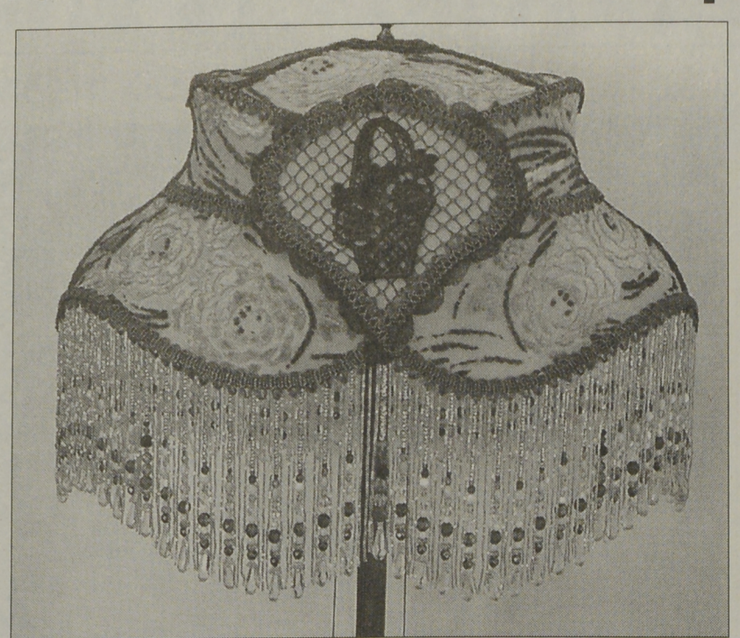
Building the ultimate retro lamp collection

by Lynsey Sable,
The Projector
(Red River College)



WINNIPEG (CUP) --The first vintage lamp I ever purchased had a black panther base and a red and black shade. According to my boyfriend, it was the ugliest thing on earth. I brought home several more ugly lamps over the next few years, believing my love affair with these gaudy relics from the 1960s was mine to relish alone. I should have known there were others.

Over the past few years, retro lamp lovers have grown in number and I thought I should go public about my affair for the greater good of us all. I do so in the hope that no ugly lamp ever gets turned out into the street again, cold and without a light bulb. One man's orange plastic lampshade is another's bedroom masterpiece. Consider this your crash course on vintage lamps – the good, the better and the beautiful.

Lamps of the 1950s

The space race of the 1950s ushered in an exciting new wave of design. According to Warren Hooper, the owner of Hooper's Bazaar, a retro specialty store in Winnipeg's Exchange district, it was common for dinner plates to possess strings of molecules and table lamps to imitate atomic structures. Lamps were usually metallic and had starburst-shaped patterns.

Collectors like Hooper generally refer to this as the Sputnik Era or Atomic Age. A great atomic lamp is hard to come by, and for good reason. There's nothing quite like a two-foot wide molecular cluster hanging from the ceiling.

Small black and white TV sets also made their way into homes during the '50s, and for health reasons it was recommended that an indirect light be placed above them. Millions of TV lamps were distributed in countless designs, most often with a ceramic base and a thick fiberglass shade. Their great character was the base, usually decorated with black panthers, running horses, Siamese cats, jumping antelopes and stereotypical post-war Asian children. Because these lamps didn't give off a lot of light, they were great for setting the mood and watching a movie.

Lamps of the 1960s

Popular in the 1960s was what Hooper calls the swag lamp, which was suspended from the ceiling by a chain through a series of hooks so the chain drooped dramatically. I stared at a lot of these lamps as a child while my parents got drunk on New Year's Eve.

Geometric shapes and high contrast colours were also a favorite in the early 1960s. Most recognizable is the spun acrylic lampshade, resembling glassy spaghetti or ribbon. These lamps were spectacular for accent lighting and were very affordable. Watch that you don't put anything higher than a 40 watt bulb in these puppies because acrylic spaghetti sure looks pretty, but it smells like cancer when it's melted all over your dresser.

According to wikipedia.com, it was also in the 1960s that Englishman Edward Craven Walker tinkered with enough mixtures of oil and wax to invent the lava lamp. Embraced by the peace, love and freedom movement, the Lava Lite became a pop culture icon and the rest is history. Spending any great length of time pondering this erotic, blubbery world is considered a rite of passage in my book.

Lamps of the 1970s

Modern Furniture and Decoration by Robert Harling shows many fashionable homes of the 1970s and some spectacular lamps. Towards the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s there was a trend towards more modern, streamlined pieces. Often referred to as Mod or Space Age, these lamps use the circular shapes of the 1950s combined with primary colours and plastic (considered very chic).

Many lampshades resemble mushrooms and strange orbs made of soft white or yellow Lucite. Brightly coloured pieces with warped, globular forms are from the Panton era, named after Danish designer Verner Panton.

With the disco age came mood lighting. There were fiber-optic lamps and disco ball lamps, which slowly rotated, and in a 1971 Eaton's catalogue there were psychedelic speaker boxes that changed colour to the beat of the music. I recently spent several minutes gazing into a mood-enhancing square that changed colours at Linens n' Things, and can attest to the pleasure that pretty colours offer.

Feel inspired by the wonderful world of retro lighting?

If you're more interested in hunting for deals, vintage lamps pop up at thrift stores nearly every week. I have no advice to give on assessing value; if you buy what you love, you can never go wrong.

