

THE UP BEAT

Newroom Inquiries, 613-596-3654 • upbeat@ottawacitizen.com

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2011

OTTAWACITIZEN.COM/UPBEAT

THE OTTAWA CITIZEN, PAGE E3

A model Canadian

Man builds tiny replica of Rideau Hall's Pauline Vanier room

BY ALEX BALLINGALL

From wall to wall, the length of the room is just shy of five-and-a-half centimetres. On the floor, a minute patch of carpet lies under four tiny chairs, a table and a miniature couch. Surrounding this furniture are detailed cabinets, a bookshelf, several paintings and a fireplace — each no more than a centimetre tall.

Anyone familiar with the decor of Canada's official residences will likely recognize it for what it is: a replica of Rideau Hall's Pauline Vanier room, only this one is 144 times smaller.

It was built by Maarten Meerman, a 48-year-old Surrey, B.C. man who designs satellites for a living. Between September and December 2010, he spent roughly 180 hours of his spare time completing the model at a work station in his garage.

"I've always liked making little things," said Meerman, who is originally from Holland. "When I was little, I used to fix alarm clocks and things for my siblings and neighbours and everything. And when there were tiny things that needed fixing, I would take them apart and put them together again."

Meerman, who lives with his wife and 14-year-old daughter, is an ardent miniature model enthusiast. Evidence of his passion can be found in his office at work, where fellow employees often come to inspect the model satellites he has built. He also has a website, mastray.com.

'The most spectacular thing was the detail he put together.'

ANN MALONE BIANCONI,
Manager, interior design
official residences

that chronicles the tiny products of his labour. Over the past eight years, he's built small versions of old tools, satellites, rocket ships, furniture and other objects.

Meerman said his latest creation has received praise from the online miniature model-building community because of its impressively small scale and intricate detail. The replica room can sit in the palm of his hand, and yet it includes 887 individual pieces, some as small as two millimetres long and 0.2 milli-



Maarten Meerman holds his 1/144 scale miniature of the Pauline Vanier Room at Rideau Hall which he built in his workshop in Surrey, B.C.

metres wide. For the most part, it's made from fragments of birch, maple, cherry veneer and silk, and is topped with varnish and paint.

"There's no point in not putting in all the detail you can. That makes it fun," he said.

Last year, some of his friends urged him to replicate something like the Oval Office of the U.S. president. Meerman, however, wanted to create a miniature version of something less popular, so he decided to take a look at Rideau Hall. Of the 170 rooms in governor general's official residence, Meerman chose the Pauline Vanier room — also known as the Canadian room — because of the variety of its contents. The room holds a number of items from various regions of the country, and is often used for media interviews.

"This room just had this whole collection of furniture from different ages and styles and there's no two pieces the same in there," he explained. "I thought: 'let's see if I can build a model of that.'"

To get the exact dimensions of the room, Meerman contacted Ann Malone Bianconi, manager of interior design for the official residences of the Canadian government.

She sent him pictures and meas-



The tiny replica room includes 887 individual pieces, including detailed cabinets, a bookshelf, several paintings and a fireplace.

urements of the room so he could draw plans for his own version at 1/144 scale.

As his work progressed, Meerman periodically sent pictures to Malone Bianconi, who was stunned by the scale and precision of his work.

"The most spectacular thing was the detail he put together for being so far away," she said. "All the mouldings and the detail (of the room) ...

he was very good to capture them."

Now that he's completed his model from Rideau Hall, Meerman is working on an array of nearly infinitesimal tools for a tiny version of Pinocchio's workshop — at least, that's what he does when he's not at the office.

"I have a day job, so most evenings and weekends I work on this," he said.

LETTERS

Gentlemen helped motorist on frigid day

One recent frigid morning as I left for work I had sufficient gas, a charged cellphone and weather-appropriate clothing. I figured I had the elements covered. What happened next was something I didn't have covered.

After passing a semi-trailer on the 416, my right rear tire blew. While I waited patiently for CAA to attend, two gentlemen stopped to ensure that I had sufficient gas to keep my engine running and that CAA had been notified. I sat in my vehicle with such admiration and appreciation at the kindness of these strangers.

Shortly thereafter, another vehicle stopped. I explained to the gentleman what had happened and he caught me off guard when he said he could help. This wonderful man, a gift from God, changed my tire, bootless, standing in snow up to his ankles while donning his daughter's lovely pink fleece toque. In 30 degrees below.

This man would accept nothing for his service.

We are inundated, daily, with random acts of violence and tend to forget that people really do commit random acts of kindness. To the gentlemen who stopped to make sure I was OK and to the gentleman who got me on my way, thank you from the bottom of my heart. I will never forget you.

LORI LOWE, Kemptville

Shining example of the Canadian way

A friend of mine from South America has recently decided to become a Canadian citizen. I met Richard through a project that I was involved with in Argentina. With his special skills, he was able to secure work in Canada, specifically in Ottawa, where he now resides with his wife and children. Although we haven't seen each other as often as we should, I received an e-mail from him recently inviting me to his Canadian citizenship oath celebration. The swearing in was at 11 in the morning during the largest winter storm of the year. I was unable to make it to the swearing-in, but sent my congratulations. Here is what he wrote back:

"Hi Paul,

"Yesterday we were afraid to don't be able to make it with the car so we went walking pulling the girls slides.

"It was a nice ceremony, but because the storm many people couldn't go."

In those two sentences, it occurred to me that this family was already Canadian, for bringing the best of Argentina tradition, and embracing it here in Canada.

