

Business spotlight: Central Chic

By Ed Marcum

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

When you love antiques but you are running out of space for them, what do you do?

You can do like Old North Knoxville resident Jill Tennant did and open an antiques store.

"I've just been collecting antiques, and my house started filling up quickly," she said.

Tennant opened Central Chic Feb. 1, on Central Street at Anderson Avenue. The shop carries merchandise dating from the early 20th century to present day.

"It's not all just antiques; there are some gift items, too," she said.

Furniture seems to predominate, but there are lots of knickknacks, home decor items, kitchen utensils, toys, glassware and other things.

Tennant has arranged it all into sections to suggest rooms with the items you might find there. There is a "living room" at the front of the store, with rocking chair, coffee table, fireplace mantel and other items; a bedroom area with vintage bed and other furniture; a kitchen area with cooking gadgets, some Fiestaware dinnerware, a couple of 1950s-era kitchen tables and such; and even an office section with antique typewriter and other things that could be used to nicely clutter up a desk in retro style.

There are little whimsical displays of merchandise throughout the shop, such as the table Tennant has labeled for "mantiques." It's for things like beer steins, shaving mugs, tobacco cans and other items commonly associated with guys.

Central Chic has some unusual items such as an ornate smoker's stand with a copper-lined humidior in the center, surrounded by a couple of elegantly curved drawers.

"I'm not sure how old it is. It's one of several things that came out of my grandmother's house," she said.

These items include pieces that had belonged to Tennant's grandparents and great-grandparents and were in her grandmother's home in Columbus, Ohio. Another unusual piece is a glass jadite floor lamp with a metal base supported by several female figures. This was one of the items in her grandfather's bar room, she said.

In fact, Central Chic is somewhat of an ongoing estate sale. Tennant says her family has many more items, and she will put more of them out in the store as space becomes available. Besides her family's items, Tennant's shop includes antiques she has picked up through estate sales and other sources over the years.

Tennant also enjoys crafts and sells purses, handbags and towels that she has embroidered. Her shop carries furniture she has refinished to have a "distressed" look. Tennant said she wants to carry other locally made products and plans on hosting craft classes at Central Chic at some point.

"One of the things I really want to do is have things from local companies and local artists here," she said.

Originally from Columbus, Tennant came to Knoxville to attend the University of Tennessee, where she earned a degree in public relations. She worked in the corporate world in Washington, D.C., for a year, "but I couldn't afford

to live there," she said. Tennant moved to Kentucky, where her family was living, got a master's degree in business administration at a Baptist college there and came back to Knoxville, where she has lived in Old North Knoxville two years.

"I just love the character of older homes," she said.

Currently, she splits her time between her shop and working at Preservation Pub on Market Square.

Tennant said she feels like she has picked the right time and place to open her shop. A neglected area for years, Happy Hollow seems to be rallying, with eclectic businesses such as the Time Warp Tea Room opening. Her landlord, Daniel Schuh, is renovating several buildings in the block where Central Chic is located and said he hopes to attract shops, restaurants and other businesses. Business owners are talking of forming a merchants' association.

"Everybody has been super nice and really helpful. Everybody kind of passes people around; if you don't have what someone wants, you send them to somebody else," Tennant said.

Central Chic is open 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday and is closed Sunday and Monday.

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