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Glassware and quirky objects on view at Karen Feldman's store, Artěl, in Prague.

Czech Mate

Looking for one-of-a-kind glassware and vintage toys? Tastemaker Karen Feldman is your girl Friday for shopping in Prague. BY JANE GARMER



MY INTRODUCTION TO SHOPPING IN PRAGUE WAS THIS practical advice: “Don’t wear heels. They’re treacherous on the cobblestones.” The counsel came from Karen Feldman. I wanted her to take me to some of her favorite spots, and this was my first clue that I was dealing with a pro.

Feldman, a passionate shopper whose taste ranges from the exquisitely chic to the fabulously eccentric, has lived in Prague for more than thirteen years. When she arrived, in 1995, she used her entire savings of \$2,500 to set up her own glassmaking company, without an office or even a telephone line. Today she sells her glassware in Paris, New York and London. During her downtime, Feldman explores every boutique in town worth knowing. Last year she published a travel guide, *Prague: Artěl Style*, which is packed with information about hotels, restaurants, museums and, most of all, shops tourists don’t usually find.

A mutual friend had told me that Feldman is “not just efficient, but the most efficient person you’ll ever meet,” so I wasn’t surprised when she arrived at my hotel with an annotated list of the stores I might like to visit. Since my time was limited, I reluctantly crossed off a few of her more esoteric suggestions (beekeeping supplies, custom-made hats, classic Czech motorbikes), and we set off for what she euphemistically called a little shopping. We traversed the magical Baroque metropolis, which straddles the Vltava River, covering Staré Město (Old Town), the commercial heart, around the town square; Malá Strana (Lesser Town), which is, to my mind, the prettiest part

of Prague; and Nové Město (New Town). We crossed the Charles Bridge—arguably the city’s most famous and, sadly, overcrowded landmark—countless times on our two-day adventure. Here are the highlights.

GLASSWARE

Bohemian crystal and glassware are famous throughout the world, and rightly so: much of it is handmade, and the quality is superb. **Material** (7 U Lužického Semináře, Malá Strana; 011-420-2-5753-0046; i-material.com), tucked under the Charles Bridge, stocks limited editions of elegant glasses, chunky vases, large bowls and chandeliers. Tomáš Kysela designed nearly all the pieces; I particularly liked his Rhythm line of whiskey and water glasses (\$50 each), which has a strong Venetian motif. Also for sale are life-sized glass leaves that can be attached to twigs from any delicate tree. It may sound far-fetched, but strewn across a table, these embellished branches are stunning (seventeen leaves cost \$485).

At **Design Glass** (42 U Lužického Semináře, Malá Strana; 011-420-2-5753-1232; designglass.cz), we admired the work of a number of contemporary Czech designers, as well as an appealing selection of wine carafes. The atmosphere at **Moser** (12 Na Příkopě, Malá Strana; 011-420-2-2421-1293; moser-glass.com), in business since 1857, is hushed and the sales staff barely in evidence. If you are looking for traditional Czech glass, Feldman advised me,

From left: The austere interior of Material; Feldman outside Artěl.

this dazzling 1934 wood-paneled showroom is the place to go.

To my mind, though, Feldman's own, recently opened store, **Artěl** (29 Celetná, entrance on Rybná, Staré Město; 011-420-2-2481-5085; artelglass.com), is the most arresting in Prague. A three-foot-tall antique stuffed crane from Africa, complete with exotic topknot, occupies the entire front window. The ceiling is dramatically vaulted, and built into sleek gray walls are ingeniously lit niches displaying selections of Artěl's individually blown hand-engraved glassware. Decorative, functional and sometimes whimsical stemware, bowls and ornaments, imbued with Feldman's fresh approach, take their inspiration from, and employ the craftsmanship of, early-20th-century Czech glass designers. (She also likes to work with contemporary artists; in 2005, Feldman commissioned Sol LeWitt to design limited-edition tumblers for Artěl.) Her rationale for opening a shop, she says, was to have a place to exhibit her line of glassware and a sparkling assortment of found objects, jewelry and books on Prague. But I came away suspecting that after years of buying

Arne Podářil manning the counter at Art Deco Galerie.

other people's wares, she couldn't resist selling items of her own choosing in a space of her own making.



ANTIQUES

Around the corner from the Mandarin Oriental hotel is **Antiques Ahasver** (3 Prokopská, Malá Strana; 011-420-2-5753-1404), one of Feldman's haunts. The owner, Dita Hudcova, is extremely helpful and her merchandise beautifully presented. Pressed antique linens are piled high in an old cupboard; a stash of Art Nouveau and Art Deco tablecloths hang neatly over a wardrobe. There's also a collection of ceramics and some nice jewelry from the thirties, including cuff links and filigreed flower brooches. In no time, Feldman had swooped down on a silver-beaded stole, while I uncovered a handmade tailored black serge jacket (\$60). Czech folk costumes are of particular interest to the owner, and that day a rare museum-quality circa-1900 embroidered and beaded wedding head-dress was prominently displayed.

