

**POWERFUL
PLACES**



Roelof's Antiques & Restoration LaPorte, Texas

By Sue Mayfield-Geiger

WHEN YOU DRIVE BY ROELOF'S IN LAPORTE, YOU WILL NOTICE THAT THIS ANTIQUE STORE STILL MAINTAINS THE FAÇADE OF THE OLD SHARP GRAIN COMPANY, ORIGINALLY OPENED IN 1929. ONCE INSIDE, YOU KNOW IMMEDIATELY WHY THE CURRENT OWNERS SPENT EIGHT YEARS RENOVATING THE GHOSTLY BUILDING THAT STOOD EMPTY FOR SEVENTEEN YEARS.



Situated on 1.5 acres (plus nine wooded lots), the main building is a palatial mix of heavy cypress beams and pine floors, ceilings and walls - all original. Although magnificent antiques and accessory items are displayed throughout, remnants of the Sharp Grain Company are reminders that this working feed store thrived during its 58 years in business. Current owners, Judy and Roelof Nieuwenhuis, made sure that anyone entering could wander around and see the grain chutes, feed sacks, corn grinder, Waukesha engine, plus old pencil writings still evident on the boards for figuring grain prices. Yellowed sales receipts, ledgers, seed catalogs, merchandising signs and more are part of the museum area.



Upstairs (now the living quarters for the proprietors), the same long grain pitch pine floors run the length of the 2,500 sq. ft. space. "That area was primarily used as storage for chemicals, plus the bins and corn crusher consumed most of the room," says Judy. "It was really a mess when we bought this place: mold, old grain, rats, owls, rusty equipment. The clean-up here was probably the most difficult," she relates, "but with a piece of chalk and enough wine, we got it done!" Now that area has new life and serves as the couple's living room. The entire living quarters is full of high ceilings, large carved doors, unique pieces of art, a loft that serves as the library, Turkish rugs, chandeliers, stained glass, an open sunroom and so much more.

"To us, when something old is structurally sound, it is so much more exciting and a better value than something new and traditional," Judy adds. And why is it powerful aside from the obvious? "We are a lot like the Sharp family in that they were hard working and civic minded. During the depression, the Sharps supplied seeds to families so they could grow vegetables, plus feed for their livestock. They were doing good for humankind. Also, the Sharps started out with nothing, just like Roelof and me; then we built a successful business over time."



The barn out back is another piece of history. It was definitely a working barn where they stored hay, feed and lime, all delivered by train. When you walk inside, you can see the old farm implements hanging on the walls, and pieces of pine that are 21 feet, six inches – true 2 x 10s that you can no longer buy today.

Volumes could be written about this powerful place that is not only full of memories, but evokes feelings of awe and wonder for every person who comes through its doors. The architectural splendor, European antiques, feed store reminders, and the mix of two families who put a lot of elbow grease and love into something that enhanced both of their lives. Drop by and see for yourself. Located at 319 E. Main in LaPorte, you can't miss it. Or call 281-471-3807 for directions. Plan to stay and browse – not only at the new, but the old – and above all – the powerful. (www.roelofsantiques.com)