

office floor, where knitting machines once hummed. High above it hangs a long metal drive shaft, stretching across wooden beams. A fitting and dramatic contrast to the high-tech business that Black and his wife, Gretchen, now operate in the same space. They work on antique wooden desks and drafting tables.

"I never buy new furniture," says Black.

Blackbox was originally in the lower, front part of the building that faces Main Street, where Megatel, a specialized computer manufacturer, is now located.

Black moved his business to the upper floor, above the antique market, and across from where he and Gretchen, created their home.

Above them, on the top level of the building, Black recently restored the dormer windows that had been boarded over in what was originally the spinning room. The couple plans to create usable space on this top floor.

"It will be a two-year project," says Black.

He has also done restorative work on the second floor ceiling at the front of the building where vendors now sell vintage jewelry, furniture and other small items. In woollen mill days, this was the mixing room, where workers would blend different kinds of wool, following a specific product recipe, according to Black.

The roof in this area was sagging when he bought the building. Extensive work took the pressure off the structure. Space above the walls was created, wall joists were doubled and a truss rod was installed as part of the beam to fortify its strength- creating queen posts- a mechanical way of making timber beams stronger.

Restoring a heritage building like The Beaumont Mill is a long-term project.

"You have to be nutty to do it," says Black, smiling.

The knitting mill was originally powered by a millrace that ran off the Credit River, controlled by a dam situated just north of the property. The race was probably about 10 or 12 feet deep, estimates Black.

The curved stonework that arched over the water as it rushed under the mill toward the water wheel can still be seen at ground level from the front and rear parking lots. The water wheel itself that powered the mill is now silenced and buried under the concrete floor of the antique market where furniture, glassware and other items are now displayed.

Bringing the past into the present has also become important to young customers, says Arsenaault.

"The business has changed over the last five years," he explains. "Older people are still interested in antiques and primitive items, but 30 to 40 per cent of our customers are now aged 15 to 25.

"They're looking for old cameras, vinyl records, jewelry, or retro toys; and for an 18-year-old, who had a toy when he was three, to him it's retro. They also like 50s, 60s, and 70s funky, old furniture that is affordable."

Arsenaault stays current with the wishes of his customers and the concerns of his vendors.

Tom O'Neill and Robert Brown were among the first vendors to join the antique market. They chose the Beaumont Mill because they liked the heritage building and the village's charm, "but especially because of Peter's personality," says O'Neill.

"In spite of his abuse," jokes Brown.

Arsenaault has a reputation for having a playful love-hate relationship with his vendors. He's just as quick to sharply correct their merchandising, as he is to install new shelving for them, or lend his expert eye to re-organizing their booth, and his keen wit keeps them laughing at the same time.

"If it weren't for Peter, we'd just be selling from home in Bradford," both Brown and O'Neill are quick to add.

"There is no other antique market like it, that we know of, in the GTA."

O'Neill and Brown, specialize in Depression glass and high-end glass pieces. Sparkling alongside a funky lime green chandelier, (O'Neill offers to custom colour any fixture) there are many traditional and Art Deco light fixtures displayed from secure wooden beams overhead, throughout the mill. They also have a large room in the market, full of china, lots of oil lamps, and unusual, rare items.

Arsenaault says that people often come in and talk about their history at the Beaumont Mill. One example greets you on arrival. Just inside the door, a framed picture of Mary (Porteous) Croll, dressed for business, is hanging on the wall, alongside a letter from her 91-year-old son, James Croll. He sent in the photo, after visiting the mill where his mother worked around 1910.

"She is part of its history," says Arsenaault, "so I put her photo up to honour her memory and those like her whose lives were part of the place."



*Pictured top centre opposite page: Beaumont Mill owner Malcolm Black stands beside the plaque designating the Beaumont Mill as a heritage property. Pictured bottom right this page: Beaumont Mill manager Peter Arsenaault displays an antique oil lamp.*