

# East Coast Cool

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JANET KIMBER

When you think about contemporary décor, St. John's and Halifax aren't the first Canadian cities that typically spring to mind. But Suzanne Saul and Christopher Joyce are laying those old Atlantic Canada stereotypes to rest with their three ultra-stylish home furnishings boutiques.

Both Newfoundland natives, Christopher Joyce and Suzanne Saul met while studying at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. After graduating Chris pursued his passions – painting, metal sculpting and furniture making, and enjoyed tremendous success selling custom work. Meanwhile, Suzanne completed her Masters in Business Administration and entered the workforce as a marketing manager in the software development field. Driven by an overwhelming absence of high-quality contemporary furniture in Nova Scotia, the couple yearned to employ their respective artistic capabilities and wanted to establish a permanent venue for Chris's burgeoning furniture line. With this in mind, they opened Attica Furnishings in Halifax 10 years ago. Originally located on Gottingen Street, the business flourished despite its out-of-the-way location. Shortly after opening, however, Suzanne and Chris packed up and moved Attica to its current digs on Granville Street in the city's swanky downtown core. Close to the water, in a highly-visible historic building, Attica quickly became a popular shopping destination for fashion-savvy locals.

The impressive 2700-square-foot space boasts palatial 16-foot ceilings overhead and thoughtfully laid-out rooms below. A combination of materials, including

wood, concrete and bamboo, mixed with exposed brick and stone, creates a warm ambiance and provides a perfect backdrop for the stylish wares.

"The New Atlantic" is a catchphrase the couple uses to describe the store. "We're a lifestyle store," says Suzanne. "We carry products with clean, contemporary lines for any and all rooms in a home, and everything required to complete the look of an entire room."

Items for the living room, bedroom, bathroom and home office are on offer, along with lighting and gifts.

Suzanne further defines the shop's sense of style as "clean lines without unnecessary adornment" and as "items that will work in both contemporary and traditional settings."

Key considerations for Suzanne and Chris when purchasing include form and function. The couple attempts to carry a strong assortment of well-priced, unique, handmade pieces alongside high-quality Canadian manufactured goods and a smattering of international designs. Considered to be on the high end of the price scale by some locals, Attica has nevertheless managed to attract a strong following of customers. "Once consumers realize they are paying a little extra for superior construction and design, they see the value in it," says Suzanne.

The store's best selling lines (aside from Chris' collection of course) include upholstered and leather furniture in a broad array of styles and fabric selections from Quebec's G. Romano and U.S.-based Carter Furniture, Canadian accessory lines from Umbra and Torre & Tagus, and fine wood furniture from Quebec manufacturer Baronet.

A hard-to-keep-in-stock item at the moment is Umbra's Bungee Credit Card Case which retails for \$7. "If I could only sell as many sofas as we do these credit card cases..." jokes Suzanne. Another current favourite is the Dublin Sofa from

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G. Romano. "With its outstanding construction, fabulous selection of fabrics, amazing price point and clean lines, it's the best value by far on the market," according to Suzanne.

Frequently travelling back to their hometown of Newfoundland to visit family and friends Suzanne and Chris noted the development of a cosmopolitan vibe unfolding in the province's capital city of St. John's. Wanting to be a part of this cultural evolution, the couple opened a second store in the historic town in 2001. Situated on Water Street, the city's unique and colourful main thoroughfare, the 4000-square-foot location enjoys as much patronage as the Halifax site.

Buoyed by the success of this expansion, Suzanne and Chris opened Attica Kids in Halifax's Bayers Lake Shopping Centre two years later in 2003. Located on the outskirts of town, and surrounded by big-box stores, many retailers would have shied away from the area, but Suzanne says the store has been a great success, adding "Quality wins out over cheap imitations any day.

"We selected this location because of the ease of parking and access for families with wee ones and strollers," explains Suzanne of their strategic move. "Being the only children's décor store specializing in kid's furniture and accessories, we have moms, grandmothers and entire families showing up to shop."

Attica Kids offers a more eclectic mix of designs than its adult version along with a broader spectrum of prices.

With so much going on Suzanne, who oversees the couple's retail operations while Chris focuses on his furnishings line, relies heavily on effective store managers and employees.

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employees and are lucky to have such good people," she says. "Many of our customers comment on how much they enjoy the modern, yet comfortable atmosphere we've created in our stores, absent of intimidation. I've gone into countless stores where I feel unwelcome or pressured, which completely spoils the shopping experience. Our goal is to create a positive experience where our customers want to return time and again."

All three Attica locations host customer appreciation nights to reward loyal customers. About 50 select patrons are welcomed each season by invitation only to preview new products and pre-purchase

sale items.

The store has also found success supporting the Designer Showcase Challenge, a fundraiser in support of the Kid's Help Phone. The event allows them to support a good cause while benefiting from fabulous exposure for their products and stores.

But life isn't coming up all roses for Suzanne and Chris. "Our biggest challenge at the moment has to be the highly-volatile industry we're involved in," says Suzanne. "It's so competitive with everyone creating cheap, knock-off imports. When they (consumers) see the trendy disposable furniture that can be bought at grocery stores versus quality investment

## Attica's Top Five Suppliers

### BARONET

[www.baronet.ca](http://www.baronet.ca)  
Telephone: (416) 387-5431

### CARTER FURNITURE

[www.carterfurniture.com](http://www.carterfurniture.com)  
Telephone: (800) 849-8614

### G. ROMANO

[www.gromano.com](http://www.gromano.com)  
Telephone: (514) 323-5140

### TORRE & TAGUS

[www.torretagus.com](http://www.torretagus.com)  
Telephone: (800) 423-4417

### UMBRA

[www.umbra.com](http://www.umbra.com)  
Telephone: (800) 387-5122

### BEHIND THE NAME

When selecting a name for their chain of modern home furnishings stores, owners Christopher Joyce and Suzanne Saul found a perfect fit in Attica. An ancient Grecian city during the Iron Age, Attica was rich with beautiful design, architecture, paintings, sculpture and household objects. The old city's eclectic mix was exactly what the couple wanted to achieve in their store.

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The couple's passion for high-quality goods, however, keeps their spirits up and their minds focused. "Both of us have a love for design and beautiful things, so it's a perfect fit to be surrounded by these things every day," says Suzanne. "We don't look at it as a business or a job, we're just following our hearts. It can be gut-wrenching at times, regarding risk and finances, but we just enjoy working with the people and doing what we love and it all seems to work out in the end." ■