

Rare Necessities

From New York to Italy, five establishments selling unique items

➤ **WHETHER IT'S A vintage Jaguar, a one-of-a-kind piece of art, a tailor-made snowboard or simply a cool pair of limited-edition sneakers, rarities have a certain irresistible appeal. In fact, research has shown that the pleasure center in our brain lights up when we encounter something rare or novel—a psychological phenomenon called the “oddball paradigm.”**

Procuring bespoke, antique and artisanal items has also become a way for conscious consumers to push back against mass production. People have grown much more mindful about their purchases, placing a higher value on not only items made sustainably and ethically, but also on those imbued with a sense of place, a human touch, and a rich heritage. Here are five shops where you'll find unique, heirloom-quality objects meant to be treasured.

► **FOR RARE BOOKS**

Argosy Book Store
New York City

A first edition of Virginia Woolf's 1925 essay, *On Being Ill*. A 40-volume set containing the works of Charles Dickens bound in rich burgundy morocco. You'll find these and a trove of other literary treasures at the Argosy Book Store, purveyor of rare and antique books since 1925. “There are always surprises,” says Judith Lowry, who owns Argosy with her sisters, Naomi



Hampel and Adina Cohen, and son, Ben. “Like the time we opened a biography of Carl Sandburg and found a letter written by Gertrude Stein. What it was doing inside that book, who knows?”

The building itself, a six-story brick town house tucked between skyscrapers on East 59th Street, is a jewel. Inside, books are everywhere—upwards of 70,000 of them—along with a vast collection of prints, maps and autographs. “We have so many subjects,” Lowry says. “People always find something they're interested in.”

► **FOR SMALL-BATCH FLY RODS**

Maine Fly Company
Yarmouth, Maine

All of the handcrafted fly rods made by the Maine Fly Company have a fishing story behind them. And each one—the Kennebec, the Magalloway, the Carrabassett—is named for one of Maine's countless waterways. In 2018, inspired by his father's lifelong passion for fly-fishing, the rich legacy of Maine's rodsmiths, and the creative spirit of the Pine Tree State's craft brewers, Jeff Davis founded what he calls a “small-batch rod company.”

TOP: COURTESY OF READANDROOM.COM; BOTTOM: COURTESY OF MAINE FLY COMPANY



Davis started by building one rod at a time in his basement workshop. Today, working out of an old red-brick mill overlooking the Royal River in Yarmouth, he and his crew create anywhere from 10 to a few hundred rods of a particular style. “I wanted people to come into the shop like they would a brewery,” Davis explains. “When they ask what’s on draft I can say, ‘We’ve got these seven rods right now. This is our current batch.’ We want people to have something unique.”

► FOR HANDCRAFTED UKULELES

Kamaka Ukulele
Honolulu

On the sidewalk outside 550 South Street in Honolulu, a historical marker bearing the image of a Hawaiian warrior points the way to legendary ukulele manufacturer Kamaka. In 1916, Sam Kaiialili Kamaka began making koa-wood ukuleles in the basement of his Honolulu home, naming his one-man shop Kamaka Ukulele and Guitar Works. It was there that he fashioned an oval-shaped ukulele with a deeper, mellower sound than the traditional figure-eight style. When friends remarked that this new uke looked like a pineapple, Kamaka had an artist paint it to resemble the fruit.

Word of Kamaka’s fine craftsmanship spread quickly and in 1928 he patented the pineapple design, which has been the brand’s signature ever since. Today, Kamaka continues to handmake every ukulele out of native koa from

Hawaii Island, testing each instrument by feel. “We tap them to make sure we’re getting that nice bell tone,” says third-generation owner Chris Kamaka. “When we do that, we can feel the life in them.”

► FOR ARTISAN-MADE PONCHOS

Ayma

Buenos Aires, Argentina
When designers Laura Basile and Carlos Carro opened Ayma, their luxury textile atelier in Buenos Aires, the couple had one goal: to resurrect the traditional Argentine craft of handweaving. To accomplish this, they set about finding and restoring 19th-century European looms, including those they discovered at Maison Borel, a textile factory established in Buenos Aires during the belle époque.

The factory now houses more than 20 antique looms and serves as Ayma’s production facility, where a new generation of artisans create exquisite, handwoven ponchos using heritage techniques. Ayma sources superfine merino wool as well as guanaco,

mohair and vicuña from sustainable fiber cooperatives in Patagonia and the Andes. The result? Soft, one-of-a-kind ponchos for both men and women that weave chic, contemporary elegance into classic gaucho garb. “We make clothing the way they did 200 years ago, using only human energy and raw, natural materials,” says Carro. “It takes time, but we make the best ponchos in the world.”



► FOR FINE COMO SILKS

Pierangelo Masciadri
Bellagio, Italy

The lakeside city of Como has been known for its silk since the 15th century, when Ludovico Sforza, the Duke of Milan, ordered the planting of mulberry trees throughout the region to feed silkworms smuggled in from China hundreds of years earlier. The trees thrived, as did the voracious caterpillars, and Como blossomed into Italy’s silk capital.

Today, although most of the world’s silk comes from China, boutiques selling Como silk can be found around Lake Como, including the Bellagio showroom of Pierangelo Masciadri. An artist at heart, Masciadri uses silk as a canvas, designing scarves and ties that evoke everything from Giotto’s famed Scrovegni Chapel frescos to the intricate mosaics of ancient Rome. “I take as my inspiration the painting, architecture, music and archeology of Italy,” says Masciadri. “Each creation tells a different story of Italian culture.”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Pierangelo Masciadri and daughters Laura and Silvia in his studio, Bellagio, Italy; antique loom at Ayma, Buenos Aires, Argentina; ukulele made by Kamaka Ukulele, Honolulu; fly rod made by Maine Fly Company, Yarmouth, Maine; Argosy Book Store, New York City

TOP: COURTESY OF PIERANGELO MASCIADRI; CENTER: COURTESY OF AYMA; BOTTOM: COURTESY OF KAMAKA UKULELE

