

The Best Kept Secret of Dysart

Wayne and Rachel Ursulescu made a spontaneous decision to buy a log home in Dysart in 1993. A small world of unique furniture, art and warm places for coffee and company has spontaneously grown around them ever since.

This place is a treasure!" exclaims an entry in the guest book at Pure Prairie Western Giftware and Coffee Garden, and there are numerous such accolades in the book. Since opening in the summer of 2005, Pure Prairie has welcomed over 700 visitors from near and far, and many of them have expressed their admiration for this one-of-a-kind operation.

Run by Wayne and Rachel Ursulescu, Pure Prairie is located in the Village of Dysart, an hour's drive northeast of Regina on Highway 22. The roots of Pure Prairie stretch back to 1989, when the Ursulescus were still living in Regina and Wayne was painting plaster figurines of wildlife and cowboys, which he began selling two years later at the Western Canadian Agribition. He

exhibited his work there for the next 10 years.

In 1993, Rachel and Wayne bought a two-storey log house in Dysart, and slowly what the Ursulescus refer to as phase two of Pure Prairie "evolved like a giant jigsaw puzzle." Some of the pieces are the buildings of the Old West village, named Buckeroo Boulevard, which features the requisite saloon, general store, post office, and sheriff's office. Here you can travel back in time, relaxing in an antique barber's chair in the saloon, or admiring a century-old woodstove in the store, or perusing other period artifacts.

Other pieces of the puzzle include raised garden beds, crusher dust paths, flower beds and shrubs and trees, a hand pump and pond, and a pergola. The





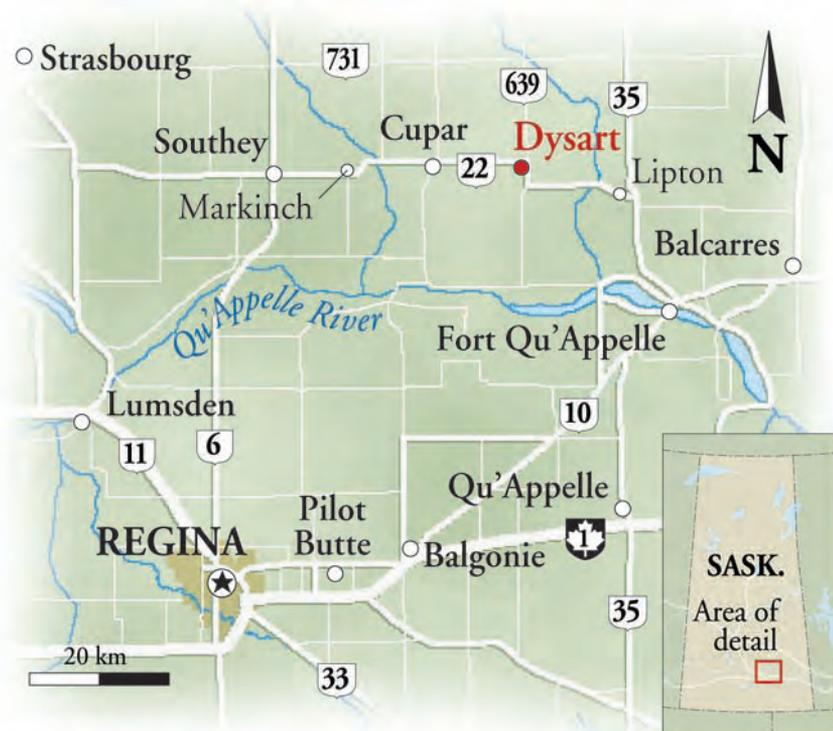
catalogue of plants is extensive, from amur cherry to wayfaring tree, from beebalm to yarrow. And such an array of plants attracts birds of all sorts—kingbirds, hummingbirds, warblers.

But the last piece, the one that Rachel had long sought, is a coffee and gift shop, so they rebuilt the back of the house overlooking the garden and Buckeroo Boulevard. In keeping with the Old West theme, Wayne finished the inside to resemble an old barn. The addition brings the seating capacity of Pure Prairie up to 100 people.

Wayne has converted their two-car garage into his woodworking shop,

“I build out of my head,” says Wayne Ursulescu of the one-off pieces of furniture he constructs (opposite top). “I don’t think I could build one the same way twice. My heart is back in the 1920s and 1930s. I’ve always enjoyed old things.” The saloon (opposite bottom), the general store and the post office that make up his Old West village “just materialized.” They had always wanted a log house. “We went out to see the house in the afternoon and owned it that night.” Ursulescu was never a carpenter but the urge to build struck him when he moved to Dysart. “As soon as we bought it we started building decks (above). People always ask me what style I build in. I’m very influenced by Victorian building.” His paintings and furniture are found in every corner of the coffee shop (below).





and there he creates—without working from plans—sturdy and unique furniture. Each is a work of art. “It comes out of my head,” he notes, “I can change it at a whim.” And each is made with wood salvaged from old buildings—barns, houses, granaries—in the area.

Among his many impressive creations are an armchair assembled with wood recovered from the old Royal Bank building on Main Street. He also built a cabinet and hutch and a pie safe from the fir stair treads and baseboards of an old farmhouse west of Dysart.

Wayne likes to work especially with the old-growth fir used to construct buildings early in the twentieth century as settlement spread across the Prairies. Not only its fine grain but also its evocation of that “bygone era” appeal to him.

The coffee and gift shop is full of his work. Their house itself doubles as not only a showroom, but also a natural history museum. Things such as bear hides to wasp nests share space with the art.

Pure Prairie is a tranquil retreat that has been called “the best-kept secret” of Dysart. **PN**

“The way I look at it,” says Ursulescu of his retirement career creating and selling art, “if I wouldn’t buy it myself, I wouldn’t sell it.” He prefers to work out of his imagination rather than depend on plans when he takes on a new project like the hall chair (below). He chose an old door and some stair treads as the raw materials for the hall chair. “I love working with old fir lumber. I think it’s one of our great treasures. It doesn’t look like much in the raw state—when you first salvage a piece—but a few coats of oil draws out the magic in it.”



Go to www.prairiesnorth.com for more information about Pure Prairie and coffeehouses in Saskatchewan.

