

Dolls preserve a piece of history

It may be a poor pun, but dolls aren't child's play these days. Never have so many people of all ages been so serious about their dolls. Canadians over the past few years have become avid collectors and it's not surprising how the quest for quality and uniqueness has brought about renewed interest in hand-crafted porcelain dolls.

Mother and daughter Lynda and Lorrie Royce of Attic Heirlooms of Stouffville, one of the exhibitors at the Markham Country Decorating & Collectibles Show & Sale, March 19, 20 & 21 at the Markham Fairgrounds, have rediscovered the world of porcelain dolls and are preserving this chapter of the past in a myriad of innovative ways.

While Lynda developed an interest in porcelain doll making as a hobby, her daughter Lorrie, studying at the Fashion Institute of Canada, loved researching, designing and sewing clothes. Not until 1989 did this creative duo combine their unique talents to establish the foundation of Attic Heirlooms Reproduction Porcelain Dolls.

"Each of my porcelain dolls are a labor of love," said Lynda. "Depending on the type of doll, it can take up to three weeks of intensive crafting before I hand it over to Lorrie to costume."

Lynda makes two basic styles of porcelain dolls. One has the entire body molded in porcelain and the other has a soft-body with porcelain head, arms and legs. The molds for the dolls are purchased from sculptors in Europe and the United States. The porcelain itself is mined in Tennessee and received in a premixed liquid form.

Lynda describes her technique of handcrafting the dolls, "The liq-

uid is poured into the molds until a thin wall gradually forms to the contour of the mold. The excess liquid is then drained off and the liquid is allowed to become firm. I then remove the mold and start to sand the seam lines and any imperfections I may find.

"The eyes are carved out and bevelled so that the glass eyes will fit snugly. Then I polish the body to perfection with a cotton ball. Once the doll is silky-smooth, it is fired in a kiln at approximately 2500 degrees to the "bique" stage."

This entire process takes Lynda approximately 12 to 18 hours with another 18 hours for the cooling off period. Lynda then polishes the doll once more to a satin finish.

"Then," she laughingly says, "the real work begins with many hours

of intricate china painting. Each of the dolls are different and it's important that their personality comes through with the right expression."

Then the doll is turned over to Lorrie, to weave her creative sewing magic and create the perfect outfit. With several years of experience in the fashion industry, Lorrie is well qualified and eager to contribute her expertise toward the design and creation of unique costumes for the dolls.

In her extensive research for the right costume Lorrie literally leaves nothing to chance. She explains, "I have several books on the History of Costume and Children's antique clothing. But if all else fails, I simply design what I feel is right for that particular doll."

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