



Lessi tin hendit prationum zzriliquisl ut aut adit aut luptat. Molor si. Lessi tin hendit prationum zzriliquisl ut aut adit aut luptat. Molor si.

just 14 years ago it was falling apart, and a candidate for demolition. But thanks to local efforts it was saved and is now being refurbished. A few years back its profile graced a Canadian postage stamp.

The station gets all kinds of visitors—from those with personal ties to the building, like Sampson, to hard-core railroad buffs interested in anything displaying the initials RR; retired railway men who once worked there and unsuspecting travellers, taken by surprise by the majestic 107-year-old building.

“We like to show it now that we are getting some things done,” says Frank Campbell, the volunteer who happened to be in the station when Sampson stopped by. He’s one of several dozen townspeople who have spent a good chunk of the last decade strategizing and raising money—and scraping, painting and hammering—for the sake of the station as well as their community.

McAdam was once a bustling railway town like few others. During the golden era of steam engines, up until the late 1950s, virtually every train on its way to the Maritimes from Western Canada or the US would stop in town for servicing. Sixteen passenger trains and up to a dozen freight trains

would lumber in daily; hundreds of passengers disembarked to grab a bite to eat or spend the night. There were two roundhouses, carpenter and blacksmith shops, coal bins and water towers. As a child growing up in the town, Campbell remembers the flurry of activity in the railyards and the excitement of each train’s arrival.

But then the diesel engine replaced the steam locomotive; cars and planes became a preferred means of travel. The last passenger train came through town in 1994. After that the station was boarded up and pretty much left to the varmints and vandals.

Enter a dedicated group of locals who formed the McAdam Historical Restoration Committee. Through a combination of private funds and government and corporate grants, the group raised \$300,000—and immediately set out to fix the leaky roof.

“The ceiling was gone; floors were rotting,” Campbell says. The station was so decrepit that many in the community wanted to bulldoze it into the pond. But the preservationists prevailed. Several rooms have been refurbished, including the main lobby, the telegraph office, the dining room and the lunch room, which seats 65 people on stools at a “W”-shaped

Arborite counter with stainless-steel trim—and where customers would sit down for coffee and “railway pie.”

“We are doing it bit by bit,” explains Campbell, referring to the work as well as the fundraising. So far \$1 million has been raised, but the Restoration Committee has a long-term goal of \$10 million. It does come in bits—like the cash donation pressed into Campbell’s hand as Sampson left—but also in major infusions, such as \$480,000 expected from the federal government.

Campbell proudly shows off some of the station’s interior features, such as the tiny jail cell with bars on a metal door, where rowdies were held overnight; the third-floor dormitory, ceiling plaster still dropping, where female station employees lived; the ladies waiting room, where a display of memorabilia includes old tickets, spittoons, headlights from steam engines and conductors’ uniforms.

McAdam remains off the beaten path, so Campbell doubts the town or station will ever become a major destination resort. Still, he expects that improvements will continue, and appreciative tourists will keep coming. Already the station opens for special celebrations such as family reunions, weddings and birthday parties—if not emergency births. Once the hotel rooms

# Sole to soul

An artist finds regional soul under her Nova Scotia soles—in the form of vintage linoleum, salvaged from old homes

by Sandra Phinney

“AMAZING.” An overused sentiment perhaps, but when Martine Vermeulen utters the word her eyes widen and shimmer—as if caught in some great surprise. Although Vermeulen says the word frequently, it’s always laced with wonderment. It’s also a cue to pay attention, as if she’s saying, “Something special is going on. Take note. There’s more than meets the eye.”

Vermeulen has spent much of her 65 years paying attention. Originally from France, she moved to Greenwich Village, New York City, in the early 60s and became a well-known ceramic artist. Her work was featured in galleries and sold to private and corporate buyers, but popularity started to chip away at the artist’s privacy.

Fast forward to 1983: Vermeulen moves to Stanfordville, in upper New York state. She falls in love with the pastoral setting and the slower pace,

and continues to create beautiful works of art in her studio, *Feu Follet*.

Then friends invite the artist to visit them at their summer home in Port Medway, NS, and she falls in love a second time—with the people, the sea and the lifestyle. While poking around the region, she comes upon a dilapidated home for sale on the shores of Blueberry Bay.

