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GIFTS

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Fabulous Folk Art

Set Your Store Apart With Distinctive Designs

Wordplay

BY SALLY STICH

A Colorado storeowner learns that words sell merchandise, especially when those words are ON the merchandise!

On a chilly but sunny Colorado morning, Old Glory Antiques Urban Home + Design, in the Denver suburb of Centennial, is just waking up as light fills the shop. No customers have trickled in yet, making it all the better to peruse the merchandise. In the silence, two things are evident: unlike many other antiques and home decor shops, this one offers large pieces of furniture. Need a floor-to-ceiling armoire? Pick one. Want an old farm table that seats 12? Look no further. Got room for an old sculpted department store counter? You'll have one of a kind.

"We specialize in larger pieces," says owner Holly Kuhn, "the expected—armoires and tables—and the unexpected—industrial pieces that make great kitchen islands."

Her shop's specialty does not end there. "Our customers also love anything with initials or inspirational quotations," she says. Case in point: the shop's Gracewords Flatware, ornate silverware on which each piece displays a different "grace" word. The customers love quotations and words because they speak to relationships, family and connections, both past and



Shopowner Holly Kuhn presents customers with the uncommon, the unexpected, the beautiful.



The store found an ideal home with large front windows and plenty of foot traffic in a mall with a mix of retailers, restaurants and entertainment options.

present. That combination of larger unusual antique pieces and elegant urban-style home accessories offers a flair to her shop that draws in the customers. And the customers are definitely drawn in—by the almost magical displays, the creative and polished marketing materials and the personal connection established through the store's Facebook, Twitter and blog.

Building a Strong Work Ethic

Kuhn's background as a CPA hardly gave a clue to her present occupation. "I was brought up to believe that you got educated in something that would allow you to support yourself," says this Oklahoma and Texas native. "There was no such thing in my family as pursuing what you loved, unless it was something practical."

And so she pursued an accounting career (which has, in fact, turned out to be invaluable) and worked for firms in Dallas and Denver. Motherhood brought an end to number-crunching, allowing her creative side to emerge. "I started dabbling in making gift baskets and selling them at art fairs," she says, "and I volunteered for the most creative projects at my kids' school."

In 1997, when her youngest went off to kindergarten, she decided to open her own shop. "I wanted old and new, unique not ubiquitous, affordable." She subleased space in a shopping strip, honing her skills and finding her niche with larger pieces. Three years later, she sold to her partner and stayed connected in the business by maintaining a stall at an antiques mall for the next five years.

The Big Break

In 2007, Old Glory Antiques, a well-respected 25-year-old shop in Conifer, Colorado, went on the market, and Kuhn bought it. "The first thing I did was move it out of Conifer to historic downtown Littleton, and then to the newly renovated mall, The Streets at SouthGlenn, in southeast Denver," she says. This mall was designed for destination shopping, and the owners wanted all local shopkeepers. Kuhn took the new store from its former country/cabin look to its new country/urban look. "My style is much less cluttered and more sophisticated," she says. "And I added industrial pieces so customers could see new uses for old things." Being in a busy mall where people may have time to kill before a movie or while waiting for a restaurant table has brought foot traf-

Stacking hefty pieces creates big visual impact.



The store's ever-changing collection of antiques, home accessories and gift items are combined in unexpected ways. When stacked, merchandise such as metal bistro tables (top left) and large industrial pieces (top right) transform into towering focal points. A variety of florals and greenery are used to add color and natural texture to the many antiques and wood pieces (above). By showcasing products large and small, new and old, the shop's diverse vignettes show customers how to blend distinct items in their own homes (right).