

DAN MILES - THE POSTER MAN

Dan Miles repairs and preserves some of the world's most memorable movie and concert posters



Dan Miles working on a Beatles poster.ø

A hobby, by definition, is something which we enjoy, helps to relieve stress and takes our mind away from the pressures of daily life. There are many different types of hobbies, but few are as interesting as the one Dan Miles has undertaken. His hobby? Restoring vintage movie posters.

For more than 10 years Dan has painstakingly repaired hundreds, if not thousands of frail, torn sheets of paper, all of which are memorable keepsakes from movies of the past 70 years. Posters with Sean Connery as '007', Clint Eastwood as 'Dirty Harry', Robert Redford in 'The Sundance Kid' and Vivian Leigh from 'Gone With The Wind'. All of which have become part of our memories from those many visits to movie theatres, drive-ins and video rental stores.

How did someone like Dan Miles become interested in such a different and uncommon hobby? "I have always had a keen interest in movies," Dan explains. "The posters representing the films bring back many memories and when I look at them I think of the stars and the movies they symbolize."

Of course, poster restoration is not the only means of income for Dan Miles. He has been in the communication industry all of his life. Recently he held a very senior position as Director of Communications for federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty. Currently Dan is a Communications Strategist for the University of Ontario Institute of

Technology in Oshawa.

Dan was born in London, Ontario and his first job was a news reporter for CFPL-TV in London. He then moved to Toronto to work in the Queen's Park news bureau for CTV. During the Harris administration Dan began working for Finance Minister Ernie Eves and later worked for Ministers John Baird and Jim Flaherty.

Their children grown, Dan and his wife Celine, left the Beaches in 2005 and moved to Port Perry to enjoy a quieter pace in our peaceful town. "I spend every Sunday morning in the basement working on the posters," Dan said. "It's relaxing and gratifying."

The art of restoring and preserving posters requires patience and attention to detail. The process starts by carefully analyzing the state of the paper. Torn corners, deep creases and small holes are quite common in posters that have been folded and lying in musty basements or in dark corners of collectible shops. Dan assesses the damage and begins his task.

The first step is linen backing or mounting the poster. The process begins by mixing glue from a wheat starch adhesive and soaking the poster in a bath of water. Dan stretches canvas over a special board and applies the adhesive. He then places an acid free paper on the canvas and then the movie poster. If the poster is stained or browning with age, he will remove this by using a diluted bleach solution. When the piece is completely dry he begins restoring it using water colours and pencil crayons. "I have kept hundreds of small scraps of paper from posters of different decades. I use these to fill in holes and tears," Dan explains.

For more than a decade Dan has spent time perfecting the art of restoration and now is one of a small handful of people in the world who are involved in this art form. His reputation has spread globally and he has done work for clients from Japan to Europe, Vancouver to Texas. "I do it because I enjoy it," Dan says. "Financially it is not very beneficial, but I find a real satisfaction in preserving the past," he smiled as he spoke.

Once the restoration process is complete, Dan has the poster mounted and shrink wrapped. It is then ready for exhibition. His large Port Perry home displays many of the rare posters Dan has restored, but he has at least a thousand stored, which he rotates from time to time. Some of the rarer posters are valued in excess of \$1,000 and bring back many memories when viewed.

Previously, Dan did restorations for Toronto's Hollywood Renaissance, a firm which used to specialize in posters, but has subsequently closed.

Check out some of Dan's amazing work at: www.backingtothefuture.com and who knows, maybe Dan can help you with an old movie poster, hidden in the recesses of your basement.

*By Jonathan van Bilsen
Focus on Scugog*