage clothing has also experienced a resurgence in demand, and many dealers have seen such items flying from their booths. Other in-demand items are vintage toys in their original boxes or sealed packaging. "Sometimes, the boxes are worth more than the toy because everyone threw the boxes away," Johnson said.

Both Katz and Johnson agreed that many consumers have misunderstood the meaning of the term "collectible" over the years. "If something is labeled as a 'collectible' or comes with a certificate of authenticity, it



One can get lost while browsing the aisles filled with vintage decor and furniture, jewelry, comics and toys, books, housewares, hardware, advertising memorabilia, and much more.

basically has no value because everyone bought it thinking it was unique, like a Hess Truck. Most of them have absolutely no value because so many were produced, and there's really nothing authentic about them," Johnson explained.

Sterling silver housewares such as tea sets, utensils, candle sticks, and platters used to be the norm on dining tables and commonly given as wedding gifts, but today, those items are worth only the weight of the silver. "Those sets are beautiful," Katz said, "but nobody wants to clean them. Today, people would rather drink out of plastic cups, but using glass or silver drinkware and place settings is so much better for the environment." Katz is passionate about repurposing instead of disposing and added, "It's more sustainable to shop at places like this because it helps the environment and is actually less expensive in the long run."

Unlike many area businesses, the Red Bank Antique Center weathered the storm of the pandemic. "It was tough, but we made it through. I didn't charge my dealers rent during the shutdown, but I came to the store every day and listened for the phone to ring," Johnson said, as the phone next to him coincidentally started to ring.

While many of the dealers have an online presence, the Antique Center is solely brick and mortar and does not

sell anything online. "We prefer our customers to be here and to see, touch, and feel what we sell," Katz said.

Another contributing factor to the Antique Center's appeal is the inventory, which is one-of-a-kind yet constantly changing, and nostalgia keeps bringing customers through the doors as they search for that one special object they remember from their upbringing, whether it be a bauble from their grandparents' holiday tree or a treasured childhood toy. One can get lost while browsing the aisles filled with vintage decor and furniture, jewelry, comics and toys, books, housewares, hardware, advertising memorabilia, and much more.

"We're a family business and thankful for the past sixty years," Katz said, "and I am excited about our future and hope my children will one day be working here, too."

—Jill Ocone

The Red Bank Antique Center is one of the Jersey Shore's most fun and unique places to visit. It has two buildings full of antiques and collectibles that will transport you back in time. Building III is located at 226 West Front Street in Red Bank, (732) 842-4336; Building II is located about three hundred fifty feet down the road at 195 West Front Street, (732) 842-3393. The Antique Center is open Monday - Saturday 11:00 AM - 5:00 PM and Sunday 12:00 PM - 5:00 PM. Visit them online at www.antiquecentersofredbank.com.

Jill Ocone