



You may also find work by **Steve Harrickey** from **Montique Furniture** and stained glass by **Karen Derksen** from **Kara's Stained Glass**. Both have their own shops in the region but love the Artisan Zone approach, too.

"We came up with this concept and didn't want to be a gallery," says Martin. Aimee agrees, saying galleries are great, but they don't always carry every type of art.

So the pair decided to create a refined space for all types of well-crafted art – from A to Z. "We want to help the average person find refined art in a retail setting," says Aimee. Their shop is open daily, so people can find art on the fly, not have to rely on limited-time art shows.

"You're not going to throw original art in your garage sale if you've invested in a Canadian piece," says Aimee. "You'll take more pride in it, hang it wisely and care for it because it's important."

Above the shopping area is a mezzanine where artists will come in to teach classes, everything from drawing and painting to photography and pottery. In terms of selling, artists can work with the Kocaks to establish a partnership suited to their needs, whether it be renting space, selling their work on consignment or wholesale, they look at each individual artist and work on a case-by-case basis. "Everybody's different," says Aimee, which is what makes their business work.

Somewhere down the road, says Martin, they'd love to branch out and "see an Artisan Zone in every city."

But for now, they're focused on their King Street location in Kitchener, which opened in November.

Once they had secured space in a heritage building in the perfect location (what could be more fitting than downtown Kitchener across from THEMUSEUM and the Conrad Centre for the Performing Arts?), Aimee and Martin knew they needed to enlist some help with the interior design.

They called **Carolann Mackie** from **The Frugal Decorator** and couldn't be happier with their choice.

After they gutted the space and cleaned it up, Mackie helped the Kocaks transform it into exactly what they'd dreamed. Now, the building's exposed brick, hardwood floors and industrial features add to its charm. Mackie saved some large chandeliers from the landfill, painted them white and now they're a feature in the shop – they suit the design perfectly.

Aimee, Martin and their two daughters, 15-year-old Taylah and five-year-old Victoria, did quite a bit of work on the space themselves, too. The barnboard-surrounded counter at the front of the store is made of bar tables from Peter Martin's 41 restaurant, previously located next door.

In the back of the shop, visitors will find Aimee's **Pure Photography** studio, where she has plenty of space to spread out and do portraits, product shots and more. Leading into the studio is a charming sitting area Aimee uses for meetings with clients.

"Artisan Zone itself is a labour of love and a work of art," says Aimee. She knows what goes into creating an art piece – blood, sweat, tears, laughter, joy – and she says bringing Artisan Zone to life had all of those things. It was a family affair and the finished product is a collaborative piece of art they can all be proud of.

"We wanted to make Canadian art more accessible for people and give it a home," says Aimee. And what a charming and welcoming home it is.

WHERE: 37 King St. W., Kitchener. 519.208.7400. www.artisanzone.ca. **OH**



BY ADRIENNE BROWN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TARA WEST

Downtown Kitchener has a new home for Canadian artists

and if the number of visitors knocking on the door before it opened was any indication, it couldn't have come at a better time.

Created and owned by Aimee and Martin Kocak, **Artisan Zone Inc.** is a collaborative boutique for Canadian artisans.

Having attended art shows for many years, the Kocaks are passionate about Canadian art, but they know that buying original art is both worth it and, at times, difficult. Finding Canadian art is indeed possible, but isn't always as accessible as it could be. Art shows come and go at specific times of year and require shoppers to plan ahead to attend and know what they're shopping for on a single weekend.

By creating a permanent space to sell similar work, Waterloo Region residents can now find art and handmade products year-round.

At any given time, Artisan Zone may have a selection of everything from paintings and photographs to sculptures, metal art, clothing, accessories, throw pillows, clocks, gourmet food, soaps and furniture. The pieces all measure up to the Kocaks' standards – that means no mass-produced pieces, no products using unethical labour practises, North American made, eco-friendly when possible and primarily one-of-a-kind work. The Kocaks don't sell anything they wouldn't want to buy themselves.

