



## Local fashion designers take stuff outside at Chicago festival

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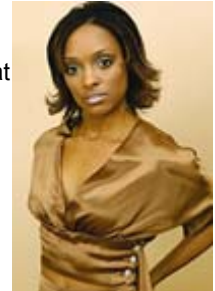
When the sun is shining and it's a beautiful weekend day, going to the mall doesn't seem so appealing, does it?

But now you can shop AND get a suntan. Perfect, isn't it?

At the [Indie Designer Fashion Market](#), taking place this Sunday in the West Loop neighborhood downtown, more than 20 local designers will be selling their clothes, bags, jewelry, shoes and more.

It's far from what you'd experience at the Gap or the Limited. No running into someone else wearing the same outfit. No tag that says "Made in Honduras."

"They're going to see things they're not going to see in department stores or even local boutiques," says local designer [Iliisa Shefferman](#), owner of IS Designs, who will have her line of business casual women's clothes on display at the market.



Here, when you feel the fabrics and try on clothes you can talk to the designers themselves.

Shefferman, 33, says she's excited about meeting her customers face to face.

"I can't wait to be there and really put my knowledge to use," Shefferman says. "The fashion market is going to let designers interact with people who are actually going to be wearing the clothes."

The show is just one element of the Chicago Antique Market, a sprawling collection of tents where you'll find a haphazard collection of '40s-era dresses, art deco lamps, kitschy posters, strands of glass beads, weathered cabinets, delicate china and everything in between.

"Everything is eclectic. That's what's so exciting about it," says Sally Schwartz, who helped found the event in 2004.

The festival is held the last Sunday of the month from May through October, and attracts about 10,000 people a month who come to browse, buy, listen to live music and eat everything from crepes and gourmet sandwiches to good old brats and Italian beef.

"It's as much a show as anything else," Schwartz says. "They way the whole event is positioned it's more like a European happening."

The show takes up an entire city block near Union Park, near the intersections of N. Ogden Avenue and W. Washington Street. Tickets are \$10 for adults, free for children 12 and under and parking is free.

Schwartz says the show was originally meant to be a celebration of one-of-a-kind antiques, but she says she and her co-organizer, Kathy Finley, realized that featuring wares from local designers made sense, too.

"If these things are made well, they'll be around in 100 years," Schwartz says.

The designers who will be participating in this year's Fashion Market include a smattering of designers who have suburban connections; Shefferman is originally from Vernon Hills; clothing designer [Lara Miller](#) is originally from Highland Park; and handbag designer [Sharon Dennis](#) and jewelry designer Undra Heard both live and work in Oak Park.

For many of these designers, who are up-and-comers to the fashion industry, hawking their creations at an outdoor festival is a great way to get noticed.

"They love to meet the public directly," Schwartz says. "It helps their brand get exposure."

Shefferman, for example, will be showing her very first collection – featuring knit tops, wrap blazers, vests and skirts made out of silks and other material – at the market.

The market is also a first for Heard, who hand-makes bold rings and necklaces out of silver, dinosaur bones and fossilized wood. He even uses meteorite. "They just get a kick out of having something from outer space on their hand or around their neck," Heard says.

"My designs are just way over the edge. I do a lot of entertainers and musicians so they want something that's really going to push it but really have a digestible look to it," Heard says.



Dennis, too, will be making her first appearance at the market. A former clothes buyer for companies like Spiegel, Sears and Disney, Dennis turned to making leather handbags when she was laid-off from the job. Her biggest sellers now are white leather bags and big oversized hobo bags.

In her corporate life, Dennis had to be on the lookout for the latest runway styles and had to figure out what would be hot sellers in the stores. But she says as a kid, her own inspiration came from vintage looks. "I raided my grandmother's and my great grandmother's houses," she says.

"People come up with their own trends and it's just fabulous to watch," she says.

Schwartz says the Antique Market and the Indie Designer Fashion Market are perfect for people who are hungry for things that are unique. "People who are into antiques... tend to be really stylish," Schwartz says. "People are tired of being marketed to."