

STATEMENT

By LEAH SANDALS
Special to The Globe and Mail
Saturday, August 7, 2004 - Page L4

HALIFAX -- With its military citadel, British gardens and Bostonian common, Halifax is a city often characterized by adherence to tradition. But amid the bagpipes and rappie pie, new elements are emerging -- hip-hop beatboxers and blueberry creme caramel, though disregarded by provincial tourism strategies, are forging a uniquely millennial Maritime mix.

At the crest of this less-salt-encrusted nouvelle vague is Statement, a home furnishings shop located in the city's artsy north end. Open just less than a year, it's quickly become a favourite with local designerati.

"There's an incredible mix of pieces, primitive to modern," says decorator Anne Thaler, who works on upscale projects from Montreal to Moncton and New York to New Minas, N.S. "It creates inspiration for a place that can be both tranquil and sophisticated at the same time."

Though lines carried by the store are Wallpaper-worthy -- Kartell chairs, Rosendahl wine racks and Parallel end tables are all in stock -- Statement's owner, Ray Frizzell, is mindful of toning down excessively cool nuances. "Pure modern pieces can be very cold," he says. "That's one of the fears people have about a modern look."

Instore, Frizzell mixes clean-lined white leather couches with vintage-look reclaimed-wood cabinets, creating a down-home feel with come-from-away cachet. "It was important for me to show that a piece with modern lines could go very nicely alongside something more traditional," he says. "You don't have to get rid of everything in your house to introduce a modern piece."

Accessories get a similar treatment, as old-style Polish crystal cozies up unexpectedly with Thai water-hyacinth cushions, and resin vases share the windowsill with Buddhist statues.

While Statement's international influences are evident, it's strongly committed to domestic artisans. Upholstered furnishings are dominated by Winnipeg's Pulse, which specializes in made-to-order mix-and-match lines, and Montreal's Via, which offers leather of all colours and textures. There's shelving and cabinetry from Quebec's Karya, as well as tables and accessories from Vancouver's Martha Sturdy.

Local artwork decorates the store's walls, offering a decidedly different take on the fishing-shacks-at-sunset trope of Maritime landscape. Janet Kimber's ultra-saturated colour photographs transform muted coastal blues and greys into intense reds and oranges. Hugo Avaralos's black and white prints focus on gritty urban architecture rather than whirling seagulls. And Sandy Caines' abstract giclée on canvas mimics the feeling, if not the appearance, of immersing oneself in Nova Scotia's wide, grassy fields.

But the artist who's been most successful in drawing on local landscapes is stone carver Sarah Irwin. Inspired by her beachside home in Hackett's Cove, Irwin combines solidity of rock and fluidity of water in long, narrow pieces of spiralling limestone. The young artist's work has sold briskly, with pieces in the collections of both hip neighbourhood creatives and vacationing Hollywood celebs.

"The ocean is the biggest carver of all," Irwin says, "There's just something about the water. Every time you walk on the beach, it's a different thing, and you're never sure what you'll find." She capitalizes on found objects in several ways, covering thrift-store items such as handbags with roadside shale to create striking sculptural collages.

As summer turns to fall, there will be lots of new things turning up at Statement. Colder temperatures will no doubt bring increased demand for Haligonian Margot Storey's sumptuous fur pillows and throws (made from secondhand coats, the line is entitled Refurbished). And longer nights will amp the appeal of lighting devices from San Francisco's Pablo Designs, whose Ventana lamp hangs dramatically in a floor-to-ceiling loop of white fabric.

But it's not time to jettison the flip-flops and the beach mat just yet. With a few more weeks of summer, there's still plenty of time to wander this seaside land of sand and concrete, never quite sure what one will find.