

HOT SHOP VANCOUVER



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Jetsetters bring global style Home

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BY CORI HOWARD

On a quiet downtown street known for its historic brick lofts and an award-winning restaurant, Robert Quinnell and David Keeler's new decor shop, Provide Home, shines like a beacon through Vancouver's typical greyness.

From the street, floor-to-ceiling windows reveal a luminous interior space painted entirely in white. The paint's reflective quality is just one of the many carefully considered details that have made the store, open for only two months, a runaway hit with the luxury home-design crowd.

More than a year in the making, Provide was envisioned as a place where frequent travellers Quinnell and Keeler would be able to bring together some of the coolest, chicest things they discovered on their trips. The couple have spent most of their four years together on the road,

visiting places such as Cuba, Australia, France and Greece. During those trips, they devoted a great amount of time to seeking out interesting stores.

"We had always seen retail like this in our travels, but there was never anything like it in Vancouver," says Quinnell, a former regional sales manager for both Tommy Hilfiger and the University of British Columbia golf course. "We wanted to offer interesting, well-designed products, whether it's a fantastic candle from Paris or a pillow from New York. It's like a gallery for showcasing beautiful life-style products."

Their "gallery" even features floating white shelves that blend into the white walls and keep the focus on the products. Among the highlights currently on display are blown-glass bowls by California artist Caleb Siemon. Ranging in price from \$650 to \$1,000, the bowls are streaked with sunset colours and make

a bold statement against the white backdrop. In addition, there are hand-woven virgin-wool blankets from Maine and soft alpaca throws.

There are Heath ceramic bowls, mugs and dishes and avant-garde, super-thick felt boxes, placemats and coasters from a German company called Domestic Affairs.

The shop also features some exclusive lines, such as the work of Rina Menardi, a Venetian stoneware artist whose bowls, cups and trays are part of the store's core collection. Her designs are created using a 900-year-old glazing technique that gives the pieces a handmade look.

Their elegant tones — black, linen and red — could serve as the colour scheme for the entire store. On this subject, Quinnell confirms that custom orders in different shades are possible, but it's clear that he and Keeler, a graphic designer for a local advertising agency, prefer this particular trio.

In keeping with the store's well-edited aesthetic, there are just two large tables and benches on the floor, designed by the duo themselves. Made from Douglas fir, which was also used in the wall behind the front counter, the furniture is so simple, solid and stylish that customers have repeatedly asked to purchase it.

Although they aren't for sale right now, Quinnell and Keeler do plan to market the tables and other furniture.

In the meantime, discerning customers will have to make do with the rest of the eclectic, meticulously chosen merchandise, which ranges from a rack of handmade silk kimonos to sleek Nespresso machines. The machines, some of which resemble fancy toasters, brew coffee through the insertion of colourful little canisters of perfectly measured espresso, thereby eliminating the need to buy, grind or clean your own. "We're having a hard time keeping them in stock," says Quinnell, who discovered the appliance at a house he rented with friends in Greece.

Sales of the coffeemakers are no doubt boosted by the owners' policy of providing complimentary cups of the deliciously flavoured espresso to customers as they browse. One of their regulars, a 65-year-old man, comes in weekly to talk over coffee about design, the city and whatever else is on his mind. "Sometimes he buys," Quinnell says. "Sometimes he doesn't. Sometimes he brings friends."

Both Quinnell and Keeler relish their new role as local arbiters of the latest trends in international design. "Provide is an outlet for us to research what's happening in design and offer it to Vancouverites," Keeler says. "To be a tastemaker is an amazing thing to be able to do."

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Co-owner Robert Quinnell

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