

# South Front Antiques Expands Via Web, Social Media

K. DENISE JENNINGS | Special to The Daily News

South Front Antiques has been a landmark in Downtown Memphis for decades, but the second generation of the Nielsen family is launching the past into the future with an expanded web presence and social media platform to make their one-of-a-kind pieces available far and wide.

Svend Nielsen, a native of Copenhagen, Denmark, settled in Memphis after meeting his wife in the 1950s. His family's love of art and his lifelong international travel working in import/export gave him an eye for unique architecture and antiques.

Initially South Front Antiques was founded as a way to legitimize having his wife travel internationally with him on business. But it quickly evolved into more. Since the store opened in the 1970s, it's been a go-to for everyone from the real estate developers to the weekend antiquer.

Svend's son Eric developed a keen eye for antiques and architectural elements growing up in the business and has been buying and handling consignments for years.

Svend retired in January, and Eric and his wife Dawn are now at the helm, determined to update the technology side of the business to make South Front Antiques more accessible.

"We're slowly making inroads into online and doing things a little differently," said [Dawn Nielsen](#), who Svend revealed has an engineering degree from Michigan and an M.B.A. from The University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business. "The explosion of the social media requirement is an exaggerated learning curve."

South Front Antiques has had their strongest sales year so far in 2015. Said Dawn: "From 2000 until now we have quadrupled our business, and we've purchased more inventory in the past year than any other year."

The Niensens have hired designer [Lara Scott](#), who also happens to be Svend's granddaughter and Eric's niece, to help facilitate the store's renaissance.

Eric, who also works as a FedEx pilot, gets merchandising and design ideas when he travels. He shoots images to Lara and they implement them into the store.

"As much heritage as we have in this business, it's still a great effort to run," Dawn said.

Lara still has the South Front Antiques business cards that she fashioned as a child on Saturdays



**South Front Antiques, at 374 S. Front St. in Downtown Memphis, features three floors of merchandise, specializing in used building supplies such as doors and light fixtures.**

(Daily News/Andrew J. Breig)

spent at her grandfather's store.

"We are all a jack of all trades," she said.

Other big changes at South Front Antiques include Scott's reorganization and enhanced merchandising within the store and the more dynamic movement of inventory.

"It will still be a destination, but you'll see our inventory turning over more quickly," Dawn said. "We have a much bigger customer base because of our online and social media presence, and we're selling things online before they even hit the store. Eric is constantly buying."

Longtime client [Tony Salvaggio](#), a Memphis-based real estate developer, has found countless treasures for developments and the addition and renovation of his personal home. He's currently mining South Front Antiques for architectural elements to use in a new, upscale residential development in Oxford, Miss.

"We're working with our architect to incorporate antique architectural elements into each house," said Salvaggio. "(South Front Antiques) does a good job of trying to preserve old pieces of Memphis history that people like me will buy and give a new life. This is my go-to place."

The resurgence of historic architecture in design – both residentially and commercially in stores like Anthropologie, West Elm and Wisteria – is also driving business, Eric says. In addition, revitalization of older properties in towns across the nation requires like elements to make the spaces feel authentic.

[Steven Hinton](#), owner of Hinton & Hinton, a clothing store on the historic square in Oxford, Miss., has used South Front Antiques for several projects including a recent store expansion. In addition to the unique finds, which his space required, Eric's service earned high marks.

"They are impeccably incredible from a customer service standpoint," Hinton said. "If I'm looking for something they will stop everything and help me find it."

In addition to the technology inroads, South Front Antiques is benefitting from more foot traffic Downtown because of South Main Historic Arts District's resurgence.

"We're buying the artifacts out of one building and selling them to another one right here in the neighborhood," Eric said.

The Niensens foresee their 29,000-square-foot building being one of those ripe for purchase and their business eventually outgrowing their space. But the family, who both lives and works Downtown, would like to keep South Front Antiques Downtown.

Said Dawn: "We are proud to be Memphians."