

chestnut hill local

Little Gallery = a big opportunity for art lovers

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Mt. Airy resident Andrew Domanski, a native of Edinburgh, Scotland, just opened The Little Gallery at 8617 Germantown Ave. in Chestnut Hill, where he exhibits and sells an eclectic mix of art acquired while traveling to Europe and in the Philadelphia region. (Photo by Susan Katz)

by Brenda Lange

What one studies in college does not always lead immediately to one's dream job or lifetime career. But when passion, opportunity and awareness converge, the dream of a lifetime may actually come true.

Such is the case for Andrew Domanski, 59, who just signed a year's lease for The Little Gallery at 8617 Germantown Ave. in Chestnut Hill, where he exhibits and sells an eclectic mix of art discovered, in large part, at auctions and markets — acquired while traveling to England, France, Scotland and closer to home, in the Philadelphia region.

Domanski was reared in Edinburgh, Scotland, and attended the university there, majoring in Art History. He spent his junior year at the University of Pennsylvania through an exchange program and worked in the Center City jewelry store of Bailey, Banks & Biddle.

After completing his education in Edinburgh, he returned to Philadelphia when work was scarce in his home country. Back in the states, Domanski worked in the retail jewelry business for a time and then became a consultant doing employee surveys for various international financial institutions. “More than 30 years later, I’m still here,” he says with a chuckle. Today, he lives in Mt. Airy with his wife, Mary Ann Domanska, who teaches second grade at Springside Chestnut Hill Academy, and their daughter, Clara.

“This job allowed for a lot of travel and allowed me to collect art finds through auctions and estate sales while abroad,” says Domanski, who calls himself a “bit of an opportunist.” (Andrew pointed out that the reason he and his wife do not have the same initial at the end of their last names is that in Polish, the woman has an “a” at the end and the man an “i.”)

That opportunism allowed him to expand his horizons and use his education while building a personal collection that he sells online or at other auctions. Domanski also has built his collection as a “treasure hunter” while visiting family in the south of France. “I always intended to do it (open an art gallery) full-time at some time or other,” he says.

That time finally came in October 2018, when, during a walk on Germantown Avenue, Domanski passed an empty storefront at the top of the hill that reminded him of a little gallery on King’s Road in Chelsea, London, that he had always admired. The “for rent” sign inspired him, and he called the number on a whim. Might this be his chance to segue back into the art world?

Domanski suggested a holiday popup gallery to the owner, who agreed. The shop was in move-in condition, with lovely, cream-colored walls, and Domanski already had the inventory, so he moved into the 400-square-foot gallery in November with “reasonably priced art from the 19th century to contemporary artists.”

His November and December success was followed by similar sales in January, so he took the leap and asked to stay on. “For good or ill, while other galleries are going online or closing, I just signed a lease for at least a year,” Domanski says, with a trace of wonder in his mild Scottish brogue.

The new gallery owner describes his business as an eclectic mix of art — oil paintings, pastels, watercolors, drawings and a few modern design objects — in an inviting, unpretentious and comfortable atmosphere.

“Anyone who walks in should be able to find something they like, and I encourage them to ask if they don’t see what they want,” he says, adding that he changes displays every few days. “Over time, people will develop their eye and appreciate art they may not have immediately known about.”

One of Domanski’s clients calls the gallery a “gem” and says he already has Domanski looking out for other items for him to buy. “[We purchased] a terrific 1949 pencil drawing by Rosalind Howe Sturges of the corner of West Hartwell Lane and Germantown Avenue, where the One West condominium and The Flying Fish are located today,” said Chestnut Hill real estate magnate Richard Snowden. “Mrs. Sturges was a very fine local artist who did the masthead of the Chestnut Hill Local with all of the community’s buildings featured on it in miniature.”

Snowden calls his experience with The Little Gallery’s Domanski “excellent.” “Andrew is very knowledgeable about local artists and what they were doing, and the setting is charming in the Baptist’s Corner House. Andrew Domanski and The Little Gallery are superb additions to the Chestnut Hill shopping experience.”

Domanski’s goals include bringing in new clients while cultivating repeat visitors and adding interesting and exciting elements such as exhibits with local artists and coordinating themed events with the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, which is opening a store in Chestnut Hill.

For more information about The Little Gallery, call 215-601-4023 or visit thelittlegalleryphilly.com.