



Furniture artist Ildiko Horvath uses Annie Sloan chalk paint to create striking effects with colour and pattern.

AROUND THE HOUSE:

PAINT ON THE PERSONALITY

British brand opens doors of flagship store in Toronto, writes *Vicky Sanderson*.

Feel sheepish that you can't tell a Picasso from a Pollock? Who cares?

After all, it probably wouldn't faze Annie Sloan, who's got a decidedly un-snooty approach, despite having a fancy degree in fine arts and a successful global decorative paint company.

"Most people are very creative, and really enjoy letting go, using paint and colour to express themselves and make something wonderful," says Sloan, who launched Chalk Paint by Annie Sloan anniesloan.com in 1990.

Interestingly, Sloan has chosen Canada, and Toronto's diverse Cabbagetown neighbourhood, for her first flagship shop at 527 Parliament Street.

"I don't want to be in the really posh areas," she said at the store's June opening. "Cabbagetown is right for me because it's very hip but it seems it's got all types of people — everyone is represented."

The store will sell Sloan's full line of paints, accessories and fabrics, which are manufactured in Lancashire, England, where there are mills dating back to the 18th century. The paints are also made in Britain.

Don't be surprised to see local artist Jim Connelly (On Instagram @jimconnellystudios) hanging around. As brand ambassador, he'll train stockists and conduct workshops at the store.

Connelly has long been a fan of the water-based, quick-dry, odour-

free, non-toxic paint, which can be applied to most walls, floors, wood, concrete, metal, matte plastic, earthenware, brick or stone with minimal priming or sanding — inside or outside — as well as on upholstery and fabric paint/dye. That makes it a good fit for the tired pieces he revitalizes for the non-profit Furniture Bank furniturebank.org, which gets revenues from the sale of his highly-detailed, whimsical pieces at the store.

"Anyone can get a successful finished product with this paint," says Connelly. "It's so easy to use, and great for restyling pieces, so you can have something beautiful quickly and keep things out of landfill."

Sloan hopes the city store will be a base from which to expand independent stockists across the country.

Having parted ways with a U.S. distributor, she explains she's ready to "really go mad with Canada."

"I wasn't happy. They treated Canada like an offshoot — just another state. I tried to explain that it's a different country but they just did not get it."

Everything has changed, says Sloan, now that Canadian distribution just outside of Toronto is in place. For one thing, she notes, "it's much cheaper to become a stockist, and the profits are much better."

Toronto's newest stockist is an old friend: in 2015, Jelena Pticek was the first Canadian painter-in-residence for the company.

member of the legendary Bloomsbury Group). For more on that, go to aroundthehouse.ca.

"It's an amazing house," says Sloan.

"Nothing is flat — it all has textures and layers. It inspired me to paint furniture because everything — from simple pieces to ones from Italy — are painted. Some of it is very fancy, but so much is sort of 'doodley,' with dots and spots. It's very approachable because it's

about being creative and having fun."

Sloan says she's only recently realized how deeply, and for how long, the Bloomsbury esthetic has been influencing her.

"I've realized I must have been really inspired by them without even knowing. I was never copying things but I suppose it got into my psyche. Maybe it's because I am the same type of person — someone very interested in arts who likes to talk to and be with writers and artists."

The new shades — all inspired by specific rooms at Charleston Farmhouse — are Firle, a vibrant green; Rodmell, a plummy purple, and the mustardy Tilton.

More new colours, currently under embargo, will be out in the fall.



People tell Annie Sloan that playing with paint unleashes their creativity.

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