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# Frugal furnishing Experts help you gather the essentials for a first home without breaking the bank

By *JESSICA M. JONES, The News Journal*

Moving back in with the folks after college didn't exactly light Karen Conaway's fire.

"Going from college back to living with parents is really rough," says the 23-year-old sales assistant.

After a year, Conaway was ready to get out. So she and a friend got an apartment in Wilmington near Trolley Square.

"This is the first time I'm paying for it myself," she says.

The total for the two-bedroom, one-bath spread was \$975.

The only thing was, she didn't exactly have beaucoup bucks to furnish the bachelorette pad. She was on a limited budget and had to figure out how to make the best of the little money she had.

It is easy to spend up to \$10,000 furnishing a place. But let's face it -- most first-time home renters or buyers don't have that kind of dough lying around.

Tammy Jo Schoppet aims to help them, through [www.rentaldecorating.com](http://www.rentaldecorating.com), a Web site devoted to helping renters decorate on the cheap.

She says a home requires five essentials: A place to sleep, a place to sit and socialize, a place to snack, a place to sanitize and a place to study and do work.

In the place to sleep, she says, "think of all the things you would need for that area: A bed, linens and a place to store your clothes." Linens-N-Things, Bed Bath & Beyond and Target are

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Inexpensive candles in Traci Mayo's first home in Bear add a bit of color and interest to contrast with the neutral colors of her kitchen.



What's more basic to a first home than a comfortable papasan chair? This one, along with an ottoman-style footstool, is available at Pier 1 Imports.



To help increase the coziness factor in her bedroom, Traci Mayo uses bedroom accessories that feature a mixture of deep and light purple hues.

good places to get these items on a sale day, she says.

In the social spot, just think of how many people you expect to have in that area, Schoppet says. If you entertain a lot, you may want to get a sofa, a love seat and a couple of chairs. Also, think in terms of dual purpose. An example would be buying an ottoman footstool that is also a storage unit.

A table, chairs, cooking equipment, utensils and plates cover the eating place, says Schoppet.

"Go to the thrift store for things like juicers and coffee makers," she adds. This way, you get the more quality items at a fraction of the cost. She got her juicer at a thrift store eight years ago, and it still works great.

A desk, a chair, a lamp (maybe even filing cabinets) will do for the place to study. Sponges, a vacuum, a broom, a plunger and cleaning products will suffice for the sanitation area.

Talleyville native Daniel Joseph has been living on his own for more than two years and currently lives in Hollywood. When it comes to furnishing a place, the 23-year-old says new renters should work around their daily lifestyle.

Joseph, a themed attraction/special effects designer, realized he would need a good-sized work area. But he only had a studio.

He combatted this problem by keeping his furniture along the perimeter of the room.

Joseph also knew he would be working on the computer a lot.

"I had to buy a computer desk and a good computer chair. A lot of design and layout stuff I do [requires me to] be in front of the computer for hours on end," he says. "And being in a comfortable position was absolutely necessary."

Joseph says stores like Target are great because they make it possible for people on a budget to buy trendy home-décor items.

"They are pretty high in quality and fashion, but low in cost because they are really mass-produced," Joseph says.

Conaway and her roomie knew what they had to spend was extremely limited. They chose an alternative route -- used.

The two hit up Resettlers, a Wilmington store that sold pre-owned furniture before it went



Mirrors in many styles and shapes are available at Pier 1 Imports on Concord Pike.



Inexpensive pillows with patterns in contrasting styles accent this Bennett sofa at the Pier 1 Imports store.

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The News Journal/ROBERT CRAIG



Meg Feeney, manager at Pier 1 Imports on Concord Pike, suggests big items should be in neutral hues.

out of business.

There, they got the basics: A big "pimp" couch (\$45), "cool" white leather barstools (\$45) and a bed frame (\$50). Conaway says she got other essentials -- such as a dining-room table and a mattress -- from her parent's house.

Once the big items were taken care of, the girls went the dollar-store route.

