



*a date with*

# DuMouchelles

WHY INDIAN VILLAGERS (AND THEIR TREASURES)  
KEEP RETURNING TO THE FAMED DETROIT AUCTION HOUSE

SUBMITTED BY CURTIS TRUITT

When the estate of villager George Palmer was liquidated recently, many of the exquisite furnishings were transported to DuMouchelle's for their auctions. George had purchased many of the items there to begin with. This is part of the tradition and cycle of life here in Indian Village. Villagers gleefully buy fine art and antiques from Du Mouchelle's to fill their opulent homes and then sell there when it is time to downsize or leave the village or when estates are liquidated.

Ask most any neighbor, and they will gush over their DuMouchelle purchases and tell amusing tales. And they proudly proclaim as they point out their treasures, "It came from DuMouchelle's!" Kris Cravens-Hutton bought her first lot of framed Italian ruin etchings there and was approached by another interested customer before she even

left the auction house. She did not sell them and has, in fact, found and purchased others there, framed in exactly the same way, to complete her collection of 16. They hang in her living room and complement her home splendidly.

Kris also purchased there a collection of silver champagne buckets that she uses as bathroom waste baskets—a most elegant touch! Her most used purchase is a Waterford crystal vase that she keeps at her entryway and filled with fresh flowers. Her most amusing tale is when her eccentric cousin came to visit and just had to attend a DuMouchelle auction. Attired in a flowered moo-moo, plaid shawl, black turtleneck, and vintage bow tie, she spread herself out "like a Whistler painting" in one of Matilda Dodge's dining room chairs—in the front showroom window—to the delight of onlookers! Kris has a photo to prove this!

Jake Whitman found an orange gilded Louis XVI armchair at the DuMouchelle auction that he just had to have, not knowing it came from George Palmer's home just a block away. Then during a real estate tour of Palmer's house, he discovered its mate, tucked away in the basement. He now has the matching set, along with a pair of mahogany and brass candle sticks that belonged to Palmer and were also auctioned off at DuMochelles.

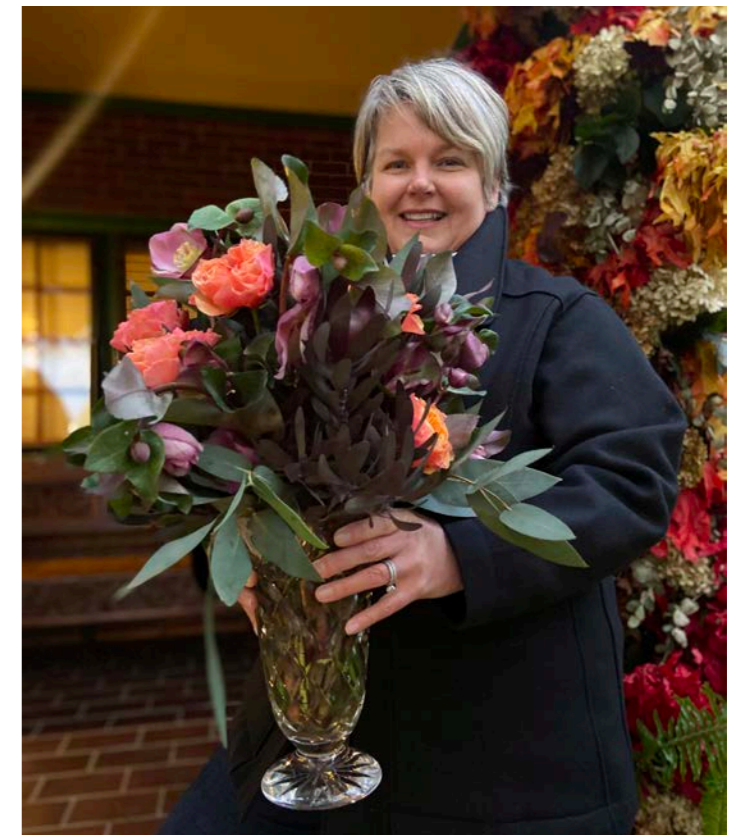
Chris Stommel and Dane Masters have furnished their home almost entirely from DuMouchelle's. Chris had long wanted an artifact from the demolished Hudson's Department Store, so when a lobby chandelier appeared in the auction, he quickly bid on it and won the auction. When Dane was informed, he was horrified, as he realized the four-foot-diameter chandelier is far too large to fit their home. They even had to borrow a truck to get it home. It now resides in the basement, while Chris seeks a buyer with suitable space to hang it properly.

