

Olympic originals

OPTIONS: You'll find a range of souvenirs with lasting value

Olympic visitors and locals alike have more than a few options when it comes to picking up Games souvenirs — T-shirts, flags, those famous red mittens.

But some city retailers are also offering items that are a lot less mass-marketed, a lot rarer, and considerably more reflective of the province's artistic depth.

Take Yaletown's The Cross Décor and Design shop.

The store, located at the corner of Homer and Davie, offers hundreds of products ranging from bedding to vintage art, and jewelry to lighting, many handcrafted by local artisans. These days, it also has an Olympic boutique, a kind of store-within-a-store that houses both official Games souvenirs and locally produced items.

"We are proudly celebrating the athletes and the Games," says The Cross's Megan Close of the boutique, which is decorated with chalk drawings of Canadian winter scenes and emblazoned with

the names of the countries participating in the Games.

Within that shop are items that have a distinct Canadian flavour: mitts, toques, and the "stumps" fashioned by Vancouver Island's John Ross.

"The 43-year-old Campbell River man, a logger and part-time furniture-maker, came to creating the items after visiting The Cross a couple of years ago.

He had spotted a piece of furniture made from a beam of wood, and returned to the island, where he found a cedar log, dried it and sandblasted it. He came back to The Cross with a stump table, which bought it then and there.

Not long afterward, Ross received a call from the shop's owners. Oprah, they told him, wanted to feature his Western red cedar stump side table in her fall 2008 *At Home* magazine. She's not been the only one to take note of Ross's works, which include a variety of other items fashioned from driftwood that has been found on the beach or in the forest.

Vanoc has also taken note.

"I was asked to provide some pieces for the VIP lounge in the

B.C. pavilion (in the Vancouver Art Gallery)," Ross says.

Olympic souvenir-shoppers may have noticed that the Cross is not alone in offering unique pieces of Canadiana for sale.

The recently opened Casa store — it's located at 101 — 1636 West Second in Vancouver — is selling items made primarily by B.C. artists, including wooden tables, lamps and glass works.

As well, it features what it calls "The Casa Collection," prints on canvas and paper. Some 98 per cent of the 800-plus images are by B.C. artists. Included are images by artist Del Miller that depict points of interest in Vancouver and B.C.: The Lions Gate Bridge, the West End, Whistler, to name a few.

And in downtown Vancouver — in 35 galleries in Gastown, Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside — an event called ArtWalk Vancouver 2010 is showcasing the works of more than 250 artists.

On offer are Canadian-made items that include everything from paintings to sculpture to clothing and jewelry. Like the Olympics, the event continues until the end of the month.

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