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EDMONTON JOURNAL

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2006



Every attention is paid to the detail of columns and marble finishing, guaranteeing a unique look.

What a relief

Demand for wall sculptures growing for Interior Impressions

LAURA SEVERS
 Special to The Journal
 EDMONTON

It's designed to make an impression.

Forget about adding another colour to make your walls stand out. Instead, artist Teresa Ursuliak has a completely different picture in mind when it comes to your surroundings.

Ursuliak, of Edmonton-based Interior Impressions, takes custom wall finishes to an entirely new level. While she can, and does, do faux paint finishes and wall murals, Ursuliak also specializes in what at first glance could be simply referred to as wall sculptures—imagine trees, birds, fruit, or practically anything else for that matter sculpted and moulded onto the wall, with the end result producing a three-dimensional effect.

The actual terminology, however, is a little more technical. In the business it's known as a bas-relief or an alto-relief wall sculpture, depending on how much the image is raised from its background.

"In the art of sculpture, a relief is an artwork where a modelled form projects out from a flat background. Depending on the depth involved it may be termed a bas relief (low relief) or an alto relief (high relief)," explains husband Dave, who also happens to represent the other half of the company, which focuses on standard interior and exterior painting, textured ceilings and drywall work. "It's something different that you don't see much of yet. It adds so much sophistication and elegance to a room."

Teresa, who has been doing faux finishes and wall murals for the past 10 years, decided to expand her skills with the sculptural aspect about three years ago, which also happens to be about the time the couple decided to make Interior Impressions their full-time career.

"I started out doing it to fix up my own house and then friends would ask me to do theirs and the business just started slowly like that," says Teresa.

Dave adds: "But over the years she kept challenging herself with different things and that's how the sculptures came about." Dave has house painting experience but worked in the trucking industry until Interior Impressions was launched.

"We had thought about going into the painting

business together some years ago. We work very well together but we never really thought we would have enough work. But this was before the housing boom," says Dave.

In one of her current projects, Teresa and Dave hooked up with Samton Homes Ltd., a custom builder that focuses on higher-end homes with special touches in the Edmonton area.

"We found out about Teresa at the Edmonton Home and Garden Show, where they had a booth. We were just walking through (the show). We were looking for different ideas and usually you do get some ideas there," says Sam DeRose, who co-owns the company with his son Tony. "I asked her if she could do something a little bit different for us."

That something different ended up being a 10-foot-high by five-foot-wide wall sculpture of a Bonsai tree, the biggest bas-relief piece Teresa has done to date.

"They had a huge curved wall (in a new home they were building) that they didn't know what to do with to decorate it," says Teresa. "A picture would look awkward. That's when they saw our exhibit and thought it (the bas relief) would be a good idea. Sam suggested the tree because I had a sample of one at the home show. He gave me a picture that he had and I just decided to go big with it."

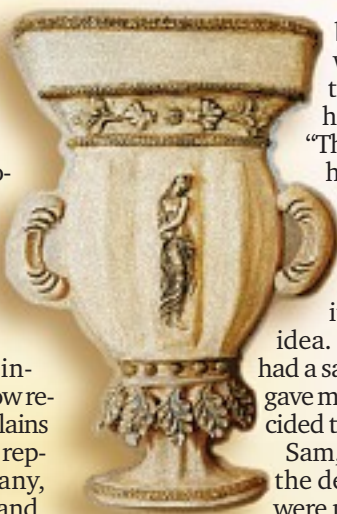
Sam, and his wife Maria, who handles the decorating for the Samton homes, were pleased with the results. They also had Teresa provide a number of faux finishes to the house including using paint to create the look of marble in some spots. Meanwhile, buyers are just amazed when they see the bas-relief sculptures in the completed home.

"They see those finishes and they think that it is something you buy and stick on the wall," says Sam, who has been in the construction industry for 29 years.

"They're totally shocked. A lot of the customers find it very hard to believe that this could be accomplished. They love it."

That response doesn't surprise Teresa or Dave, who are now just starting to get used to these wow-factor types of reactions.

"The people have never really seen anything like this before and they want to touch it. Then they want to know what it's made out of. Then that's when I tell them that's a secret," says Teresa.



Detail of a bas-relief urn created by Teresa Ursuliak



Dave and Teresa Ursuliak, owners of Interior Impressions, stand beside a large bas-relief sculpture of a bonsai tree that Teresa created in a St. Albert show home. Below, detail of columns and marble finishing gives the bath a Roman look.



Non-traditional colours make festive holiday tablescapes

Dear Leanne: Could you provide some thoughts on table decorating for the fast approaching entertainment season? Are there any new trends or ideas I should try to incorporate?

A: You are absolutely correct; the entertainment season is arriving with great speed. Most of these events are steeped in rich traditions. Whether you are celebrating Christmas, Hanukkah, or Zwanzaa, they offer a plethora of design elements for a meaningful gathering.

To incorporate the latest trends into a historically entrenched gathering, look to the latest home fashion trends as your muse. Christmas colours do not have to be the traditional red and green, for instance. Consider a variation on these traditional favourites by setting a table in deep plum and chartreuse.

