

# Market shift

We check in on the Chelsea Flea's northern migration to Hell's Kitchen

By **Leslie Price** Photographs by **Talia Simhi**



For almost 30 years, the lot at 26th Street and Sixth Avenue has been to bargain hunters what the Hamptons and the Berkshires are to the moneyed set: a weekend destination. There, haggling and browsing were a leisure time diversion on par with sunbathing or hiking. But the plot that was once home to the Annex Antiques Fair and Flea Market (a.k.a. the Chelsea Flea) now sits empty, due to the encroachment of high-rise development. "The person who'd owned the Chelsea lot for 60 years decided to participate with a developer," says Alan Boss, the founder of several area bazaars, including Chelsea Flea and a new alfresco market in Carroll Gardens (*Union St at Smith St, Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn. Begins Sept 6*). The good news is, on August 6, Boss folded his Chelsea fair into his smaller-scale Hell's Kitchen Flea Market (*39th St between Ninth and Tenth Aves. Sat, Sun, from dawn to dusk*).

Closed to traffic during market hours, the new location is about the same size as its downtown predecessor—around 500 by 40 feet, compared to Chelsea's 100 by 200 feet—and it plays host to 97 percent of the vendors from the Chelsea Flea. "The layout is easier," says Eric Schultz, a dealer who's been with Boss's fair for 15 years. The newer bazaar's two open lanes allow pedestrians to stroll the length of the block, as compared to the mazelike pattern in Chelsea.

What's more, penny-pinchers will be pleased to know that the \$1 entrance fee at Chelsea has not resurfaced in Hell's Kitchen. Because the fair now

takes place along a public street rather than on a private lot, admission is free of charge.

Getting shoppers to the new spot seems to be the only drawback to the move. "All the regulars are finding us here, though," Schultz says. That may be due to a gratis shuttle service that runs from the former site to the new location. To ease the transition, Boss arranged for two buses to run continuously from 7 am to 4 pm on weekends, stopping along the way at the Garage, Boss's indoor market (*112 W 25th St between Sixth and Seventh Aves. Sat, Sun 6:30am-5pm*).

Despite the no-man's-land location, many longtime vendors claim they're happy with the new spot. "This is such an improvement over the last place," says dealer Rob Kelly, who, with his wife Margaret, sold curios at 26th Street for 12 years. "In Chelsea you had traffic, noise and car fumes." In the new spot, vendors are only exposed to vehicular hubbub at opposite ends of the market.

"We like it here a lot better," agrees Beverly Wiburn, who's peddled clothing at Boss's fleas for 25 years. "In Chelsea, we were right next to trash dumpsters. Here, there's a quaint feeling."

Apart from the odd usage of "quaint" to describe the dull stretch in the shadows of Port Authority's bus ramps and the Lincoln Tunnel, the vendors here have another reason to embrace their displacement: This public thoroughfare is not for rent, so—unlike its former digs—it has the promise of permanence. That is, until another big development (the 7 train extension, perhaps?) prompts another market migration.

## Bargaining tips

Based on his ten years as a vendor at the Chelsea flea market, Steve Cooper, co-owner of LES vintage jewelry shop Pippin, gives up some choice tips on haggling.

- Stop by late. The dealer has been trying to get top dollar all day long, but usually, the later in the day, the larger the discount that's offered.
- Never be afraid to ask for a lower price. There's no harm in asking. Start with, 'Is this the best price?' Don't demand or insist. If you want a bigger discount, say 'I'll pass,' then wait for a retort. If you're buying in bulk, ask 'What's your dealer's price?' They'll assume that you're buying for retail and will usually offer you a bigger break.
- Don't show your cards—don't pay too much attention to a piece that you really want.
- The more you have to dig, the better price you should expect.
- Keep your mouth shut about your knowledge [about a piece]—always feign ignorance. If you know that something is priced too high, don't tell the dealer that. Ask for a better price and walk away if you can't get them down.
- Don't ask for a discount after you've decided to purchase something. Make the discount part of your decision. —LP

