

COLOR



Star Photos by Charles Hjerger

Victorian-style furnishings decorate the home—and business—of John Vetrano

ONE COLOR
Variety
variety
variety

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He brings Victorian era alive and makes a living

By SUZANNE PERRY
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John Vetrano is a Victorian junkie. His addiction knows no bounds. He lives in a Victorian house, with three rooms filled with Victorian furniture. His basement is full of Victorian collections, including a copper bathtub, an ornate gas-electric chandelier and a cage-like shower with four sprays.

A recent discussion of that shower prompted Vetrano to refer to an 1883 plumber's catalog. Admiring the decorative talents that appear on its pages, he said, "They were so nice you could put them in your living room."

"That gives you a clue to why I love the Victorians—there's no end to it."

Vetrano and his wife, Pat, also sell reproductions of Victorian furnishings—everything from mirrors to love seats to park benches. If you happen to need a combination lightning rod-weather vane, complete with an ornamental prancing horse, they can get you one. Their business is called Victorian Reproductions.

The era of England's Queen Victoria has the reputation of being a prudish, somber period, but Vetrano disagrees. "The Victorians were in love with life," he said. And they loved to impress each other with nonfunctional architectural details—towers, stained glass windows and fretwork.

"The Victorians loved naked ladies, naked men, cherubs," Vetrano said with a chuckle as he looked at sides of Victorian lamp reproductions. Some lamps appeared as if they were being supported solely through the efforts of scantily draped human figures in brass.

Vetrano is fascinated by the eclectic nature of Victorian furnishings. "They borrowed heavily from every previous time style that existed. It was a long, complex period," he said. His favorites are the early, most ornate Victorian pieces.

Minnesota was a sparsely populated, developing state during much of the Victorian period, roughly 1850 to 1914, so Victorian originals are hard to come by in this area.



WEATHER VANE-LIGHTNING ROD
Reproduction in Vetrano house

Vetrano said easterners take for granted some of the pieces he finds so precious.

Vetrano's passion began innocently enough. "It was a progressive thing," he confessed. "I was into antiques and junk, scouting the farmyards. Everything from iron beds to furniture—you name it. Anything we thought we could resell."

The few Victorian pieces—originals and reproductions—he encountered began enticing him. "I thought it was very artistic furniture," he said. "Such graceful, flowing lines."

After a bad experience with a Minnesota antique dealer, Vetrano decided he would set up business for himself.

He and Pat, who were then living in a duplex,

add most of their household furniture, bought a few furniture reproductions wholesale and began advertising on bulletin boards and in neighborhood newspapers. They continued to expand, obtaining dealership rights for lamps, mirrors, stamped metal ceilings, fretwork and grilles.

In August 1975, the Vetranos bought an 1887 house at 1601 Park Av. S. and set about the painstaking job of restoring it to appear exactly as it would have during the Victorian period. Linoleum has been removed, fireplace mantels installed, stained glass replaced.

The Vetranos spend their vacations scavenging around the nation for doorknobs, coat hooks, lamps, tile or anything that catches their eye. Vetrano once rescued a radiator from a 19th-century Minneapolis house that was to be torn down minutes later.

He estimates it will be another 10 years before the house is exactly the way he wants it. Meanwhile, he is trying to find out everything possible about the original owner, who was a prominent Minneapolis jeweler, Harry Legg.

The front parlor, back parlor and dining room are now furnished with Victorian reproductions, which give customers the chance to "see and touch, know what they're going to get."

Several original pieces are included so that customers can compare the workmanship. "Our primary goal is to offer the most authentic, high-quality reproductions available, although we have to temper that with affordability," Vetrano said.

The furniture generally is expensive—some sell for as much as \$983, chairs for up to \$282. Solid brass lamps with features such as imported French glass, available in electric or oil, are priced as high as \$731. A four-poster queen-size bed sells for \$1,216.

But Vetrano points to the hand-carved solid Honduras mahogany used in the furniture, the quarried Italian marble of the tables, the delicate glass of the lamps. "It's expensive, but not for what you're getting."



Vetrano is restoring 1887 house at 1601 Park Av. S.



Vetrano plans to restore ornate gas-electric chandelier that came from Philadelphia

COLOR

Gedney turns red at the thought of artificial color.



Gedney makes a dilly of a pickle. (naturally)