



OUTSIDE
THE *Vines*

INSPIRATION FROM BEYOND THE POTTING BENCH

Out with the New, *In with the Old*

By Ana Olvera

Whether you're looking to be more eco-friendly or looking to save money, incorporating repurposed items into your displays can add a unique touch to your merchandising.

Sara Sweet has found inspiration for displays in everyday items. Her gift shop and consignment store, I like you, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has given new life to various items such as screen doors, dressers and crates.

When I like you opened 10 years ago, Sweet began using repurposed items from necessity.

"We opened at the height of the recession and we had to figure out ways to afford how to make our store work. Part of that was not ordering new things," Sweet says. "We took things from our own home. We [didn't] have to worry about making something work that we didn't already have a love for."

Now, Sweet repurposes pieces to add character to her store.

"New stuff is really boring. I like things with a little bit of a story and things that feel loved," Sweet says.

The Search

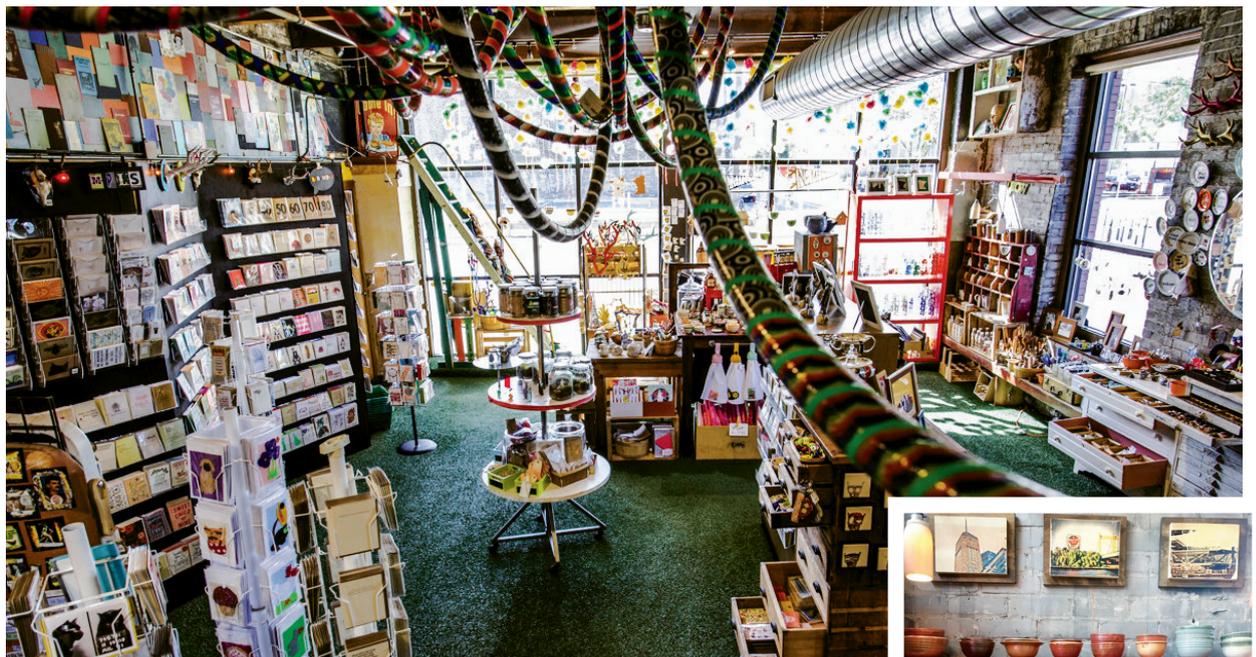
Sweet visits a variety of places to find items for store displays, including thrift shops, auctions, estate sales, Habitat for Humanity ReStores and the ReUse Program Warehouse at the University of Minnesota.

Sweet thinks outside of the box when looking for where to buy materials for displays. Occasionally she drives down alleys to scout for salvageable items, she says.

Sweet also keeps an eye for when businesses decide to close their doors. When a print shop in the area decided to close up shop, Sweet purchased crates and other items to be used for displaying products.

"You never can tell what people are getting rid of — and it's pretty easy to repurpose something," Sweet says.

When she's out looking for items to repurpose, Sweet says she looks for items that are imperfect or have a story, even if its purpose isn't always clear.



"Sometimes you might have a shelf with an imprint of an item that might've been there or old wallpaper inside of a cupboard. Sometimes it's as simple as something that reminds you of something you grew up with," Sweet explains.

"Sometimes we have very specific ideas for that item or sometimes it might sit in the back for a couple of months. We buy things with character knowing that at some point we can use it."

Some of Sweet's finds are used as is while others are taken apart or added to something else for a new purpose. An old printer's cabinet currently holds the store's cash registers, but its drawers were previously taken out to be used on their own to hold jewelry, cards and more.

Sweet has even repurposed pipe shelving to make a 7-foot tall wall. She added wheels to the bottom so it can be easily moved around the store. Crates, however, are her favorite items to repurpose.

Think Outside the Box

The most important thing to remember when repurposing an item for a display is to keep your eyes open and think outside the box, Sweet says.

"You don't have to use something for what it was intended. We look for things that really utilize vertical space and sometimes that is something that is bits and pieces," she says.

"You can make a display out of just about anything if you keep your eyes and mind open.

"If you get a piece that you're really not sure about, flip it over. Try it in every aspect that you can. Put something on top of it, put it in something else. Don't let it go quite yet," Sweet adds.

Getting creative with displays and repurposing items pays off in the end, both financially (by saving you money) and with customers.

"We get complimented quite often. Most of the time those compliments are 'Oh this is an interesting way to use this!'" Sweet says of customers reactions to some of the materials displays are made from. "I think people appreciate things that are clever." **LGR**