"Almost our whole apartment is decorated from the dollar store," she says. "And you wouldn't know it, though."

About 20 diamond-, rectangular-, circular- and octagon-shaped mirrors adorn one of the walls in her dining room. They were a buck a pop each.

The girls purchased candles, place mats and fake plants from the store, too.

Joseph says he also uses the dollar stores to cut costs.

"One of the ways I would save money was getting paper products at the dollar store. A paper towel is pretty much a paper towel. Obviously, an expensive one might last longer, but you're just going to throw it out anyway," he says.

Traci Mayo, 21, moved into her own spot this May. The first thing she thought about when furnishing her two-bedroom apartment in Bear was comfort.

"I wanted it to be comfortable. And at the same time I wanted it to be nice and almost trendy, sort of," says Mayo, who is from Bridgeton, N.J. "I like contemporary sometimes and I also like homey, so I wanted to mix both of them together."

In her quest for furniture, one place she frequented was Raymour & Flanigan, a Northeast region furniture store chain.

"They have really nice stuff for cheap," she says. "And they have sales all the time."

While furniture was a big deal for Mayo, accessorizing the place was even bigger.

She used magazines as an inexpensive way to bring color into the apartment. About four issues of Cosmopolitan are on each glass table in her living room.

Colorful photo albums were also an easy way to add oomph.

Picture frames are on almost every one of Mayo's walls. She bought the frames at Wal-Mart and put one of her own photographs in each of them.

If you are moving into a fixer-upper, the Habitat ReStore in Wilmington is a great place to get cheap home improvement and renovation items. It carries things like appliances, kitchen cabinets, tiles, lighting fixtures, doors and windows, all donated from home-improvement companies.

Though it doesn't carry much furniture, the store occasionally gets things like futons and headboards.

All the profit goes to the local Habitat for Humanity organization.

Yard sales also are a way to find deals. Contrary to popular belief, Schoppet says, showing up late for such a sale can be better than showing up early. At the end of the day, people are eager to get rid of things, so furniture might be offered at a cheaper price.

Perhaps the soundest piece of advice Conaway has to offer is simple, too: "Check your parents' house first."

Contact Jessica Jones at [jjones@delawareonline.com](mailto:jjones@delawareonline.com) or 324-2492.

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### *THINK PRE-OWNED, TOO*

**BLUEBERRY HILL RESALE**, 1015 Brandywine Blvd., Bellefonte; 765-2047. A "little bit of everything," including used headboards and footboards.

**CANTERBURY USED FURNITURE & ANTIQUE**, U.S. 13, Felton (12 miles south of Dover); 284-9567. Quality used furniture, including chairs, tables, bedroom suites and china closets.

**ECLECTICA**, 800 Brandywine Blvd., Bellefonte; 888-1824. A chic home décor place that sells items like drawers and end tables. Most items are under \$20.

**FAIRY GODMOTHER'S HOUSE**, 903 Brandywine Blvd., Bellefonte; 764-4738. A plethora of household items, including furniture.

**THE FURNITURE EXCHANGE**, 2411 Lancaster Ave., Wilmington; 658-1414. High-end resale pieces, including furniture, ceramics, glass and silver.

**REEVES USED FURNITURE**, 403A Philadelphia Pike, Claymont; 764-5582. Used refrigerators, washers and dryers, living room sets, kitchen sets, bedroom sets, air conditioners, lamps, etc.

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### *FURNISHING YOUR FIRST HOME*

Meg Feeney, manager of Pier 1 Imports in Brandywine Hundred, offers tips for furnishing your first home. "If it's your first home, think very carefully about how you spend your money," she says. "You want your home to be not just a house, but a home. That's where your life is."

**STICK TO A NEUTRAL BASE:** When choosing your bigger pieces, like a sofa, it is always safe to steer clear of bold colors. "If your style changes, or you want to change color schemes, it is really easy to change pillows or a rug and accessories." Changing an expensive couch ... not so easy.

**LIGHT IT UP:** "Candles and candle holders can provide warmth and a pop of color."