

Martina Lesar says rug hooking can be a pastime for anybody

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

There is, on Mississauga Road in Caledon, a beautiful old log house, within which is the rug hooking shop and studio of Martina Lesar.

'I've had the shop probably 15 years now and I started rug hooking in 1999,' Ms. Lesar informed the Citizen in a telephone interview earlier this week. 'My background is interior design. When I stopped working, I always had an interest in textile and designs. A friend encouraged me and referred me where to go to learn hooking and I started then. I learned it in a Glen Williams studio at Best's Harbour, which is closed now, I think. They used to have folk art from Nova Scotia and rug hooking rugs and lessons.'

'It came to me straight away,' she added. 'I only took a beginners' course and then, worked on my own, making designs and went from there. I'm not good with a needle,' she declared. 'but this was easy. I do a lot of commissions for mostly room sized rugs.'

It has now been 20 years since Ms. Lesar started her new trade.

'The studio is a supply shop as well. I sell all supplies for rug hookers. There's a lot of people hooking rugs now. [I attribute this to] a growing number of retirees, who are looking for something to be creative. It's not like sewing that's hard. With hooking, there's one stitch and that's about it.'

'I mean, you can get really creative with alternative fabrics. There's so much more to rug hooking than there was. A lot of contemporary artists do really unique rugs.'

She commented, talking of the simplicity of hooking, 'I've taught children: you're pulling up a loop and you continue to pull up a loop and, with a few basic tools you can do it. People are working from recycled clothing; so, the cost doesn't have to be very expensive.'

Looking back to its history in the homes, 'Traditionally, it was wool fabric. So many artists are using different materials to make different effects.'

'We have full [colour range of] wool, patterns, frames, hooks. We offer classes here in the studio as well. People also use silk sari ribbon and banana silk. That's actual banana tree pulp and turned into fibre. Rug hooking is all about reusing things. In the 1800's they used old clothing, cut into strips. There are cutters for that now.'

Ms Lesar explained, 'When I first started, I hand cut everything, It depends on how much you want to supply yourself. There are rotary cutters, the same as quilters use. We supply new wool. We actually have our own wool made and we dye it as well. We use acid dye, not vegetable dyes because they don't last. The colours fade after a couple of years. My rugs are primarily for the floor, so, I try to make them as durable as possible.'

Not entirely running the business on her own, she told us, 'My daughter helps me out in her spare time. She's my dyer which is done on site. We have a separate dye kitchen just for dyeing the wool.'

An old art coming into the new era, 'Rug hooking today has really evolved. A lot of younger artists are interested in fibre art. They're doing a lot of new contemporary work. It's great. Not everybody is going to want a traditional floral pattern. A lot of people were turned off hooked rugs because they were too old fashioned but, with these new young artists, there is a real interest in hooked rugs.'

'My style is changing too. My work is becoming a little more contemporary. My interest has been interior design and so, I still have an interest in it. These are my own designs. I hook what I like. If I would like it in my own home, that's what I create. I do sell my

own patterns and other artists' patterns, as well. None of my artists are rug hookers.

?Janet Bailey is a painter, for example. They give me license to take those paintings and do line drawings on foundation cloth and people will hook that. Generally, people decide their own colours. Some people do ask for a kit to help them decide the colours and we're here to help any way we can.?

In addition, ?People will also design their own. People are very creative about putting their own designs on linen cloth. The cloth is sort of like burlap but much better quality. It's an open weave linen cloth.?

A person will come to her to say, ?I have a design.?

She helps that person, who will transfer the design on to the material, by offering the basic cloth and ?usually a hoop, like embroidery, only bigger. A hoop is inexpensive ? we teach on that ? to begin with. It's portable and, later, they move on to a frame. It's not the same frame for everybody. There is something for everybody.?

The benefits to rug hooking are numerous:

?It's very therapeutic,? Ms Lesar was certain. ?There's not a lot of equipment needed; it's not messy; you don't need a machine, just a pattern, the fibre of your choice, a hook and a canvas.?

Best of all, ?you're creating something for your home that is functional.?

She did say though, ?There are some that are too beautiful to go on the floor. They should be hung.?

She added, however, as a matter of intent, ?Mine are all functional.?

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