

TWO'S A CHARM

BY BRIDGET FABI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK BURSTYN



Three years after opening her first retail store Victoria Mifsud-Teti wanted to do it all over again. It was a wise decision. Her two ultra stylish Toronto boutiques are the talk of the town.



Tucked among stately heritage homes near Toronto's upscale Bloor West Village, Victoria Mifsud-Teti's flagship store Rizo Home is quick to evoke fond memories of yesteryear amongst her customers thanks to a fabulous selection of classic and vintage-inspired décor, bath and body care and garden accessories.

Having spent her childhood in Malta, Victoria returned to Canada as a teenager with vivid recollections of Europe's bustling open-air street markets. After years spent working as a special effects make-up artist, Victoria decided it was high time she realised her fantasy of running a boutique that mirrored the markets of her youth and combined her

passion for all things vintage. A quest for the perfect store – one which was located in a stylish, yet affordable Toronto neighbourhood – ended when she found a quaint old building on Annette Street. Close enough to Bloor West Village, yet far enough away not to be in direct competition with its shops, the store seemed the ideal spot especially after Victoria's inspection of the interior.

ABOVE, TOP RIGHT & BOTTOM RIGHT: Artful arrangements at Rizo Home, Victoria Mifsud-Teti's quaint home décor and gift boutique.

WIDDLE: Victoria Mifsud-Teti with husband Tony Teti and daughter Madeline Lisa In Little Lisa, the couple's second retail store in Toronto.



The site was formerly a neighbourhood hardware store and the turn-of-the-century red brick building still featured the original tin ceiling, antique fixtures and rough putty-stoned walls. These charming period details provided the perfect backdrop for 1000 square feet of Victoria's opulent offerings.

Extending the ambience onto the street, Rizo Home sports a red awning and a

wrought iron gate which ushers customers inside the store, an experience akin to stepping into a European country garden.

Enchanting displays are highlighted with hanging birds' nests and cages, garden gloves, benches, custom iron trellises and weathered garden stammary.

Larger pieces include vintage and reproduction furnishings which fit perfectly with the neighbourhood's modus operandi of providing classically-designed items of character which are destined to become heirlooms for future generations.

While the price points at Rizo are mid-to-high-end, Victoria's customers

Continued on page 54

ABOVE, TOP LEFT & BOTTOM LEFT: Old-fashioned toys, European bedding and timeless furniture set the tone at Little Lisa – The Children's Store.



Continued from page 33

appreciate quality and uniqueness and expect to pay more for her great finds. Many of Victoria's purchases are made at the Toronto, Atlanta and New York trade shows, but she also embarks on numerous European excursions and credits the Internet as an excellent resource for unique product.

Like most retailers, Christmas is the busiest time of year at the shop. Victoria benefits greatly from being located in an

area where classic Christmas trimmings are strong sellers thanks to many well-kept local heritage homes and seasonal house tours. Being near the downtown business district also ensures plenty of sales from custom corporate gift baskets.

As if running one successful home store wasn't enough, Victoria and her husband Tony were faced with an exciting opportunity three years after opening Rizo when a similar retail space became available a few doors down. With one win already under their belts, the duo decided to embrace the opportunity and opened a second business dedicated to vintage children's products. Named after their precocious daughter Madalene Lola, in 2001 Little Lola – The Children's Shop was born.

above: Delightful gift items for babies on display at Victoria Mitsud-Teti's children's shop Little Lola.

With a striped awning, original painted tin ceilings, soft robin's egg blue walls and whimsical hot air balloons hanging from above, the ambiance of this store is abundant. Lovable little Madalene Lola adores her visits to the shop and shows promise as a future retailer offering up many suggestions, such as the current children's play area. However, she does have a tendency to try and give products away at no charge.

Despite the array of toys on display, there are no batteries required at Lola's. All of the delightful amusements are period replicas running on wind-up mechanisms or with a little imagination and interaction. It's literally a wonderland of adorable bedding, timeless furniture and exquisite handmade European clothing.

Both stores' romantic and whimsical styles are never altered. Victoria believes too many retailers make the mistake of constantly changing in an attempt to follow every trend and competitor. Her philosophy – of targeting the local demographic by carrying pieces which fit their lifestyle while following her own style and instinct – has paid off and resulted in strong customer loyalty.

According to Victoria, excellent staff, customer service and differentiating features are the other integral ingredients of a successful independent store. She credits her three great employees for her success as well as her dedicated husband and business partner.

"Tony is a total workhorse," says Victoria. "He ensures the business runs smoothly, looking after the less-than-glamorous behind-the-scenes tasks, and keeping me on budget. Without him it would be chaos.

"We enjoy working together in our businesses. Once the workday ends though, we try our best to leave work behind and go home to our little family. That's probably our biggest challenge, setting aside enough time for just us."

And having enough time will get even more challenging in the near future because rumour has it that Victoria and Tony are planning to open a third location this spring, aptly named Rizo Lolo & Company. It's expected to be a combination of their two stores in a larger space with more focus on substantive furniture and garden pieces and design services. Based on their current success we're betting that three will be a charm and not a crowd. ■