The initiation of a new whisky fan

by Jason Tucker

Thanks to the generosity of Bruns columnist Michael Burt of the Fredericton Whisky Tasting Society, I was treated to a traditional Scottish dinner and whisky tasting on Wednesday night. Throughout the evening, we were served a six-course meal and given a taste of a different type of whisky to complement each course.

As a promotion for the Whisky, Spirits, and Liqueurs Festival, sponsored by the Whisky Tasting Society, this dinner gave a beginning connoisseur like myself a small sample of the delights that befell the eyes (and, more notably, noses and tongues) during Friday's Festival.

The first course consisted of a fish soup called cullen skink, which is basically grilled halibut and milk. This was served with a ten-year Talisker single malt Scotch, which was arguably the second best whisky I've ever tried and carried a buzz factor of one.

Following the cullen skink, we were treated to a braised chicken breast with orange and whisky sauce, with carrots and rice on the side; this dish was complemented nicely by a 10-year-old Glenkinchie, another single malt. The Glenkinchie is known as a "ladies' whisky," and was definitely lighter than most other offerings of the evening. It was not my favourite whisky of the night, but not bad by any stretch, and had a buzz factor of six.

At long last came the great Scottish delicacy, haggis - which I thoroughly enjoyed - served with Bell's Extra Special, a blended Scotch that I thoroughly didn't. While it complemented the lamb well, it simply did not have an especially good taste. Then again, after three glasses of whisky and two glasses of wine, I rather doubt taste entered into the equation very much. Also, it definitely packed the biggest buzz of the night (even I had to water it down), with a buzz factor of eight.

Following that rather staggering introduction, the main course of the evening was served: roasted lamb with mint sauce, peas and roasted potatoes. Aside from being the best course amongst several excellent dishes, it was also served with an excellent whisky: a ten-year Glenlivet single malt with a minimal buzz factor of two. Bluntly put, this is an excellent whisky. Anyone who knows anything about whisky knows about Glenlivet. Anyone who doesn't - well, it's their loss.

Finally, dessert. After eating four courses of a six-course meal, I would never have believed that I could eat any more than I already did. However, the dessert of cranchan (cream and fruit) was exceptionally light, and went down marvellously after the rather large meal.

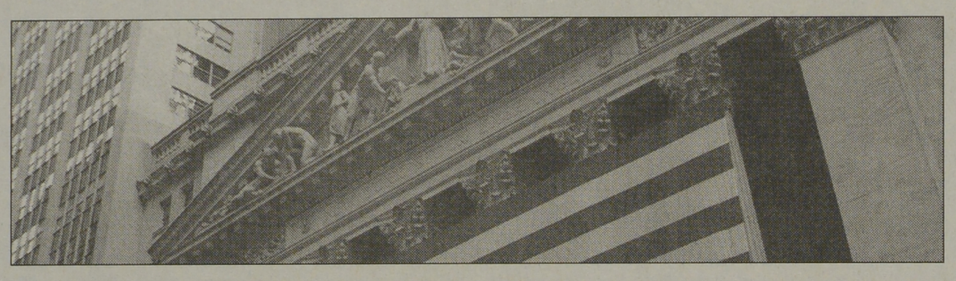
The twelve-year-old Dalmore single malt that was served with it was one of the smoothest whiskies of the night. It too went straight to my head, and comes with a buzz factor of four or five.

Following dinner, we were served homemade truffles and a shot of Drambuie. This recipe was handed down by Prince Charles Edward, and after having tried it, I can understand why he went to pains to get it out of his palace. While it could be served rather complimentarily in coffee or some other drink of that nature as a sweetener, I found it far too sweet to be consumed on its own. Overall, it was not one of the better drinks of the evening, and it hit me pretty hard with a buzz factor of seven.

After dinner, I took a taxi, and took myself to my bed, where I enjoyed an excellent sleep.

October 19

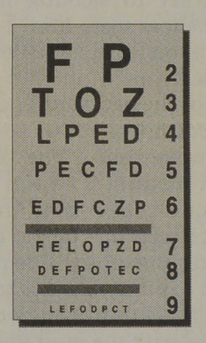
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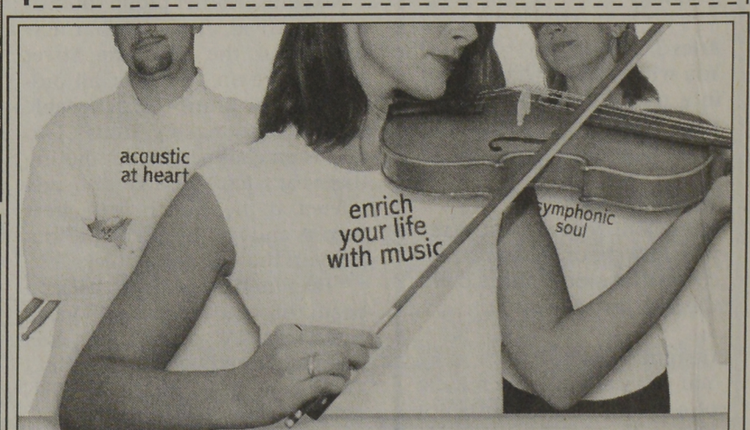
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