Old Toys (21 Rybná, Staré Město; 011-420-2-2481-1336) is one of Prague's most delightful shops. Come here for items like a small battery-operated Russian space vehicle from the sixties and a penguin that lights up and flaps its mechanical wings, which Feldman purchased, unable to resist its adorable face. There are miniature kitchens from the fifties, wooden toys, dolls and dollhouses and metal trains, plus vintage children's clothing. It all adds up to a wonderful nostalgia trip.

As at many antiques stores in Prague, at **Alma Mahler** (7 Valentinská, Staré Město; 011-420-2-2232-5865; almamahler.cz) you can lose yourself for hours among turn-of-the-past-century hand-embroidered clothing, linens, china, glass, jewelry and furniture. (Feldman snapped up a vintage nightgown, telling me that she always cuts off the bottoms to transform them into oversized shirts.) **Art Deco Galerie** (21 Michalská, Staré Město; 011-420-2-2422-3076) is the one store we visited that specializes in a single period. It's not large, but a wide array of lamps, clocks, porcelain and furniture awaits the Art Deco aficionado.

JEWELRY

The garnet is the official gemstone of the Czech Republic, and it's ubiquitous in Prague. **Antique Vladimír Andrlé** (12 Kaprova, Staré Město; 011-420-2-2232-9003; antiqueandrlé.cz) has a wonderful assortment of the stones in jewelry both modern and antique.

Locals swear by **Halada** (16 Na Příkopě, Malá Strana; 011-420-2-2422-1304; halada.cz) for quality and price; this is where you'll find the best high-end pieces fashioned from gold, silver, platinum and fine gems. The real draw, though, is Lia Halada's sophisticated rings, pendants and earrings, made in her workshop by artisans who set colored gemstones with rows of pavé diamonds. **BeldaFactory** (10 Mikulandská, Nové Město; 011-420-2-2493-3052; belda.cz), almost hidden on a side street, offers contemporary metal jewelry with precious and semiprecious stones designed by the owner, Jiří Belda. It also sells one-of-a-kind bowls crafted by the talented Zdeněk Lhotský; their bold geometric designs are sandblasted or enameled into the glass (from \$140 to \$1,765).

For something simpler, visit the excellent gift shop in the basement of the **Municipal House Culture and Information Center**



From left: Staré Město, Prague's Old Town; a collector's paradise at Old Toys.

structural pride of Prague. Don't be put off by the name: this lovely shop sells reasonably priced brooches, earrings and bracelets from the thirties and fifties. It's also a great place to stop for a meal; the Plzeňská pub and the American Bar here are exuberantly decorated with crystal lighting fixtures, mirror-covered walls and art by Mikoláš Aleš.

BOOKS, PRINTS AND CARDS

Antikvariát Karel Křenek (20 Národní, Nové Město; 011-420-2-2231-4734; karelkrenek.com) is a treasure trove of antiquarian leather-bound books on every subject imaginable; there are also lots of prints, old photographs, children's books and ephemera, includ-

(5 Náměstí Republiky, Staré Město; 011-420-2-2200-2101; obecni-dum.cz), the architec-

Feldman, who takes hotel guests on individually tailored shopping tours. The service, which should be requested when making a reservation, includes an initial consultation with her and costs \$660 for three hours (the minimum) and \$220 for each additional hour.

PERSONAL SHOPPING IN PRAGUE

The ninety-nine-room **Mandarin Oriental, Prague** (double rooms from \$440, suites from \$1,190; 459/1 Nebovidská, Malá Strana; 866-526-6567; mandarinoriental.com), a restored 17th-century Dominican monastery turned luxury hotel, has an exclusive arrangement with Karen



ing several turn-of-the-century photographic panoramas and a small Japanese manuscript with hand-painted illustrations. Feldman has a particular affinity for **Sběratel the Collector** (5 Malá Štupartská, Staré Město; 011-420-2-2482-7097), a hole-in-the-wall where photographs and postcards share space with old Czech military medals. **Fraktály** (5a Betlémske Náměstí, Staré Město; 011-420-2-2222-2186) specializes in books on architecture, design and contemporary art, many in English. And **Ars Pragensis** (27 Malostranské Náměstí, Malá Strana; 011-420-2-5753-2093), dedicated to books on the Czech Republic, is definitely worth a visit for its black-and-white reproductions of classic Prague postcards, which are not available elsewhere. Unfortunately, when we tried to stop by over the weekend, the store was closed. Feldman rolled her eyes: shopkeepers not opening on Saturday or Sunday, she explained, is a policy held over from the Communist era and one of her bêtes noires.

DOS AND DON'TS

Most stores take credit cards, and all charge a 19 percent VAT, so if you are making a large purchase, you should fill out the paperwork to reclaim at least part of this tax. Czech merchants are often not forthcoming and have surprisingly little interest in providing the kind of assistance many Americans expect, so don't be shy about asking for help (English is spoken in most stores). Prices in antiques shops tend to be negotiable, especially if you pay cash. ❧