

Warehouse filled with Asian treasures is Victoria's hidden jewel

In a spacious but cozy warehouse open to the public on the corner of Quadra and Hillside, over 5,000 square feet display a lavish abundance of antique furniture, statues, carvings, paintings, and textiles from Thailand and other Asian countries. Artfully arranged by design consultant Martin Connor and competitively priced, these treasures await new homes as one-of-a-kind showpieces to complement any décor.

Some discover Best of Both Worlds by accident, explains owner Robin Elworthy. "They come in the door and say, 'Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore...'" Customers are amazed by the quality of the offerings and the sheer size of the place. "The front of the building is deceptive," he admits, "but once they come in the store, they say, 'Wow, this thing goes way back!'"

Elworthy personally does the buying and importing for the business, and savours his regular journeys to Thailand. "I have to have some kind of creative edge and enjoyment to what I do. It's fun for me, hunting for the unusual. What sets us apart is I don't buy a lot of any one thing; these are mostly signature, or one-of-a-kind objects. Some people say it's sort of museum-like."

Solid wood furniture, often with 100 or more years of history, is what you will find at Best of Both Worlds. "Solid wood is a big issue with all of the people that come in here. They don't want veneer or particle board," he explains. "The quality I have here is beautiful, and I can be competitive in my pricing because I don't bear the overhead expenses of businesses that are operating in the core." Both rents and furniture prices downtown are getting high, but since Elworthy has

Multi shelf storage cabinet



Best of Both Worlds owner Robin Elworthy

cleverly transformed this centrally-located warehouse into a spacious retail enterprise, the savings are passed on to his happy customers.

"We sell a lot of antique Chinese cabinets which make great flat-screen TV stands," he says, gesturing to an ornately-painted and elegant low bench with



Latch on antique cabinet

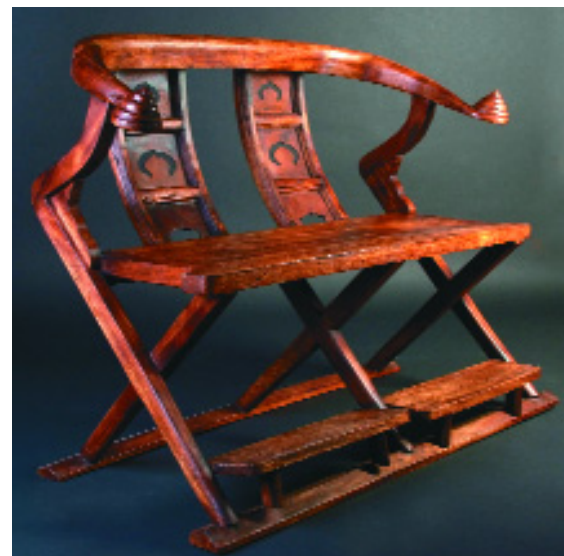
cupboards built into the base. "Each one is unique. They're generally 120 to 160 years old, but have been reconditioned and painted using traditional designs. The finishes are colourful and new, but the pieces are antique." The inventory is ever-changing as shipments arrive; currently Elworthy is featuring pieces made from reclaimed Russian pine. "The wood is from Russia, and the furniture is made in Vietnam. Beautiful pieces with lots of character and simple lines—everything from dining sets to large armoires."

Many these days are searching for light, bright, clean and modern, and Elworthy, who works with many interior designers, explains, "When bringing a room together, you have to have an anchor. A whole room full of sleek and modern is kind of cold. Too much of anything is not a good thing. The trend now is for a mix; you need a bold statement, a showpiece. That's

what I go shopping for when I am on my buying trips."

Best of Both Worlds is definitely a family affair. Elworthy's mother Bobbie has been "the dynamo behind the business from day one, doing the books and packing and overseeing the operation, and her 86th birthday is this month," he says proudly. On the issue of fair trade, he explains, "My wife is Thai. I've dealt with the same companies there for years and years. I understand the general public doesn't want to buy things out of unhappy situations, and neither do I. Thailand has a strong, thriving economy, and was never colonized; I plan to retire to Thailand, to live there—this is more than strictly business."

There is an aura of respect for the artistry and the meaning of the carefully collected objects. "We have



Chinese "Generals" bench

Spirit Houses and Buddhas here, and handle those respectfully," Elworthy explains. "We always recommend how to display them appropriately." He especially enjoys describing the symbolism of the motifs used in the traditional carvings, and providing his customers with some historical and cultural context for the treasures he curates and sells.

"Our prices range from \$2 to \$3000, so it's a great place to shop for gifts for the holidays. There is free parking, and there are some lovely cafés nearby." To get a taste of what's behind the Quadra Street facade, go to www.bestofbothworldsimports.blogspot.com or go to YouTube and type in "Best of Both Worlds Imports." The best way to experience Best of Both Worlds, however, is to enter through the large doors and discover this hidden jewel for yourself.

Best of Both Worlds
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