Despite the fact that mushrooms sprouted from its carpets, the ceilings were crumbling and the vinyl siding flapped in the wind, the house had her name on it. “I knew this was where I belonged,” she says. “It was very visceral. I could see it all finished... I just had to be patient.” Vermeulen drank in the sunsets, visualized living there and made an offer.

She ended up with two homes. “I say to people that New York is my husband and Nova Scotia is my lover.

I love them both dearly.”

When in NY Vermeulen potters away, but in Nova Scotia she’s morphed into a new phase as an artist. It started by creating driftwood compositions. “I never planned to do things in wood, but that’s what artists do,” she says. “You take something completely ordinary and transform it into something out of the ordinary.”

Her art took a major shift five years ago when she restored a friend’s summer home, also in Blueberry Bay. “They had area rugs [made of linoleum] that I had never seen before. Amazing! So I picked them up and put them out of harm’s way.” Vermeulen used the substantial chunks in the restoration, squirreling away the leftovers in the rafters of her barn.

Compelled to do something with these scraps, she created two collages. Eureka! The old linoleum came to life.



PERRY JACKSON





**profile:** martine vermeulen



**Portrait of an artist.** When Martine Vermeulen removed the flooring of a friend's old house she found linoleum; she soon started using it to make collages. "I became totally obsessed and possessed with it," she says. "What if these floors could talk?" She visited seniors at retirement homes, where her collages triggered nostalgia. Above right: Phyllis Rhodenizer.

She was mesmerized by the patterns and passionate about the potential of this new-found medium. "It just took off. One piece led to another and the infinite possibilities were moving me along. It's amazing—like archeology. It's like picking up pieces of somebody's past."

One day while cleaning the linoleum, Vermeulen started thinking of all the people, now seniors, who would have walked across it. "These people had such hard lives yet they had a quality of life, and they were so rich with knowledge and wisdom. Some of us today live in their old houses, walk on their old linoleum." She thought, "What if these floors could talk?"

So as a tribute to seniors Vermeulen visited retirement homes, where she discovered just how much her linoleum collages trigger nostalgia for the way we used to live.

"The Way We Used to Live" is now the title of her exhibit; she also gives talks and presents her work in libraries and museums.

Mary Anne Mehaffey visited the exhibit while it was at the Yarmouth County Museum & Archives last summer. "It sure triggered memories," she says. "We called it 'Congoleum.' There were patterns I hadn't seen since



I was a child and I knew immediately where I had seen them."

One of the patterns in the exhibit brought the 76-year-old back to her grandmother's home in Port Maitland, NS. It reminded her of the eight-foot tub encased in tongue-and-groove wood, and "having a bath with a grandmother who was very gentle compared to my mother who was very busy!"

Mehaffey notes that in the early to mid 1900s it was common for US rug dealers to visit Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, peddling linoleum in exchange for hooked rugs. "People were tired of wood floors and splinters and thought they [linoleum rugs] were up-to-date," she says.

Lemoine Bent, a resident at Hillside Pines, in Bridgewater, used to install floors for Nauss Brothers and reckons he tore out miles of linoleum in his lifetime. When he first saw the exhibit, his eyes lit up and he could barely contain a grin. "I remember the linoleum in the kitchen. It wasn't fancy, but we had running water and a

bathroom, which lots of others didn't have," he says.

The 80-year-old remembers playing hide-and-seek in the root cellar where the family stored pickles, and potatoes and carrots in barrels of sand. Many homes were insulated with rockweed, seaweed, birch bark and wood chips. "We always had food to eat. I think I started drinking tea when I was five years old. I put in sugar and fresh milk from the cow."

And so it goes. People see the collages, and memories tumble forth like waterfalls. Meanwhile, neighbours and builders still bring the artist pieces of linoleum, and she's having as much fun as a child building a sandcastle.

Vermeulen has what seems like an enchanted life, easing into the day with a cup of chicory laced with lemon zest, and "some good French bread" with jam. If the weather and tides are right, she's likely to haul her custom-made wooden kayak (a gift from friends on her 60th birthday) to the shore and paddle for a couple of hours. Or she may reach for her "Black Horse," a

# cavendish full page



## anderson windows 1/3 vert



SANDRA PHINNEY

**profile:** martine vermeulen

Lemoine Bent, at Hillside Pines, in Bridgewater, NS. "These are the people on whose foundation we built our lives," Vermeulen says.

vintage Raleigh bicycle she's had since 1963, or turn to "Rav," a perky black moped, and journey off somewhere.

