

Clue: A major city



Cut and run

As the credit crunch bites, the sales are bigger than ever. By Ros Anderson

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Gloom on the high street as consumers rein in spending has hit the home furnishings market hard. In April, Ikea admitted sales are being adversely affected by the economic downturn, and even that temple of middle-class stability and taste, John Lewis, has revealed its March homeware sales were the weakest in four years. The result: prices slashed and more sales, making now the perfect time to refurbish on a budget.

Alison Cork, who runs [homesandbargains.co.uk](#), a website full of tips on good deals for the home, has definitely seen a difference in sales this year. "They are on earlier and longer," she says, and where a couple of years ago a 20% discount was generous, now high-street retailers are offering 40% or more, from the first day of the sale.

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Big discounts can be found at most points in the market. Heal's summer sale has up to 70% off; Laura Ashley and Littlewood's Direct are advertising 60% off. "There is clear desperation in the marketplace to shift the current season's stock before the next season comes in," Cork says.

If you're serious about getting big reductions on large home items, there are a couple of tricks worth trying. One is to ask for a further discount on the sale price - this can be well worth it on big-ticket items, as stores want to at least cover their costs before they have to clear floor space for the next season's range.

Another trick is to go off the beaten track, leaving the high street and heading for more obscure locations. "One of my big discoveries of the last few years has been out-of-town warehouses that sell the oversupply of high-street brands such as House of Fraser, John Lewis, Laura Ashley and M&S," Cork says. "They are not allowed to advertise it, because that would damage the big brands, but they sell current season stock at whatever price they want." Try Trade Secret (01295 810110, [trade-secret.co.uk](#)) for warehouses in Oxfordshire, Hampshire and south London, or Bucks Furniture Warehouse in Deptford, south-east London (020-8692 4447).

Beyond the lure of a new sofa at a knock-down price, more substantial home purchases, such as kitchens and bathrooms, are also included in some of the big DIY shed sales. MFI (0800 023 4457, [mfi.co.uk](#)) is already offering 50% off all purchases, plus an additional 20% off on purchases of £199 or more (excludes warranty, delivery and installation). Magnet (01325 744094, [magnet.co.uk](#)) and Moben (0800 413413, [moben.co.uk](#)) are both offering up to 50% off.

That said, the kitchen and bathroom market may not be the best place to find a bargain right now. As house prices wobble, people are staying put and hoping major renovation will shore up the value of their property: Experian's online credit report service recently found non-moving home improvers planning to spend an average of £11,142 in the next six months. So while Homebase, for example, has announced declining sales this year, its kitchen retail section continues to grow.

Prices may even rise, according to Tony Nicholas, owner of kitchen showroom Nicholas Anthony and chair of the Kitchen Bathroom Bedroom Specialists Association (01623 818808, [kbsa.org.uk](#)). "The hike in fuel prices has had an effect on the cost of raw materials," he points out, "and with the strength of the euro against the pound, prices are likely to go up."

Don't be tempted to buy in haste, though. "In an uncertain market," Nicholas adds, "weaker companies often become insolvent and stop trading. You have to be very certain of where you place your order."

Sales to queue for...

The Conran Shop June 21-July 6. Up to 75% off (020-7589 7401, [conranshop.co.uk](#)).

Furniture Village June 26-July 31. Up to 50% off (0800 783 0830, [furniturevillage.co.uk](#)).

Heal's June 26-August 27. Up to 70% off. Tierra sofa was £1,995, now £995; Aspen bed was £1,095, now £545; Alto lamp table was £495, now £245 (020-7636 1666, [heals.co.uk](#)).

Homebase All summer. Offers vary (0845 077 8888, [homebase.co.uk](#)).

Ikea June 19 into July. Discounts vary (0845 358 3364, [ikea.co.uk](#)).

John Lewis June 28-July 20. Up to 50% off. Alamo dining set, £495; Edan floor lamp, £60 (0845 604 9049, [johnlewis.com](#)).

Liberty Starts June 19. Up to 50% off. Eames chair was £3,195, now £2,716; Tom Dixon copper shades were £155, now £132 (020-7734 1234, [liberty.co.uk](#)).

SCP June 28-July 27. Discounts vary (020-7229 3612, [scp.co.uk](#)).

Sofa Workshop Until June 22 (0844 249 9161, [sofaworkshop.com](#)).

Twentytwentyone June 28-July 28. Up to 50% off. Bitossi bird was £75.50, now £64; De La Warr chair was £388, now £233; George Nelson clock was £237, now £189.60; Arco lamp was £1,100, now £880 (020-7288 1996, [twentytwentyone.com](#)).

Viaduct July 5-19. 30%-70% off. Toy chair by Philippe Starck for Driade was £98, now £55 (020-7278 8456, [viaduct.co.uk](#)).

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