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Her H(Art) in Downtown: Entrepreneur follows dream to live part-time in urban Saskatoon loft

“As soon as I opened my Saskatoon store two years ago on Second Avenue, I had seen that they were converting this building to lofts, and I told myself that this was my dream,” says Sandra Young, who owns Willow Studio downtown. “If I could make it happen, I wanted to get a loft here at the Second Avenue Lofts.”

For Young, it was a dream come true. After growing up in Saskatoon and completing high school at Rosthern Junior College, a tradition started by her parents and grandparents, the entrepreneur spent time traveling, designing window displays and store fronts in Yorkton, Prince Albert, Regina, Saskatoon, and North Battleford. Then she opened businesses in Regina, Yorkton, Prince Albert and North Battleford. She met her future husband, Todd, a systems analyst, in Regina, and the couple settled in Calgary, where Young established a home furnishings and design company. She expanded into other locales like the hamlet of Bragg Creek, Regina and Moose Jaw with the help of family members.



Photos: Darrell Noakes

Sandra Young's airy loft is a breeding ground for animated conversation about the lively decor.

But Saskatoon, and the distinctive Hudson's Bay department store, always held fond memories.

“I used to shop here when I was a kid,” Young says. “I used to take the bus from East College Park when I was a young teenager. I would hop on the bus and come here with my girlfriends. I felt so grown up to be able to hop on the bus by myself, go shopping at the Bay and go for a malt at the Malt Stop with my girlfriends. To me, the thought of being able to come full circle here, starting a business in Saskatoon after being away for so long, to be able to go back to my

roots, felt like a great idea.”

Young's daughter, who also graduated from Rosthern Junior College, studies art and painting at the University of Saskatchewan. That helped provide the impetus for opening the Saskatoon Willow Studio.

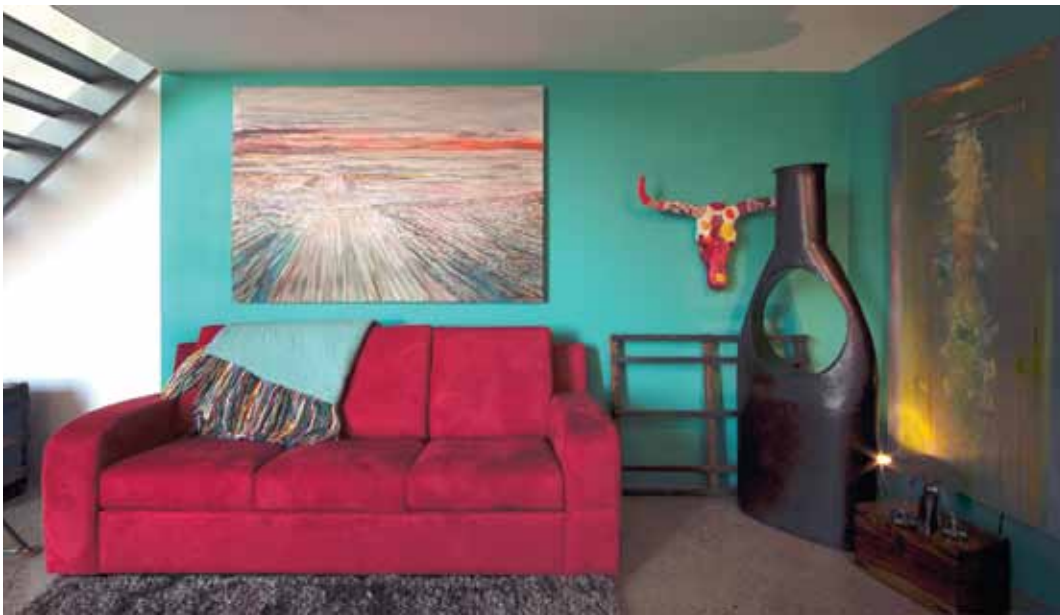
“I think I was just lonesome for my daughter,” she says. “I thought, what better reason to reconnect in Saskatchewan. I could spend some time with her and develop a business that I love.”

Young spends about a week a month in Saskatoon. It's not enough, she says, but she can't afford to be away from

the family's Calgary home and business any longer than that. In Calgary, they live on an acreage, so returning to Saskatoon, especially to the urban residential environment, feels refreshing.

“To live in an urban setting is the ultimate juxtaposition for me for my quiet life in the country at home. To have that combination of lifestyle makes me appreciate each lifestyle far more. It's like a vacation property for my family.”

“I love the energy of the downtown and the business owners here,” she says. “We're all really working hard to try to make it a better place. It's



This nook, besides being an appealing place to relax, perfectly showcases the artistic creations.

in everybody's best interest and our city's best interest to support downtown business and to support downtown living, so that our city maintains some vibrancy and doesn't fall the way of so many American cities, or others around the world."

There's an energy to downtown living, she adds. "I love things like Persephone Theatre, Taste of Saskatchewan or the Jazz Festival."

"My husband, Todd, and I often mention that there is more art per capita in downtown Saskatoon than in all of some other cities that we've lived," Young says. "I think



Even the kitchen serves as an art gallery.



Sandra Young has coordinated the colours and decor in this bedroom to ideally enhance the art work.

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that's what's brought us back to this place — our appreciation for art. The Mendel Art Gallery was a staple growing up — going to the Mendel Art Gallery on a regular basis, going to the symposiums on the river bank. I used to hang out with my Uncle Bill Epp and all these artists, doing all these symposiums on the river bank, watching the artists work.”

“My background is more in display design and interior design, so that has always been my bread and butter. However, my real passion lies in art. Over the last 12 years, my design studio has evolved more to promote artists.”

Second Avenue Lofts embodies urban living, Young finds. Residents meet each other as they come and go. Yet, the suites are quiet, giving everyone the privacy they desire. There are common spaces for entertaining and exercise. Young's suite overlooks a rooftop outdoor lounge that will soon be open to those in the building. Although the building has been open for only a couple of years, Young says that residents have already established a tradition of celebrating New Year's together, roaming from suite to suite, “like a potluck.”

Much of the appeal of downtown living comes from the services that are within walking or cycling distance. The restaurant selection is outstanding, says Young.

“Last night, I biked to Broadway and enjoyed the services there, the restaurants and local coffee shops. In this neighbourhood, Second Avenue is just alive with restaurant and shopping choices.”

The Loft is an Art Gallery

Young's suite at Second Avenue Lofts has become a showcase for artists.

“I don't have enough wall space in the studio,” Young explains. “I usually have three to five artists shown in our 3000 square foot show room. I thought, how can I show these people for a longer period than I can at the studio? So I started bringing pieces over and the show has revolved at the loft. When we have art clients wanting to look at art, we bring them over as a personal tour to see art in a furnished space to give them a sense of how art would look in a home.”

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