Rainy/snowy day options include staying in bed until noon reading *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, or a book from her collection, which includes everything from Maritimers Donna Morrissey and Wayne Johnston, to French author Marcel Proust and American poet Mary Oliver. Occasionally you can find her bent over an eight-foot puzzle stashed under a carpet in her living room. She calls it the ultimate meditation, adding that "Like in life, if a piece doesn't fit, it doesn't fit and you have to wait for the right piece to fit in order for the picture of your life to be complete." She offers this tip: "Always do the frame first, then fill the frame. It's the thing that gives you the parameters." Looking at the puzzle in progress, she murmurs, "Amazing."

Some days she'll step into "Snow White & My Seven Dreams" (a well

travelled white Toyota truck) and scurry around making arrangements for a film festival, or take a neighbour to a doctor. And, of course, she makes time to show "The Way We Used to Live," and talk with seniors.

But more likely than not, you can find Vermeulen in her studio composing a new work of art using linoleum scraps. Here, in what feels like a sacred place, she loses track of time, surfacing in the late afternoon. Friends often come to visit at this time; she'll reach for a plump teapot and prepare a brew. While it steeps, she steers the conversation to simple things like the virtues of Nova Scotia russet apples, or a commentary on a recent film she's seen. Or she'll invite you to take a stroll in her secret garden, or along the path leading to the shore.

Oh yes. The New York "husband?" Vermeulen doesn't get back to the US much these days. In fact, two years ago she became a permanent resident of Canada, and in the next year or so will apply for Canadian citizenship. Picture the headline: "Lover wins Vermeulen's heart."

Amazing.

## Top floor!

Inspired by discovering a thick rubbery skin on a can of open paint in a basement, linoleum was invented by English rubber manufacturer Frederick Walton; he patented the product in 1863. The name linoleum is derived from the Latin words *linum* (meaning flax) and *oleum* (meaning oil). It's made from natural products like cork, wood, flax oil (linseed oil) and pine resin pressed into a burlap or canvas backing.

Flexible, easy to clean and relatively safe, it earned the name "the 40-year floor" because it was so durable. The floor covering has also been

called "battleship linoleum"—the better, thicker grades were commonly used in battleships.

Many homes in Atlantic Canada had—and still have—linoleum on their floors. Depending on the age of the flooring, the patterns could be colourful flower arrangements to more modern, geometric designs. Some pieces were used as "rugs" for the centre of parlours or bedrooms, and homeowners painted the floor around the edge. Linoleum was also produced as "runners" for porches and hallways. Installation days were a cause for celebration and generated lots of excitement.

Oh for the good old days!

**roots & folks:** nature

# Great blue signs of spring

Sharing the fast-food hot  
spots of shallow waterways  
with shy, stately cranes

by Bob Bancroft



IN ST. GEORGE'S Bay, near my home on the northeast coast of Nova Scotia, Pomquet Island hosts a breeding colony of great blue herons, locally referred to as cranes. Many herons in the Maritimes migrate here in late March or early April from southern climes. Islands provide nesting trees, privacy and some protection from four-legged climbers like weasels, martins, squirrels and raccoons searching for eggs and nestlings. Colonies are also found in remote inland areas, where they nest near waterways in pines, other evergreens and hardwood trees.

Great blue herons are large, blue-grey birds—standing four feet tall—with



SCOTT LESLIE

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distinctively long legs, neck and bill. They wade in shallow waterways across Canada and up the Pacific coast to southern Alaska; they can be found stealthily hunting in Mexico's desert rivers and searching mangrove swamps in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean.

Quietly stalking a shoreline, a great blue suddenly thrusts its neck, head, and dagger-like bill to spear or grab unwitting animals. A modified sixth cervical vertebra of its skeleton allows it to coil its neck while stalking prey or to draw it into a tight S shape in flight. Active by day or night, it flies with ponderous wing beats. Deep, harsh croaking sounds of indignation often erupt between birds, prompting re-alignments of foraging territories.

Great blues are normally shy in