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# Charming laundromat hailed as city's best

THIS CITY By: David Sanderson

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Mike Deal / Winnipeg Free Press

*Elder De Andrade in his laundromat, The Washeteria, at 556 Keenleyside St.*[Enlarge Image](#)

The Washeteria is an East Kildonan laundromat, the name of which always seems to pop up in an annual poll that ranks the best of Winnipeg in a wide variety of categories -- everything from steak houses to coffee parlours to pizza joints to, well, laundromats.

A big part of the Washeteria's charm is its colour scheme -- a sequence of merrily painted squares and rectangles bordered



*De Andrade says he's 'not really surprised by anything that goes on' in his laundromat anymore. (MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS)* [Photo Store](#)

by thick, black lines that immediately reminds one of that old school bus from TV's *The Partridge Family*.

"Some laundromats in major U.S. cities have theme-based decors, like country-western or '50s retro," owner Elder De Andrade says when asked about the eye-catching motif.

"I decided to do this place in a de Stijl, or neo-plasticism influence, from the Dutch movement that started in 1917 with Piet Mondrian's works."

De Andrade chuckles when a writer expresses doubt whether any of the chain-smoking, quarter-dispensing laundry types he dealt with during his university days would have been able to discuss Mondrian and Maytag in the same breath.

"I never studied art or anything; it's just a passion/hobby of mine. In my travels, I've always made a point of visiting places like the Louvre, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the (Salvador) Dalí Museum in Florida."

De Andrade says there was a simple enough reason he got into the laundry biz five years ago: unemployment. In 2008, the married father of two was laid off from his job as a purchaser for DeFehr Furniture. One day while he was dropping off resumés, he noticed a "for rent" sign in the window of what used to be a laundromat, not far from his home in Elmwood.

It wasn't much to look at; the business had been closed for a year-and-a-half and everything inside was dated and worn. But the location, surrounded on all sides by apartments, duplexes and townhouses, reminded De Andrade of a laundromat he and his wife used to frequent in Montreal in the late 1990s.

"The interior of the one in Montreal was really attractive, there was always cool music playing in the background, and the owner seemed really happy, standing behind the counter greeting people and folding clothes," he said.

"We said to each other at the time, 'What a wonderful business to be in.' "

De Andrade immediately enrolled in a startup business course. He joined the Coin Laundry Association, an Illinois-based organization that dispenses industry advice to hundreds of laundry owners in Canada and the United States. Finally, he did some homework: For a few weeks, De Andrade visited different laundromats all over Winnipeg to put together a comparative analysis. He brought along sacks of dirty clothes, and during the 90 minutes or so it took him to wash and dry his belongings, he made a laundry list of what he liked or didn't like about each establishment.

He took over the lease at 556 Keenleyside St. in January 2010 and spent the next five months gutting the premises. A musty, wall-to-wall carpet was the first thing to go. ("Who would put a rug in a laundromat?" he wondered to himself as he ripped out piece after piece.) He sold the old, rusted-out appliances to a film studio that wanted them for movie props and replaced the lot with 23 state-of-the-art washers and dryers, including a "monster-loader" that can handle eight loads at a time.

"To save money, I did most of the renovations myself. It was very hard work, but very satisfying," he says, adding the name he chose, the Washeteria, is a common term for laundromats in the southern U.S.

De Andrade has regulars from as far away as Selkirk. Saturday and Sunday mornings are almost always standing-room-only, and thanks to a snack bar, big-screen TV and free Wi-Fi, a lot of his clientele treats laundry day as an outing for the entire family.

"I get every type of demographic coming through the doors -- rich, poor, young, old -- including all races and creeds," says De Andrade, who works 12 hours a day, seven days a week. "I overhear bits and pieces all day long -- people breaking up, making up... Sometimes you see a guy and a girl strike up a conversation, and the next thing you know they're coming in here together. Then the next thing you know, they're coming in to tell me this is where they met and that now they're getting married. I'm not really surprised by anything that goes on here anymore."

A couple of years ago, De Andrade, a member of '80s-era punk bands Lesbian Bingo and the Bitch Magnets, was approached by the Stiff Bishops, a Winnipeg rock group fronted by Kevin Mears, former lead singer for Monuments Galore, and Paul Schaeffer, ex-guitarist for the Johns.

"The Bishops were looking to do a video for our song Same Old Story," says Schaeffer. "We were throwing around ideas when the scenario of a laundromat came up. As luck would have it, we all knew Elder from back in the day. It was really a no-brainer to use his place as backdrop for our video, and Elder had no problem lending it out to us."

Finally, who better than a laundromat owner to help solve one of life's great mysteries, namely, what the \*&# is it with washing machines and missing socks?

"I don't have a clue, because we seem to have the same problem here," De Andrade says with a laugh.

As it turns out, socks aren't the only articles of clothing that work their way into the Washeteria's lost-and-found bin. It's not uncommon, De Andrade says, for entire loads of laundry to go AWOL.

"I've never been able to figure it out. People toss a load into a washing machine, go outside for a walk or smoke or whatever, and I never see or hear from them again," he says.

"There have been times when they've left behind a few hundred dollars worth of shirts and pants, and it really makes you wonder, how does somebody completely forget they were here?"

On the plus side, De Andrade donates any unclaimed clothing to Siloam Mission every three months or so.

"Last time it was close to 400 pounds. And a lot of it was nicer than what I've got on."

[david.sanderson@freepress.mb.ca](mailto:david.sanderson@freepress.mb.ca)

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