

## A Walk Through Larchmere Leslie Yerkes

Take a walk with me through one of our area's most charming and eclectic shopping and entertainment locales, The Larchmere Historical District. We'll saunter down Larchmere Boulevard, along a quarter-mile long sweep of independent-minded and intriguing small businesses, located one block north of Shaker Square.

A little history is called for before we make our way. After World War II ended, Larchmere Boulevard was redeveloped by Sedlak Furniture to such a remarkable extent that eventually Sedlak reconditioned and utilized fourteen buildings for their showrooms and distribution operations. When the furniture dynasty contracted in the late eighties and moved away, The Larchmere Development Corporation created a visionary master plan to repopulate the empty storefronts.

The neighborhood's unique mix of dining, shopping, and walk-in services was the result. Right from the beginning, the street became known for combining antique shops with hearty dining.

More recently, a series of neighborhood special events were developed by the Larchmere Merchant's Association to pull newcomers and art and music lovers, into the quarter mile's enchanting ambiance. Nowadays the annual Porchfest music festival, monthly First Friday outdoor movies, two sidewalk sales and street wide flea markets, and the renowned Holiday Stroll key the neighborhood's family-friendly mission. The Porchfest is set to become an iconic local event, just as the Holiday Stroll has become. The aptly named annual festival puts musicians on the front porches of houses and low-rise residences throughout the neighborhood for an evening of music, to which one wanders and enjoys!

Starting our own stroll from the east end, it would be impossible to miss Gene Epstein's photorealistic mural of a shelf of books that occupies the entire east wall of Loganberry Books. The book titles in the mural were selected by the community and culminated the two mural projects. The other mural is located on a wall at Life Skills Community Center.

Loganberry Books, started by Harriet Logan in 1994, is the largest independent, used book store in the region. It is a book store in the old fashioned sense: floor-to-ceiling shelves packed with books and inviting comfortable chairs and benches beckon the reader to linger, crack open a volume, and stay awhile.

