

Mad Skills with Merchandise



By Christina Salwitz



I recently left my house to go on what I like to call a “photo safari” for the day. I have a certain number of locations that I frequent, and they change enough that I can get photos to use for various projects over and over. This safari day was particularly inspiring because what I went out to see and what I came home with were two very different stories.

There is a local outdoor shopping mall about 45 minutes away from me that I like to visit on occasion, and I’m sure that both my husband and my bookkeeper are thrilled that I can’t get there as often as I’d like. The shopping danger is real!

One of the best stores in the entire mall is called Ravenna Gardens, located smack in the center of the action, and it’s a veritable treasure trove on all levels.

Founded in 1997 as a neighborhood retailer, this Seattle store was born from a mutual love of dirt and a passion for gardening. This tiny garden center supplies a wide range of plants, trees, planters and garden tools, gardening books, unique terrariums and attractive ornamental pieces to local garden enthusiasts who recognize that this place has amazing style. A consistent fan favorite at our Northwest Flower and Garden Show, Ravenna Gardens’ retail booth and displays have been an award winner for years.

Even more than just fabulous style that hit me from the minute I came up to the front of the store, I was mesmerized by the merchandising skills that I witnessed.

Everywhere you turned, there was one idea after another laid out like something you would see in high-end magazines. Yet, all inherently touchable and accessible. I could live in that store. But, that’s THE IDEA, right? Any place that can get me, the old cynical and jaded retail worker of 30 years to wander around in a daze of giddy “I wants” is doing something right!



Whether it's specifically for display and merchandising ideas, websites like Houzz, Apartment Therapy or what I have now dubbed "Pinterest" are just a few places where we all troll for design ideas at one time or another, but to see it come to life is another story.

I have only witnessed one other garden center that I had this same passionate reaction to and that was the famed Flora Grubb in San Francisco. Also a postage stamp-sized garden center, yet filled to the rafters with exceptional display and design ideas as well. It should be on your "bucket list" if it isn't already.

There is an amazing team at Ravenna Gardens who all work together beautifully to make this magic happen inside and out, but the leader of the skilled pack is Barbara Libner. She is talent personified when it comes to merchandising. I can only imagine how

ECO-1

Introducing, Eco-1™ Garden Spray, the newest member of Arborjet's horticulture line, providing total garden protection. Made with organic botanical oils, Eco-1 Garden Spray is non-toxic to people and pets, and protects indoor and outdoor plants from insects, mites, and diseases.

Visit us online to learn more!



ARBORJET
Revolutionary Plant Health Solutions

arborjet.com/eco-1





stunning her own home must look. I think Barbara must be my merchandising and display “spirit animal.” She clearly has her finger on the pulse of trends and style opportunities.

Following the lead for the movement toward color blocking displays, Barbara has used this idea artfully to include all facets of garden center merchandise.

One of my pet peeves as I travel the country and see many different types of garden centers is how rigid they can be with regard to categorizing items. I know this notion has softened over the last 20 years or so, but it’s amazing how often I see stores where only houseplants mingle with houseplants and herbs only with herbs and so on.

Our visual lives are much richer these days and being too militant about which items can pair and mix with others is so 20th century!

Larger scale garden centers can learn a lot from the tiny places where every speck is right in your face.

There’s no place to hide your flaws, everything must be following the laws of great display. Use your vertical space skillfully, use unique shelving, tables, risers, carts with character, and I beg you, I’m on my knees about this, use lighting effectively. You should feel like you want to almost melt into a truly skillful display.

The flow of color carried through a large or small display is key. If you stand at a distance, does your eye move smoothly from one element to another. Or, the opposite, if you have a bold statement to make, is everything else quiet?

Often, garden centers fall into the gift shop curse of being visually overwhelming with 8 billion little knick-knack things that don’t tie an idea together.

In the case of Ravenna Gardens, this also raises the point that the buyer is as skilled as the merchandiser, and making a great team on that is important. As a salesperson, it’s a lot easier for me to sell when my customer is focused on an idea, and hopefully it’s the idea that WE have spawned without the customer even realizing that it happened.

I have also written on a number of occasions about how important it is for the buyer/merchandiser team to make sure that the sales team is also in the loop on why these ideas are important.

“I didn’t even plan on buying that amazing (____). But, once I saw it in this arrangement, I have to have it. How did they know that teal is my favorite color?” Sound familiar? It could just as easily be orange or green or the Pantone color of the year!

Sometimes I think we lose sight of that wonderment and delight that a customer feels when they see our goods, inside or out, in new ways and in person rather than on a screen where they can touch, smell, poke and learn about a new thing from a human. Or see these things paired with items and ideas that resemble something we might do in our own homes. Or the inspiration that just might get a new gardener to begin a collection of succulents, herbs, pottery or garden art.

You never know what it may be that sets someone off in a new direction they never considered before they came to your store. That insight helps us define who our current customers are but also who our NEW customers may be in the future. **LGR**

Christina Salwitz, the Personal Garden Coach, is a container designer, public speaker, horticultural guidance counselor, service provider for The Garden Center Group and photojournalist based in Renton, Washington. She can be reached at: personalgardencoach@comcast.net.

90 day buy-back guarantee – try them virtually risk free

Turn the Breeze into Music!

Our chimes play tunings from around the world to soothe every ear. We offer 8 sizes from the 30” Soprano to the 14’ Basso Profundo, and 12 musical scales, from the familiar Pentatonic to the exotic Gypsy and Japanese.

Handcrafted in Austin, TX, tuned with sophisticated equipment using weather-resistant materials:

- Powder-coated tempered aluminum alloy tubing
- UV-stabilized synthetic braid
- Stainless Steel components



To Order: Motschimes.com - Grace@motschimes.com - 888-324-4637

Visit us at these shows:

Dallas Total Home & Gift Market June 20 – 26, 2018 Dallas Trade Market – Dallas, TX 2432 Dallas Trade Mart	2018 WBU Vendor Mart June 27 – 28, 2018 Rhode Island Convention Center 1 Sabin St, Providence, RI 02903 Booth #616
The Atlanta International Gift & Home Furnishing Market July 10 – 17, 2018 Americasmart – Atlanta, GA Building 2, The Gardens, Floor 9 B66	

Mongolian Mezzo 38”
A Best Seller
Plays the notes of “Amazing Grace”



Music of the Spheres

The *Stradivarius* of Windchimes®

motschimes.com/tunings
Listen to our chimes!