In another amusing story, Chris' and Dane's dog stepped on the bid button on the auction app on Dane's tablet, and it accidentally bought them an African mask! The mask still hangs on the wall as a reminder that dogs can bid, too!

When Regina and Craig Kuper bought their village home, they found that all of the original lighting had been replaced with plain, more modern fixtures. They quickly remedied this by buying lovely period lights from Du Mouchelle's. These lights are works of art in their own right and are perfectly reflective of their home's original charm. Regina says that there is no need to feel intimidated in attending one of Du Mouchelle's informal auctions, and "You can find bargains there, too."

Neighbors all agree that attending a DuMouchelle auction is an exciting experience, and the DuMouchelles are extremely gracious and helpful hosts. They not only educate buyers but remember what people are looking for and alert them to upcoming items. And fondly remembered are the complementary cold cuts and coffee, served during the auctions!

The origins of the DuMouchelle family in Detroit are concurrent with that of our own Indian Village. Following World War I, Joseph DuMouchelle came to Detroit from Windsor, Ontario and worked for art dealer, Emil Dittrich, on Washington Boulevard. Both Joseph DuMouchelle and his wife, Charlotte (Lepain) originated from Windsor, and their family farms now comprise what is downtown Windsor. The Du Mouchelle family came from Quebec as early settlers. In 1927, Joseph went into business for himself in a historic home on Jefferson Avenue and Riopelle. This was called, "The Art Salon," and he conducted auctions on the first



ABOVE: Kris Cravens-Hutton with her Waterford crystal vase.  
BELOW: Chris Stommel with his large Hudson's chandelier.

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## OUR HISTORY

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floor and lived upstairs. The next place of business was in another historic home on Woodward Avenue near Forest. It was here that he agreed to auction an estate so large that this location would not accommodate it. As a result, he rented (temporarily) the first floor of 409 East Jefferson, a former car dealership. (This explains the giant freight elevator.) This grew into the permanent location for DuMouchelle's. The name was changed to this in the late 1930's. The building was purchased by DuMouchelle's in 1946. Joseph and Charlotte had five children-- Lawrence, Norman, Rosemary, Joan, and Ernest. They are all familiar and friendly faces to the villagers who have frequented the auctions over the years.

Joan DuMouchelle Walker says of her father, Joe, "He was from Canada and had an affinity for the river." Joan tried to persuade him to move his business to fashionable Washington Boulevard where there was a lot of foot traffic, but he felt the public should have a place where a gallery visit would be a special destination, and East Jefferson on the river was his idea of that place.

Larry DuMouchelle, eldest son, and past president of the business, said prior to his passing in 2019 that the family always felt it was an honor and privilege to be entrusted to handle any family's estate. Local customer support has always been the key to the success of the business, and Joan affirms this basic business tenet. People recognize this sincerity and respond to it. And the business has thrived.

DuMouchelle's has handled some of the largest and grandest estates in Detroit such as those of William Fisher and Matilda Dodge Wilson. The DuMouchelles have become experts in all categories of art and antiques, and the business remains one of the world's largest and oldest family-owned auction houses. The entire family helps in the business-- and always has. The DuMouchelle children came to the gallery directly after school each day in

order to complete the tasks needed to keep it operating smoothly. Some family members have even appeared on PBS's Antiques Roadshow and evaluated items for the long-running Detroit News/Free Press feature, "Trash or Treasure?"

In terms of trends, Joan said that they come and go and that her dad realized that they bought and sold in the same market. He always paid close attention to popular items and tried to satisfy demand.