Rather than one tablecloth emblazoned with a busy festive pattern, consider a calm, sophisticated backdrop for your dinner by using solid colours that can be used readily at another time.

Contrasting solid colours add drama, can be used at other times of the year

If you can't find a solid tablecloth in the colour of your choice check out the bedding department and tailor one from a flat sheet. If you are handy in the sewing department create napkins from any remaining material.

Rather than using traditional placemats, lay table runners across the table to denote place settings. For example, if you are seating eight guests, lay three table runners (in a contrasting colour) across the width of the table and a fourth runner down the middle from long end to end. This will provide a contemporary plaid pattern that will give your table an updated look.

Place your plates directly on the runners, or use chargers to add dimension. The rest of the display should be delightful to look at while being practical.

When planning an intimate meal, avoid placing large and/or high, cen-

Leanne Brownoff
Ask the designer



trepieces on the table. Tall, fresh florals are beautiful in magazines and add incredible ambiance to a space — both from a visual as well as a fragrant consideration. However, they tend to be highly impractical when dining.

Place these arrangements on a side table or buffet so they can be enjoyed to their full potential.

Candles should also be considered. Long, tapered candles are elegant. To ensure their stability, anchor the candles in

a heavy-based holder that complements the decor. Tea-light candles displayed on a beautiful plate or floating in a bowl of coloured water will offer a soft incandescent glow without competing with your dinner or your guests.

Embellish the plates or napkins with a festive touch. For example, secure a napkin with a strand of raffia. Tie items such as Christmas ornaments, with pine cones and cinnamon sticks, and attach each bundle to the napkin holder.

Another design trend for entertainment is using organza fabrics. This translucent fabric brings a touch of elegance to any gathering. Lay organza over a tablecloth, or as a cover for dining room chairs, and allow its dream-like quality to transform your decor to the height of sophistication.

Dear Leanne: I have an antique pie-safe with a decorative, punched-tin

front. Over the years the tin has begun to appear dull. I have never tried to clean it and wondered what I should use.

A: When cleaning tin, avoid using any cleansers that contain abrasive materials or harsh chemicals, such as ammonia. Tin is a very soft metal and these cleansers remove more than surface grime, they can actually remove surface metal as well — and that is not desirable.

To clean your decorative tin, use a soft, clean cloth and a solution of mild liquid detergent and warm water. Wipe the entire surface with the cloth, rinse with warm water and thoroughly dry the entire surface.

Remember to dry the inside of the panels as water can penetrate the punched holes and drip onto the pie-safe's contents. Once the tin is dry you can apply a thin layer of paste wax to the surface to enhance the metal's lustre.

Leanne Brownoff is a local interior design consultant who welcomes your questions at www.leannebrownoff.com.

Give kitchen that custom touch by DIY from scratch

Debbie Travis



When the owners of this user-friendly kitchen decided to renovate, their first priority was to invest in modern appliances. And that took care of most of their budget. This project was a complete do-over, so how did they manage to complete the room with such style and efficiency? Part of the secret lies in my friend Anne's creative background. As an artist and set designer, Anne thinks outside the box. Her solutions not only work, but also look fantastic.

Inexpensive stock cabinets from a hardware store were transformed with two coats of milky tangerine paint and sleek steel handles. Paint really is the best, most cost-effective decorating tool around. Choose your colour, choose your accents, take the time to prepare the surface properly and you'll have a custom look like no other.

One of the advantages of building your own kitchen from scratch is that you can personal-



TORSTAR SYNDICATE

Modern steel counters and a mirrored backsplash reflect an upbeat tone.

ize it to suit your lifestyle. You aren't tied to someone else's assumption of what makes the perfect kitchen. For Anne, additional storage was not an issue. Her kitchen did not require upper cabinets. Instead, she designed a unique floating shelf that holds the wiring for over-the-counter lighting. The upper space is left uncluttered to be utilized for two or three simple objets d'art. This is not a large kitchen, but the airy design gives the illusion of space.

When I was a girl, my mom made friends with

the local grocer and butcher. It was important to her that we were all well-fed, even when times were tight. Her loyalty paid off — we always got the best cuts of meat. In this day of DIY, it's smart to make a buddy in the cutting department of your local lumber store. For the kitchen counter, Anne drew the template and had her friends at the lumber store cut the shape from plywood and wrap it in a sheet of stainless steel. The cost is a fraction of what a made-to-order steel counter would cost.

The upkeep of a mirror backsplash isn't for everyone, but it does heighten the reflective quality of the steel countertop, and opens up the room.

Choosing the right floor for your kitchen involves some extra thought. The practicalities of comfort and cleanliness usually take precedence over style, unless you can get all three in one product. New designs in vinyl and linoleum offer a series of exciting colours and patterns, as does cork. Anne chose chocolate brown cork tiles, an excellent product for busy, hardworking spaces as cork is both forgiving underfoot and good looking.

