



## Heirlooms & Artifacts

By Elisabeth Daniels | Photography by Elisabeth Daniels

**I**t all started with a fall off a ladder. Doug Abbott grins as he tells the tale. "While I was out on workers' comp, I was watching all the reality shows on TV — like 'Storage Wars' and 'Thrift Hunters.'"

His twinkling blue eyes match the Hawaiian shirt he's got on, and his long white beard bobs as he continues. "So

I went to a couple of storage auctions. The third time I went out to one, the auctioneer started at \$100, and it went down and down. I offered \$10, and he said 'sold.' I was standing there on crutches wondering what I'd done."

Standing next to Doug is his fiancée Laura Anderson. Their story is as interesting as the histories of the

collectibles they sell. Doug and Laura have been together for 14 years, but they first met when they were kids in the junior choir at church. Doug left to travel the world. After he moved back, they ran into each other at a bowl-a-thon. It wasn't until two weeks later, when they found pictures of each other from choir, that they realized they'd met before.

Laura is tiny in comparison to Doug. Her head of auburn hair barely reaches his shoulder, but her smile is as big as his. She picks up where Doug left off. "We started collecting: rummaging through storage units and hitting garage sales." They were hooked on the thrill of the hunt. When they had five storage units of their own, plus a packed five-bedroom house and a full garage, they knew. "It was time to get a store!" Laura says, laughing.

Doug and Laura opened up Laura's Treasures on Antique Alley in the Arts District about a year ago. They were excited about getting in on the ground floor of the downtown redevelopment. The spot was ideal because of the power of the group. "If we were outside this area, on our own, we'd have to rely on all of our own advertising," Doug comments. "Here, we're with a group of like-minded shops. There are 24 of us on Antique Alley, and we can pool our resources." Laura adds, "It's really nice how everybody refers to everyone else. Every two or three weeks, we all try to get through the other stores so we're aware of what they have."

With so many antiques shops in the same area, it can be hard to stand out. Yet, Laura's Treasures does just that. Maybe it has something to do with the friendly way Doug and Laura greet everyone who comes in. They're welcoming, but they don't pester their customers. "We help people if they need it, and we let them browse if that's what they need," notes Laura.

There's a lot to browse. The shop offers an astonishing array of goodies: everything from vintage gowns and hotel castoffs to Star Wars memorabilia and pop culture items like Pez dispensers. Looking for art to jazz up your décor? They've got it. Need table settings for a retro dinner party? They've got that, too. They've even got a couple of slot machines. "We try to have a little bit of this and a little bit of that because everybody's tastes are different," says Laura.

Doug says people like the layout and flow of the shop, and he might be on to something. Although the shop has an extensive inventory, it doesn't feel crowded. It's easy to walk through and get a closer look at the merchandise. "People like coming in," says Laura. "It makes them feel good. Everyone comments on the music, and I like to see them singing and dancing as they look around."

Another thing that sets Laura's Treasures apart? "We have one of the larger man cave sections on Antique Alley," says Doug. "We currently have between 40 and 50 different vintage bar mirrors and advertisements. We have ten different neon signs right now." One of those is a vintage Miller Beer light from the 1960s. Doug explains that you can tell its age because it hums, which means it has an old style transformer. It's also a hefty 15 pounds. Today, a neon sign that size would weigh a mere eight pounds. That kind of expertise keeps the antiquing aficionados coming back.

If you find something you like, you'd better snap it up. "We just sold the Holiday Inn mirror from the 1982 World's Fair

in Knoxville, Tennessee," Doug comments. "They were the official hosts of that World's Fair, and it was hung at the main entrance of the fair gates."

**"A guy came in the other day looking for the Route 66 lamp,"**  
*adds Laura,*  
**"And it was gone."**

It's crazy sometimes how things come full circle. "We'd only been open about three or four weeks," Doug says, and "a gentleman walked in that I recognized. It was Jason from the TV show 'Thrift Hunters!' They spent about five hours here and filmed an episode that aired the week before Thanksgiving." If you want to check it out, it's Episode 201.



Laura's Treasures is located at 1411 South Main Street. Store hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Sunday, and they're open late on First Friday.