

DESIGN

NEW AND OLD MEET FOR 'ECLECTIC' LOOK

Antique and vintage décor brings personality to contemporary spaces

KATHRYN MCMACKIN
REPORTER/PHOTOGRAPHER

They say some things never go out of style. And even in the contemporary city of Calgary, inspiration is only a few hundred years in the past.

Local designer, Verna Leask, of Valadar Design in Partnership Inc., said she has spent 20 years accumulating the antique pieces that currently decorate her Meadowlark Park home. She spent so long, in fact, that she and her husband renovated their bungalow around the furniture – not the other way around.

“(Antique) pieces are classic,” said Leask, gesturing to the alabaster wall sconces that line her dining room. “You won’t be able to tell if it’s 100 years old, or if it’s five years old.”

It’s this idea of timelessness that enables antique and vintage décor to mesh well with a

variety of design styles to create a more diverse look. Leask said this eclectic style can integrate heirlooms and other evoking pieces that are more representative of the homeowner than what is typically found at local design stores.

Adding these older pieces doesn’t have to be dramatic. Leask said even the smallest touches can add character and interest to a home. For instance, replacing the hardware in your modern kitchen with more quirky vintage handles and knobs.

Leask finds her antique, vintage and

retro furniture and décor in a variety of places, including: auction houses, consignment stores, antique stores and salvaging. Because Calgary is a relatively new city – compared to say, 400-year-old Quebec City – antiques aren’t always so easy to come by.

“It takes effort and it takes time,” she said. “Calgarians don’t always have the time.”

A number of the designer’s pieces, including the stained glass panels found in her dining room and the antique tile surrounding the fireplace, have come from Julia Shantz at Uniquities Architectural Antiques and Salvage.

Shantz and her husband primarily import salvage and antiques from the United Kingdom, France and Belgium. She described her clientele as having a “desire for something unique in their home.”

“The rules are changing,” said Shantz, emphasizing the importance of making the older pieces suit personal tastes. “You can paint and bleach and (décor) becomes current. Don’t throw away Granny’s (furniture,) just use them in a more functional way. Be creative.”

The mixture of old and new design is a current trend, said Shantz, adding that vintage-inspired pieces are starting

to hit the shelves of Calgary design boutiques.

But, be careful of some of these replicas, warned both Shantz and Leask, as the quality may not be as long-lasting as the genuine article.

“In general, furniture that’s made today isn’t as well made as antique – unless you buy expensive pieces,” said Leask. “Today’s furniture isn’t going to last 100 years. It’s not even going to last 10 years.”

Cost could be an obstacle for those wanting old-fashioned pieces, which

are typically pricier than the antique-style found in popular home and furniture stores, like Homesense or Ikea.

For those looking for an affordable and easy way to bring antique style into your home, Leask advised homeowners to purchase one piece that you love, whether it is a piece of art, furniture or a light fixture. And then, just be creative. She recommended framing a single tile as artwork, or adding a new shade to a funky, old-fashioned lamp.

“Make it a statement,” she advised. “Don’t just store it away.”

■ Leask said a neutral backdrop allows interesting antique and vintage pieces to become the focal point of a space.



KATHRYN MCMACKIN, Reporter/Photographer

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■ A single antique tile is displayed in Leask’s kitchen, surrounded by a contemporary backsplash and appliances.



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■ Antique wrought-iron and wooden rails have been salvaged and painted to create a modern kitchen island.