Ingenuity led the way in this dynamic, urban-chic kitchen design. The mix of reflective surfaces, good lighting and white walls creates a bright work space; tangerine and chocolate brown add the youthful character and fun.

Organize your furnishings to enhance their beauty

Q: After months of procrastinating, I have finally replaced my living room furniture, but I find that these new pieces don't seem to work in the room. The new furniture includes a long sofa in a soft green shade and a matching chair in a coordinated fabric. I would like to incorporate two additional chairs that are covered in a striped green, red and gold pattern and have one matching footstool; an oval Victorian table; a long antique book case; and a dark oak china cabinet.

I think that some additional seating, as well as couple of end tables are necessary.

A: All interior design projects begin with taking an inventory of existing furniture and evaluating each piece for its function, its appearance and its sentimental value. Sometimes it is simply not possible to integrate all pieces in this inventory because of their size, the shape of the room, or because the pieces don't fit into the design criteria.

The best way to create a pleasing arrangement is to organize your furnishings to enhance their beauty. The nicest things should have a place of prominence by placing them near the entrance as the first thing you see or by organizing your major furniture grouping around it.

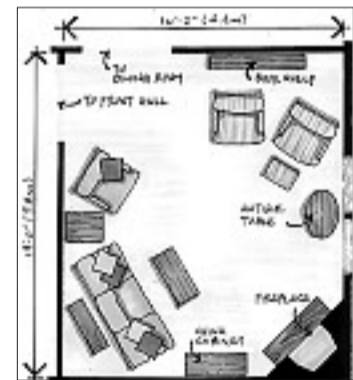
Contrastly, you need to underplay things that are not so beautiful and all your pieces should work together in order to create a pleasing ambience. To create compatibility, you may have to refinish some of your wood furniture to match other pieces.

It is important to avoid too many wood tones in a room. Wood tones have colour, so look for the colour in your wood to make sure they work together. Pine, teak and some oak woods, for example, are orange in colour and combine well with gold, green and blue tones. Red woods, like cherry, mahogany and rosewood, blend well with other red tones, greens and soft blues.

A common wall colour will help merge all your furniture styles. If you have a patterned upholstery, this may be the basis of your colour scheme. The lightest or most neutral of the tones in the upholstery would be a good choice for the wall tone. Diverse pieces of furniture can always work as long as they share something in common. Pieces of the same period will always go together as will pieces of the same scale or texture.

David Ferguson designs homes. Write to David at: ferguson@creativespaceonline.com and check out his website at www.creativespaceonline.com

David Ferguson



TORSTAR SYNDICATE

Organize furnishings to enhance their beauty.

Bonsai tree painted taupe, with bits of gold to enhance its 3-D effect

RELIEF

Continued from 11

Part of that secret is a unique gypsum plaster mix is used to create the wall sculpture.

"You need to get the right drying time when you're sculpting the item," explains Teresa. "You don't want it to dry too quickly, but you do need the plaster to get hard."

As far as the exact composition of those special additives, Teresa and Dave are not about to divulge the secret formula. Teresa, though, is glad to talk about any other part of her bas-relief work.

The finished sculpture, she says, will come out looking like it has a whitish finish but notes that it can be painted in subtle tones or full colour, depending on the client's preferences. For example, in the case of the bonsai tree, it was painted in the same taupe colour as the existing wall to give the finished sculpture a more subtle look. Teresa did, however, add bits of gold on the tips of the leaves and the bark to enhance its three-dimensional effect. Time to complete a bas-relief sculpture will depend on the amount

OFF THE WALL

► **What is relief wall sculpture?** A sculpture is a three-dimensional man-made object considered as art for residential or commercial use. At least two levels of relief are commonly used and defined: bas relief, which means low relief, and alto relief, meaning high. In both cases the images must attach to the background.

► **Why choose relief wall sculpture?** One or more appropriately selected and properly placed wall sculptures can add distinction and elegance that cannot be acquired in any other way. Being so unique, they are a focal point, conversation piece, and a source of enjoyment.

► **Where can I find out more?** Check out the Interior Impressions website at www.interior-impressions.ca

of detail and the size, Teresa says. It generally varies from a few days to a week.

Aside from trees, other bas-relief work Teresa

has done includes urns, lions and a horse rearing up on his hind legs. She's also doing a life-size sculpture of a waitress holding a tray to adorn a wall where the homeowners have incorporated an English pub theme in their basement.

Pricing for bas-relief sculpture work ranges from \$1,000 to \$4,000 depending on how elaborate or large the project is. The price includes painting costs.

"In Teresa, the key thing about this is we were very fortunate to find someone who is a joy to work with and takes a lot of pride in what she does," says Sam, who adds, "it's (the tree) excellent. It's better than I expected. We went much larger than what we originally planned on doing and it's really an eye-opener."

He now has Teresa lined up to do some work on the latest home he's building, this one in St. Albert in Regency Heights, a 2,500-square-foot bungalow that will include an additional 2,500 sq. ft. in the basement, and comes with a five-car garage.

As to what the next bas-relief sculpture will be, Sam says that hasn't been decided yet.