

Ceramic restorer sets up shop in Middle River

Middle River

Lisa Holt-Jones is part artist, part cleaner, part jeweler and sculptor. She can examine, dismantle, clean, reconstruct, paint and polish a treasured heirloom and restore it close to its original form.

The Middle River ceramic restorer delicately handles a vintage blue-glass necklace and describes how it first appeared to her.

"It was in pieces," she says in a strong British accent. "These blue baubles are beautiful, but some of them were damaged; the string was disintegrating. I was able to repair some of them with tiny bits of metallic material; gently placing it inside the glass bead, then closing up the bead and making it look almost the same as the other beads," she said recently from her main street store in Baddeck. The Antiques Boutique is full of Canadian and British glass, ceramics, books, jewelry and more. She shares the location with Inverness-area antique dealer, Robby MacKinnon.

Holt-Jones, who immigrated to Canada two years ago, is a professional ceramic restorer and has just recently launched her conservation services for the private sector. Trained in her native Britain under master restorer Lynne Edge, (who has done restoration work for the Duke of Westminster, one of the largest landowners in England), Holt-Jones works with pottery, porcelain, bone china, earthenware, stoneware, Terracotta and glass pieces.



Lisa Holt-Jones at work restoring ceramics at her home in Middle River

Usually, the type of work Holt-Jones does happens in museums. But she believes there are many treasured vases, bowls, plates and figurines in people's homes that could use her special service.

"Nova Scotia is rife with antique ceramic pieces, many of them carefully packed in suitcases while their owners crossed the Atlantic, looking for a new life. These items are proudly displayed in homes, on mantles and in cabinets, or may be packed away in the attic. Many have become chipped, cracked or stained. I can repair and restore these heirlooms," she said.

And it's not just in family homes.

Holt-Jones believes there are collections that need her help in churches, universities, museums, private, public and corporate collections, auction houses, antique dealers and insurance companies.

Her delicate work requires precision and expertise. Too often a treasured antique is ruined by cleaning efforts.

"Household bleach should never be used to remove an organic stain on ceramics, this will disintegrate the glaze," Holt-Jones said. Instead, she uses a poultice of hydrogen peroxide and a professional synthetic silicate to draw out the stain.

"I can recreate and model missing

pieces, repair chips and cracks, remove stains, clean a delicate object by getting into hard to reach places with a specialized steam cleaner," said Holt-Jones.

"Most museums lean towards the conservation method of repairing a damaged artifact by leaving the repairs bare, so an observer can clearly see what is original and those added for repair. Restoration, on the other hand, restores the object close to its original appearance, including artwork and reconstructed parts," she said.

She uses an airbrush and water based glaze or hand paint with powder or acrylic pigments to replicate the traditional styles found on the antiques. Glass pieces can be especially difficult to restore, but by using a specialized epoxy, she is able to recreate pieces that closely mimic the refractive nature of glass.

The restoration process can take weeks or months to complete.

"The resin takes three days to cure and each coat of glaze takes at least a day - often several coats are needed. Then the item must be hand polished," Holt-Jones said.

"Broken ceramics can be restored, with the restoration becoming part of the item's history. Restoration can bring value to a broken and seemingly worthless object, or restore a family heirloom or a piece of history," she said.

Work is mainly carried out in the quieter winter months. Estimates are free.

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