



Jean McHale of Gaines McHale *Her Business is Your Home*

By Sabina Dana Plasse
Photos by Erica Fromherz

As President and CEO of Gaines McHale Antiques & Home, Jean McHale has managed to make her passion not only a family operated business but a Baltimore institution. A former music teacher who mastered the clarinet, McHale knew that a life in music was not her calling. "I flew down to Birmingham, Alabama to work with this guy who used to import antiques from England. I worked with him for a week and said this is what I wanted to do," reveals McHale.

McHale had her work cut out for her and realized very soon after establishing the business with her partner Judy Gaines that there was a great deal to learn about the antique business. "When you start putting your money into something, it's called the school of hard knocks. You learn quickly. I still read every night before I go to bed."

Unlike many stores of the type, Gaines

McHale wants people to feel at home in their establishment, and you do. With birds chirping, fun hip music as well as a sea of comfort around every corner, this is not a store you just pop in on. "I think one of the things that has made Gaines McHale different from anybody else and part of the secret to its success is we do try to educate people, teach them and tell them what they are buying as well as try and instill in them the passion of what they are buying," tells McHale.

From its roots McHale has found that antiques and furnishing homes is a very indi-

vidualistic process. Although she mainly deals with mostly European styles, McHale understands that there are lifestyle issues, emotional needs, physical scenarios, budgetary concerns, habitual behaviors and most of all commitments to owning antiques. "These are things that you have incredible reactions to," she believes. "In my house people say to me aren't you flipping furniture in and out and I say no. The pieces of furniture in my house are my friends, and they are staying there. I love my things too much and they are a part of me."

McHale will advise her customers to consider the investment in antiques because you are purchasing furniture that is unique with a history and a great deal of honor. One of the specialties that has separated Gaines McHale from other stores is its ability to convert antiques for more modern purposes such as placing televisions in armoires and adapting pieces for computers. "One thing that I am good at is really figuring out different ways to

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use pieces," says McHale. "I can take a sow's ear and turn it into a silk purse. That is where the conversion thing started, and we started hiring cabinetmakers and more sales people." She adds, "We alter uses to fit people's needs and the main thing is we try not to destroy the integrity of the piece."

Through many requests as well as advising people to find the right look and style for their home, McHale has branched out and launch GMI Design LLC with her partner Katherine Behrens Crosby. Through GMI Design, McHale and Crosby can offer a sophisticated and practical approach to interior design. Using antiques and reproductions, GMI Design hopes to satisfy their clients who wish to achieve a home that reflects their tastes and interests that is also livable.

In addition, Gaines McHale has not only opened a second store in Historic Savage Mill, a very fitting locale, but after 25 years in Baltimore Gaines McHale will open a brand new 17,000 square-foot showroom at Harbor East which will also be the home to GMI Design. Gaines McHale will still maintain their Federal Hill location at 836 Leadenhall Street for operations such as furniture storage, restoration projects and deliveries, but now the accessibility to finding lifetime furniture that reflects your personal life choices is a good deal easier.