



## IKEA Alternatives: Apartment Decorating on a Budget

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By Dave Howard

My wife loves going to IKEA and browsing through all the knickknacks and displays to find something new for our rental in Los Angeles. Once I enter their doors, an internal 45-minute time bomb starts ticking. I have a ¼ of an hour threshold for the windowless maze of particle board bargains and masses of humanity before I start to freak out and am told to meet her at the car.

She eventually buys something and hands it over to me to assemble. I'm not a handy guy and soon I am cursing Malm, Hemnes and Borgsjo—who I assume are the Swedish gods of interior design. Also, I have words for their son, Billy, inventor of the hex wrench.

As you do when you are married, I needed to find a new compromise on shopping, one that was IKEA-free, one that was soothing, and one where I didn't have to build anything. If you want to play the "green" card, remember buying used is recycling.

So, here's how you save your marriage with IKEA alternatives. You're welcome.

### Swap Meets

Swap meets have come along in the last decade. Once thought of as a place to pick a framed black velvet version of Dogs Playing Poker, they have really expanded to include quality items for your house. Thanks to the all of the DIY and refurbishing reality shows, swap meets are a great place to find gently loved or recently restored furniture. Since most of the stuff at swap meets was originally made decades ago out of—get this—*real* wood, it is built to last for a few more decades. Also, keep an eye out for vintage glass and barware, lamps and other knickknacks you will never find anywhere else. Best of all, there is one somewhere near you just about every Saturday or Sunday, aka prime IKEA time.

### Consignment Stores

You may have to Yelp! around to find the one that is right for you, but you can save ton when you find a quality consignment store. Consignment stores buy furniture from people who have decided to redecorate, move to a new city, or, in one case, bought a couch that they couldn't fit through the door. Consignment stores won't take anything they don't think they can sell. That's how you get a \$1000 off a stylish used couch.

### Goodwill and other Thrift Stores

Most thrift stores are hit and miss, and it may take a while to sort through the junk to get to the good stuff. Because they are run on donations, the quality of what is on the floor is sometimes lacking. For some reason, items seem to better at thrift stores run by religious organizations. I haven't quite figured out why.

### Craigslist

Despite that bad press that it has been getting, Craigslist still is a good place to find some good deals on apartment wares. Last year, I was looking for a rocker and found one for under \$60 right in my neighborhood. As always, when you go to check something out, you should bring someone with you. What can be really valuable on Craigslist are their garage sale listings. For starters, make sure the garage sale is in an above-average neighborhood as that will increase your chances of finding better, higher quality items.

### FreeCycle.org

I love this freebee site. Basically, in the spirit of keeping green, people give away household items for free. You can find complete bedrooms sets, electronics, and all kinds of "one man's junk is another's treasure" type items. Keep in mind this stuff is free, so there is picking involved.

Congratulations, you may know throw away your hex wrench. Your purchase is already built—like nature intended.

What is your favorite way to bargain hunt furniture and [decorate your apartment on a budget](#)? Let us know in the comments.

*Over the last decade, Dave Howard's work has appeared on countless news, entertainment, and sports sites including NBCNews.com, Disneyland.com, and USA Today. In addition, he has written official sites for actors, athletes, and other personalities. Having lived in twelve different rentals in a ten-year stretch, he is uniquely qualified to report on the lifestyle of apartment dwellers.*

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