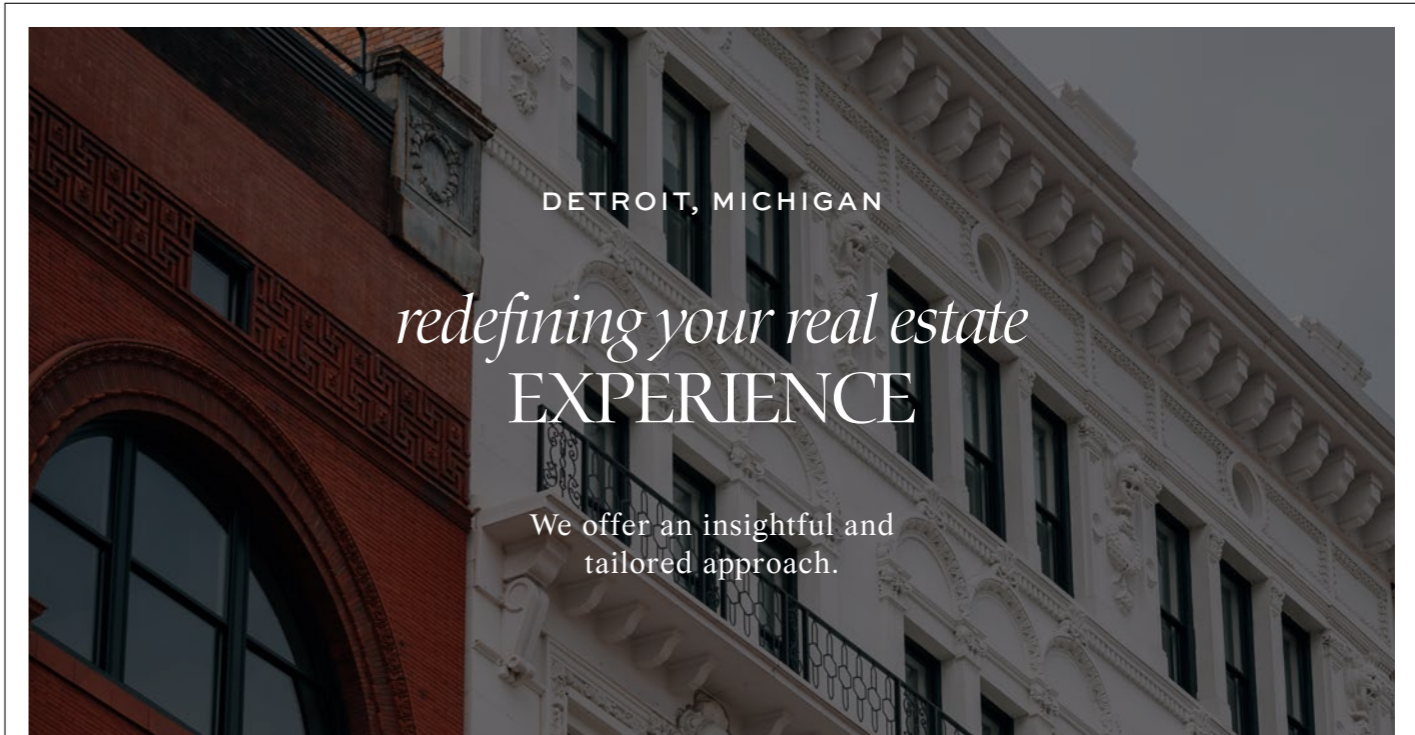
The pandemic created an incredible challenge in that the in-person auctions all but disappeared in favor of on-line

or telephonic bidding. This is a completely new reality for a company steeped in face-to-face interaction. The in-person auctions have been slow to come back, but they are on their way. In the meantime, Joan indicates the company is enjoying a good, healthy audience on the internet. A recent innovation is the virtual auction preview, available online. The online catalog is also a great way to preview the monthly sale.

As villagers, we are most fortunate to have this wonderful resource literally at our doorsteps. With the onset of cold weather, why not luxuriate in the treasured tradition of attending a DuMouchelle auction, and enhance the

George Palmer's Louis XVI armchairs

comfort of your home by adding another splendid item! You can view their virtual auction preview at [dumoart.com](http://dumoart.com) and bid online at [live.dumoart.com](http://live.dumoart.com). Or you may visit the gallery in person at 409 East Jefferson to preview or attend an auction. Check for times online. **CT**



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