

## You won't believe what's behind these doors

As with any secret, treasure-filled cave, before you enter, you are looking at... a giant rock. Once you pass the mundane threshold, however, you are richly rewarded: glints of gold and jewel-like colour, richly carved wood and lavish silks enrapture the senses and inspire the soul.

Open to the public on the corner of Quadra and Hillside, housed in a decidedly un-glamorous commercial building, Best of Both Worlds is just such a treasure-filled cave (okay, *warehouse*). Behind these iron gates, owner and importer Robin Elworthy has spent more than 30 years as a procurer of "the best"—an abundance of antique furniture, statues, carvings, paintings, and textiles from Thailand and other Asian countries.

Artfully arranged and competitively priced, these unique gems await new homes as one-of-a-kind showpieces to complement any décor. "Robin has an eye," says Brian Trotto, local filmmaker and creative consultant. "The things we have at home that we bought from Robin over the last 30 years are still our favourite things. This place is unique; it's an opportunity to enjoy the aesthetics of cultures from the four corners of the world, brought here to the 'four corners' of Hillside and Quadra!"

Some discover Best of Both Worlds by accident, explains Elworthy. Customers



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Best of Both Worlds owner Robin Elworthy

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 place is incredible!'"

Elworthy savours his regular journeys to Thailand. "I enjoy the creativity of what I do. It's fun for me, hunting for the unusual, going way off the beaten path. What sets us apart is I don't buy a lot of any one thing; these are mostly signature, one-of-a-kind, artisan-made objects, some with over a hundred years of history."

It's a curated collection, yes—some say the store is museum-like in its artful display of beautiful treasures—but unlike a museum, Best of Both Worlds serves as a portal to immediately bridge the gap of distance, time and culture to allow anyone to incorporate beautiful and meaningful "functional works of art" into daily life at home.

Solid wood furniture, each piece carrying the intriguing residual energy its own rich 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.

"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 cupboards built into the base. "Each one is unique. They're generally 120 to 160 years old." The inventory is ever-changing as shipments arrive; among the offerings are pieces made from reclaimed, antique 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."

Elworthy's intention is that each trip to the store be a unique and entertaining experience. A theatrical stage set recreation of a Hong Kong shipping port from the 1930s complete with steamer and airplane greets you in the foyer, and Elworthy especially enjoys describing the symbolism of the motifs used in the traditional carvings, providing his customers with some historical and cultural context for the treasures. "When you hear Robin giving an impromptu presentation about the carved wooden spirit houses, for instance, he provides a wealth of fascinating information about the artifacts," says Trotto enthusiastically.

The newly expanded store now includes an additional 2,000 square feet of retail space on the second level. Just in time for holiday giving, a large selection of smaller gift items, carefully-chosen pieces that are far more meaningful than what you would typically find at the mall, will be featured, as well as a designated "Buddha gallery," showcasing sacred statuary, paintings and panels.

"Our prices start at \$2, so it's a great place to shop for gifts for the holidays," adds Elworthy. "There is free parking, and some really lovely cafés nearby." In this era of online socializing and shopping, treat yourself to the inspiring and edifying experience of shopping in person at Best of Both Worlds... enter through the large iron gates and discover this hidden jewel for yourself.

**Best of Both Worlds**  
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