

Searching for a deal at Michaan's Auctions

By Peggy Spear

It's true: auctioneers do talk really, really fast when they're working.

That's one of the discoveries people make when they attend one of Michaan's Auctions, located in large showrooms on Alameda's old Naval Base. In fact, their main gallery auction house is a refurbished bowling alley, but its sophisticated décor and the items or "lots" for sale belie a pedestrian past.

Michaan's offers three types of auctions, owner Allen Michaan said. Its monthly Annex Auctions — held the Tuesday and Wednesday after their monthly Alameda Point Antiques Faire — are for less valuable items, such as furniture, jewelry and some artwork, as well as household items, books, records and lots of bric-a-brac.

The monthly estate auction is for more higher-end treasures, such as beautiful jewelry, china, stamps, currency, Egyptian and Roman antiques and unique lots such as a life-sized Blues Brothers statues and selections of fine antiques.

The third type is the fine sale auction events, held two to three times a year, for the most prized lots.

"What we do here is recycling at its most efficient level," Michaan said.

Most of the lots come from people not wanting to hold estate sales when a parent or relative passes away or from people doing some intense spring cleaning. Occasionally there are hidden treasures, as one gentleman found out when Michaan's appraisers discovered his wire Christmas wreath was designed by California sculptor Ruth Asawa and Michaan's sold it for \$110,000. He was preparing to put it in a yard sale but decided to have it checked out at the weekly appraisal event.

On a Wednesday morning in April, auctioneer Scott Bradley, vice president of Michaan's, is selling furniture, rugs and artwork in the Annex Auction. About 30

If you go

Michaan's Auctions: The Annex Auctions start at 10 a.m. May 9 and 10. Previews are from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. May 6, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. May 7 and May 8 and from 9 a.m. and continuing on the days of the sales. The Annex Auction house is located at 2701 Monarch St. in Alameda. The next Estate Auction is May 13 at the Main Gallery, 2751 Todd St., in Alameda. For more information, email info@michaans.com, call (510) 740-0220 or visit www.michaans.com.

people mill around the large annex room, but that small number doesn't represent all of the bidders, there are also absentee bidders that a clerk keeps track of while Bradley rattles off numbers more quickly than gunfire.

"Two-250 over here, three, 350, going once, going twice..." And just like that one of the 2,500 lots for sale is sold.

"I can't bring my wife down here," buyer Bill Stewart said. "We already have too much stuff."

He is an antiques dealer looking for resale items and represents one of three types of buyers, according to Michaan's Director of Marketing Talesa Eugenio. There are private buyers, just shopping for themselves. Then, there are business buyers — other antique or novelty sellers who are looking to stock their stores. And there are the collectors, people who are looking for specific items.

"I'm on a treasure hunt," said Jacque DeVoe, who falls in the private buyer category. "I have a big old house I need to fill." She has attended the Annex Auctions many times. "It's a treat I give myself."

Laura Eady runs a furniture and antique shop in the Fresno area.



PHOTOS BY LAURA MORTON

Laura Eady places a bid while attending the monthly Annex Auction at Michaan's Auctions in Alameda. She often buys items from the auction for her furniture and antique shop in the Fresno area.

"I come every month," she said. "I have found a lot of treasures."

Buyer Erin Keller walks by, grinning. She has just purchased a print of the famous "Love" painting by Robert Indiana for \$30.

"We had one like it when I was growing up, so it has sentimental value," she said.

The auction runs almost as quickly as Bradley can talk, skipping from lot to lot quicker than some can follow. A Michaan's employee uses a long pointer to indicate what is being sold at the moment, and all the in-person bidding is done with paddles. A wooden sculpture goes for \$30, while a nearby set of Victorian lamps goes for \$250. A decidedly ugly green pedestal sells for \$35, while the lot next to it — four Corinthian pedestals — goes for \$275 to an absentee bidder. A pair of rattan chairs is \$35, while a bamboo coffee table with a marble top is bought for \$140.

The one item not popular these days, says Michaan, is office furniture, as a large wooden desk receives no bids. But the two full-sized wooden file cabinets next to it sell for \$250.

The most popular items are jewelry, which were sold in the Annex Auction the day before, Michaan said.

"You can find some really good deals here," Stewart said.

Natasha Chand, two years out of UCLA, is a new auction-goer. She attended the Tuesday auction to see how it was run.

"I told myself, 'I can do this,'" she said, not intimidated by the perception of auctions being only for seasoned professionals. She is decorating her new Oakland condominium with some of the items she is buying, including a telescope, chairs and a china set. "I like to take risks," she said.

Eady is not happy, being outbid on a chance to buy an antique china hutch that she would have sold in her Fresno store.

"Don't you hate it when people say 'I just don't know what I'll do with it?' I know what I'll do with it — I'll pay my rent!"



Above: The monthly Annex Auction at Michaan's Auctions is held on Tuesdays and Wednesdays following the Alameda Point Antiques Faire, which is held on the first Sunday of every month. Below left: Auction attendees look over furniture for sale. Below right: Scott Bradley, vice president and chief operating officer of Michaan's Auctions, auctions off items during the monthly events.

