

design

BUILDING A DIY DECOR CENTER IN HUNTINGTON STATION

BY LISA CHAMOFF
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Amanda Peppard can look at an old dresser and see the shabby-chic treasure waiting to be discovered. She had the same sort of vision for a 1907 building on New York Avenue in Huntington Station that for over four decades had remained pretty much unchanged.

Two years ago, Peppard rented a front room at Yankee Peddler Antiques, a collection of merchants that had been there since the 1970s, and opened her decorative paint business, Suite Pieces. In the beginning, Peppard sold furniture and vintage accessories she made over herself, and she also was the sole Long Island retailer for Chalk Paint by Annie Sloan, a wildly popular product in the DIY world used to easily paint anything from wood to fabric. Peppard's business quickly took off, and she started renting more and more space in the building, which had been on and off the market.

YANKEE PEDDLER'S REDO

In May 2013, the building was purchased by Reststar Hospitality Group, which owns several restaurants in New York City and on Long Island, including Bistro Cassis in Huntington. The new owners, who had bought the property as an investment, approached Peppard about becoming the building's manager, and she signed a 10-year master lease for the building. The arrangement fit the plan Peppard, 33, had envisioned from the beginning — creating a one-stop shop for do-it-yourself home design.

"I see this as being a Huntington design house," says Peppard, who also runs a smaller Suite Pieces in the Greenpoint section of Brooklyn. "There's really nothing like it on Long Island where you can go and design anything you want."

After Peppard took over as building manager in March, she set about renovating the space that had once housed the Venice Hotel and Mascaros Italian Restaurant. She tore out old carpet and linoleum, took pegboard off the walls and added crafty, shabby-chic touches, including a long front counter with a countertop painted (of course) to look like marble.

"It was a lot of love and a lot of paint," Peppard says of the



Amanda Peppard, rear, teaches a group at a Pinterest Live! event at Suite Pieces in Huntington Station.

renovation.

Today, the main room of what is now called The Shops at Suite Pieces has the charm of an Anthropologie store mixed with the DIY spirit of Etsy, with vintage furniture and collectibles for sale by the dealers in the building's other shops.

Suite Pieces conducts workshops on different painting techniques, and Peppard's space now includes a dedicated area for classes and events. A schedule of upcoming workshops is featured at

www.suitepieces.com. The Drapery Lady, run by Elisa Irvolino, is a new vendor offering custom upholstery and window treatments, and Peppard, who went to school for interior design after working in marketing, eventually plans to offer a full range of traditional home decor services.

Since November, Suite Pieces has offered a monthly event series called Pinterest LIVE!, named for the DIY-driven social media site, in

which participants are given materials and instruction — along with plenty of chocolate and wine — to create home decor. At one event, participants painted and stenciled giant, wooden monogram letters.

ANTIQUES AND ARTISTS

Along with Peppard's business, there are still individual shops selling antiques, collectibles, jewelry and vintage home decor on the rest of the ground floor and on the lower level.

Meanwhile, 14 artists sell their work in studios upstairs, branded as The Studios at Suite Pieces. There are six new antiques dealers, and some remain from the Yankee Peddler. One difference now is that all the shops and studios do joint marketing.

John Murray — whose father, Jack Murray, managed Yankee Peddler Antiques for the previous owners — says he welcomes the change.

"It was needed," says Murray, who now helps manage Peppard's paint business. "There's a little bit of everything for everyone, and Amanda just took that and made it into one cohesive unit. She's brought a new energy to it."

Bob Walton, a Cold Spring Harbor resident and collector who had been coming to the Yankee Peddler for 20 years, says he enjoys the new space and even got to contribute a bit to the decor. He recently sold Peppard an old milk crate with bottles that she uses to hold paint sample sticks.

"It's not anything like the way it was, but you know what? They have a lot of interesting things here," says Walton, 76.

The antique business has become more challenging with the rise of eBay and the economic downturn.

"I'm always for new," says Maxine Jurow, a painter who's had a studio upstairs for the past seven years. "I've seen a different environment even while they were renovating. It can only get better."

'PIN'-SPIRATION

If you do a search for "chalk paint furniture" on Pinterest, the image-based social media site that's big with the DIY crowd, you'll find hundreds of examples of souped-up dressers and kitchen cabinets. The decorative, low-VOC paint provides a matte finish and is a popular home design trend because it's easy to use, says Amanda Peppard, owner of DIY store Suite Pieces, and requires no stripping, sanding or priming, which is necessary when using latex paint. You simply dip your brush into the can and go to town, sealing the paint with wax after it dries.

"People are transforming Ikea furniture like crazy," Peppard says.

The most popular brand is Annie Sloan, developed 20 years ago in the United Kingdom and brought to the United States a few years ago. (Some serious DIYers have blogged about making their own



Above, a bureau is painted in Antibes Green Chalk Paint at Suite Pieces. Left, chalk paint on a secretary.

chalk paint with plaster of Paris.) There is a wide range of colors, from subtle French Grey to bold Barcelona Orange, and a number of finishes and styles. Aside from

a standard paint job, you can layer colors and distress the piece with sandpaper to give it an antique look. Peppard also offers milk paint, so called because it contains casein, or milk protein, from the brand Miss Mustard Seed. The environmentally friendly, nontoxic paint comes in powder form and has to be mixed with water. The finish can be a little less consistent than chalk paint, and a bonding agent is necessary so it can adhere to a variety of surfaces, unless you want a chipped, rustic finish. The Suite Pieces Pinterest page has hundreds of photographs with crafty projects to provide inspiration. Pictured are a couple of pieces of furniture that were recently made over in the shop.

— LISA CHAMOFF