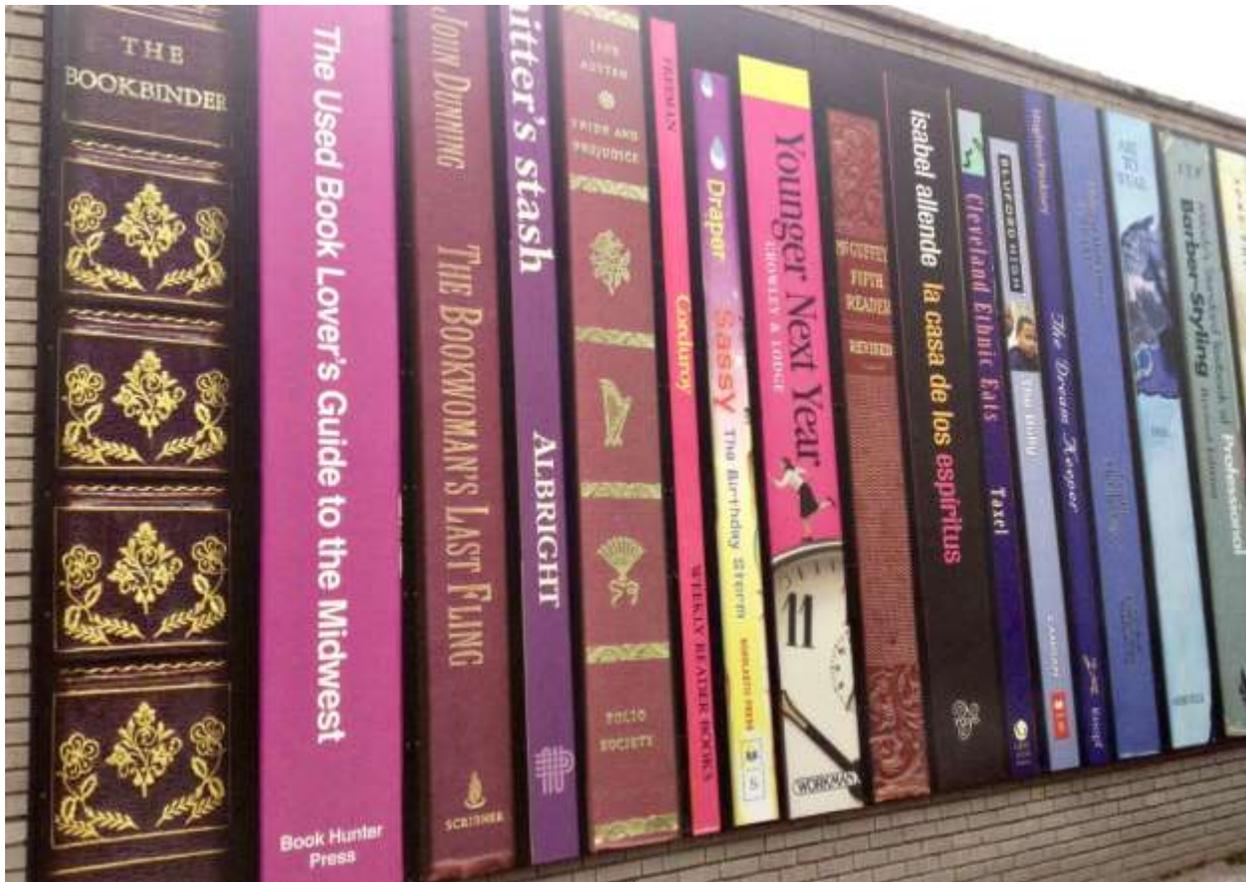


Photo: Stephen Calhoun, 2012

From here we note a café across the street and as we continue our stroll, we pass clothing and antiques stores, one of the area's best auto body and repair shops, and then we're stopped in our tracks.

The display windows of Larchmere Oriental Rugs, the region's most reputable independent retailer of oriental and tribal rugs and throws, capture our eyes. Pressing ourselves closer to the window we imagine finally finishing those hardwood floors and visiting the shop as buyers.

Next we slowly walk by the windows of dealers on one side of Cleveland's Antique Row, and marvel at the fine taste and craftsmanship tempting us into the showrooms we pass. We walk past one of the biggest upscale second-hand women's clothing store that we have ever seen.

We go into The Dancing Sheep and American Crafts to say hello to my friend Lynne Alfred, the owner. Dancing Sheep is a microcosm of the neighborhood. Lynn brings together hand-picked fine art crafts, one-of-a-kind woven art clothing, accessories and, gifts. It strikes me how her retail vision exemplifies the independence, refined and practical good taste, and diversity which all come together on Larchmere.

I'm hungry, so we head down to Felice, one of Cleveland's best restaurants. Both Felice and the new gourmet vegetarian restaurant, Bon Vivant, are advantaged by their settings, as they occupy old homes. The dining experience takes place in rooms of the old house or on the patio. Such warm, cozy environs are perfect settings for the literally hand-crafted choices we order up and enjoy.

Ten restaurants are located on Larchmere, so I hint we'll be trying home-style Cajun at Jezebel's next time around.

Walking back up the street, past salons and another café, your eye is caught by an unusual store set in a green clapboard house, Fine Points. The windows showcase yarn and knit clothing. Yes, Larchmere is home base for designer Liz Tekus and her special collection of clothing and supplies for knit and crochet crafts persons and aficionados. It's an amazing place and is one of the most colorful places in all of Cleveland.

Retracing our steps, passing by the marvelous art deco store front of Conservation Studios, another antique shop, we stop on the corner next to the chalkboard advertising The Academy Tavern's lunchtime offerings. I lean close and tell you, "Not just any hamburger!"

This corner is a fitting endpoint for our brief tour because the tavern is one of a handful of businesses that go back to the pre-war era, 1939 to be exact. Although the boulevard is straight, we've come full circle. Inviting you in, I mention this is a great place to hang out and mingle with people who live on the tree-lined residential streets which stake out the essential personal geography of the neighborhood.

This provides one of the essential qualities of Larchmere: it is a thriving neighborhood that feels like a village, percolating with life just up the hill from downtown, a block away from Shaker Square and its own many charms.

To learn more about the Larchmere neighborhood go to [www.larchmere.com](http://www.larchmere.com)