

St. James Vintage Lighting opens up in Hockley Village



By Constance Scrafield

A beautiful thing has happened to the historic St. James Church in Hockley Village. It has become a vintage lighting shop.

That means what it sounds like: the interior has been refurbished to a high quality and inside the old church is hung a wonder of antique lights, Art Deco, sconces, lights with faces, with stained and painted glass, ceramic and crystal chandeliers.

Old lamps, made in Canada of brass, hand made and fabulous, stand on the counter.

Overhead, a crystal chandelier, not big but endowed with hung crystal pieces, round and tear drop, to reflect prisms of light, to enhance any room. Every piece shines with having been polished to its best look.

Next to it, an antique ceramic chandelier. There are figures carved of flowers and a cherub holds a bough, cream coloured, it is painted with leaves and flowers, the light held in sconces, a beautiful work of art, cleaned and refurbished.

In the midst of it all is Vanessa Dragicevic, whose great joy in life is to rescue, repair and resell beautiful and interesting lighting. Sometimes, she makes new lights from old materials.

'I'm making new Art Deco lights for the Hockley Community Hall,' she told the Citizen, 'as a donation.'

Born in Slovenia, Ms. Dragicevic came to Canada with her parents in 1977.

'My parents decided to immigrate here,' she commented.

Then, in 1994, married with three children, her husband James, suggested, 'Why don't we move to Orangeville?'

They loved the heritage look of the centre of the town and the comfortable feeling of the smaller community. More than that, they could see that there is a strong arts community in the town and the surrounding area.

So, they brought their family of two sons and a daughter to Orangeville, where they found themselves settled in a place that suited them very well.

Artistically, Ms. Dragicevic attended Sheridan College for photography, eventually teaching photography for the Catholic School Board from 1983 to 1997.

She explained, "That year, the Ontario government said I had to go back to school to get a teaching certificate, after all those years of teaching. I wasn't going to bother with that, so, I quit."

Then, one day, "I went into a lighting shop where I couldn't afford the lights and I realized nobody north of Highway 9 is doing this. I bought Primrose Church in '97, the same year I resigned from school. I cashed in my pension to do it. My parents told me I was crazy to give up such a good pension but I told them, I have to do something with my life."

In order to source her stock, Ms. Dragicevic has associations with "pickers," people who shop for antiques and oddities. They let her know when they have found things they think she will like and either she approves or she goes to the market to meet them and view the items. These can be found in the antique markets at Aberfoyle, south of Guelph and at demolition sites, especially of old houses and other buildings.

This means that her stock is always changing, "makes it great for my regulars," she remarked. If so many of her pieces are unusual by virtue of their history, her shop is a place that can be visited over and over, with always something else to see.

"Everything is made to be replaced," was her comment. "Here it is all recycling beautiful old things made safe, clean and refinished. I restore a light from the ground up. My mentor, [a Dutchman] James, taught me so much, even how to fish wire through the arms of a lamp. Most craftsmen won't show anyone how to do that because they're afraid of losing the business..."

She said, "When I'm in my workshop, doing the rebuilding or refurbishing, the time flies by. I'm in my element. People do bring their old lights in for me to renovate."

"First and foremost, it's recycled. Everybody needs lighting. There is new lighting replicas of old lights. But this is a niche market."

She reasoned, "It's a long time to learn. I can look at wiring and understand what's needed."

In a happy place, what Ms. Dragicevic wants for herself is to keep doing what she is doing.

"I'm going to do this work forever," she was decided. "I just want to save as many of those old lights as I can. People are too quick to throw things out."

In addition to the shop, Ms. Dragicevic had the rest of the building converted into living quarters for herself. So, her shop hours say "by chance or by appointment" but, actually, as she says herself, "I'm here most of the time."

She recommends and asks people to call her when they are planning to come. "It's way too much to try and train someone about the lights. There are too many stories and history and other details about many of them. So, I just do it myself but if I had regular hours and then, if I got a call and I had to go to a site or a market to check on something, then people would be disappointed."

As she says, "There's something really rewarding to take an old piece and make it new again."