

# Miniature assemblies a challenging hobby

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Staff Reporter

It's contagious. Collecting miniatures is one of the largest hobbies in North America--and still growing.

To talk to Irma and Karl Volkert, owners of the Doll's House on Front Street in Belleville, it's easy to understand why a person can get so wrapped up in tiny pieces of furniture and houses built on a scale of one to 12--three-quarters to 12 in Europe.

There's more than the pride and satisfaction of completing or assembling something in miniature. It's a challenge.

As a matter of fact, the Volkerts began creating miniatures as a hobby--something for their granddaughter. More than a year ago they opened a store to sell miniatures and accessories--the only store between Toronto and Montreal, and the lone store to sell only miniatures. They also founded a

miniature club in Belleville. Now, Volkert devotes his time to the store and his special projects in miniature, although he is an electrician by trade. It makes him the resident electrical expert. And yes, miniature buildings do have electrical outlets and lighting.

"In miniature," he adds.

Right now Volkert is building a two-story house for the miniature club's first show in September. When

that's done, he says, he'll start something else. He's got blueprints ready for the next project, whether it's a one room box or a keepsake hutch.

"So they'll be there when I'm ready," he says.

And clientel is growing. It represents a cross-section of almost every social and economic level of society. Volkert says even men are beginning to come into the store where before they would just stand outside and let their wives come in.

"As soon as we got the building supply (section)," says Mrs. Volkert, "the men got interested."

There are kits and pieces and accessories and furniture settings at the store. Many of the small items handcrafted for the miniature collector, such as glassware and ceramics, come from local or Canadian craftspeople. But all building supplies come from the U.S. and Mrs. Volkert is disappointed because with the dollar exchange rate and duties, it makes these items very expensive. She says she thinks these items should be made in Canada--perhaps manufacturers aren't aware of the demand.

Mrs. Volkert says she thinks part of the attraction of miniatures is a trend of

people to get back to the basics--to work with good materials, create something to be proud of and to have something which can be handed down from generation to generation. She likes to call it Heritage in Miniature.

Mrs. Volkert says some of the people getting interested in miniatures are young couples who are just starting out and who don't have a home of their own as yet. She says they build a miniature of a home they want and get to iron out the bugs before they look for or build the real thing.

The Doll's House will have a display at the Quinte Exhibition this year, especially appropriate, says Mrs. Volkert, in the International Year of The Child.

She's also looking forward to the miniature show on Sept. 29 at the Four Seasons Hotel where she works as comptroller. She says she really hasn't any goals for the show except, perhaps to make people more aware of miniatures.

But be warned. It doesn't matter what your age. Once you have picked up that first tiny brick or door or balsa eavestrough or scale model wood stove, you're hooked. Collecting miniatures is second only to stamps.