

Virginia Greenblatt, Woman of the Cloth

Since 1973 Irish Imports, Ltd has been providing quality Irish handcrafts, clothing and gifts to its customers in Cambridge, just outside of Harvard Square.

Owner Virginia Greenblatt travels to Ireland each year and searches out the very best craftspeople and their creations, helping to keep alive a tradition of home-made goods for which Ireland is famous.

Colette talked with Virginia recently and asked her these questions.

Q: What are customers looking for when they come into your Irish shop these days?

Since the beginning, our merchandise has always appealed to people looking for quality. Certainly in the last few years there has been more awareness of buying something durable that you can use for a long time. While this was once and still is partly as a function of economy, durability has become a hallmark of quality.

Q: Your products are all Irish-made. Does the Irish-made signature still carry a brand loyalty in an age of globalization and mass production?

Yes, definitely. And I think it always has. It goes back to the idea that things are strong and well-made. The older Irish ladies used to say that a good tweed coat will see you out.

Q: What does the phrase Made-in-Ireland signify to you?

Attention to detail - - whether it's an older style or more contemporary. And true to its origins.

I would compare this to Lord of the Dance. They kept the original dance form and embellished it to make it more appealing and stylish. The same is true, for example, of hand-knit sweaters. They still use the cable patterns and stitches that belong to the traditional origins but add something new like a cuff, collar, big buttons, pockets and so forth that lends itself to a more stylish and contemporary product. Quality and style go hand in hand so the melding of the tradition with the stylish appeal is wonderful.

The use of color has always been



important too. Many of the colors seem to me to be a reflection of the natural beauty of the Irish landscape.

Q: Who comes into your store to shop?

We get a lot of Irish-American customers as you would expect and many have romantic or nostalgic reason for coming in. But we also get a lot of non-Irish and people from all age groups.

People who know our store, either with or without an Irish connection, are looking for the broader appreciation of Ireland's legacy of artistry and style. They are looking for natural materials rather than disposable goods. So again, style and substance are key.

We have a wealth of knowledge about everything from the crafts person to the legacy behind the craftsmanship and we enjoy the process of working with our customers and guiding them to a suitable purchase. As a result, many of our customers

return and many other come about through word of mouth.

Q: The layout of your store is very attractive and spacious. Is the spacious look deliberate on your part?

Absolutely. Many of our customers are drawn into the store by something attractive that they see while simply walking by. Once inside, our products are laid out in such a way that you can experience the texture of fabrics and examine our art pieces up close so the layout is crucial. Another important element is not just the presentation of the store but also how we package gifts for our customers. We do a very nice job of packaging gifts so the gift givers has nothing left to do. We like to think we offer it all!

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