



OUTSIDE THE VINES: *INSPIRATION FROM BEYOND THE POTTING BENCH*

A Signage Gold Mine

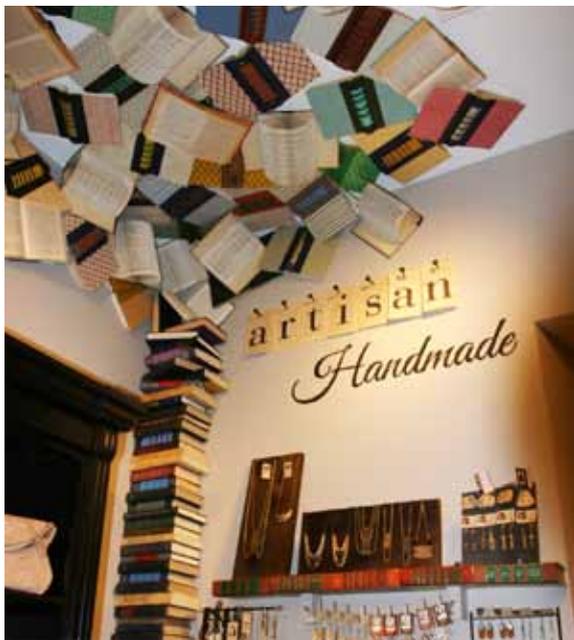
One jewelry boutique's unique ideas can inspire signs for your garden center.

By Lynn Tangorra

Geranium, an independently owned jewelry and accessories boutique based in the Midwest, boasts intrinsic signage with eye-catching designs and one-of-a-kind displays that supply customers with not only information but also a story.

What started as a wholesale business eventually expanded into two retail boutiques in the St. Louis area. The Boulevard location opened Nov. 1, 2012, and the West County Mall location opened Nov. 8, 2013.

Tina Anthon, president and founder of Geranium, is a world traveler who garners many of her inspirations from what she sees at market and in different countries.



"A lot of business owners don't have a creative background, so they have to source that out, find a graphic designer or find someone who can creatively express their vision," says Lauren Riegler, store manager of both locations. "Tina has both; she has the business savvy and the design background."

Anthon attended design school in Chicago before moving back to St. Louis where she worked for a company that allowed her the freedom of opening up her own shop.

Oh the Places You'll Go

The Boulevard store sells a collection of handmade artisan jewelry that Geranium wanted to draw attention to. That is how a chalkboard wall was born.

"The chalkboard wall was a way for us to highlight those items," Riegler says. "We are very big about trying to purchase as much as we can that is made in the U.S. and support both our local community and nation."

The chalkboard wall contains different hand-drawn frames that showcase a product line.

"When creating this wall, we painted the entire area with chalkboard paint, then projected an image of various vintage frames on the wall," Riegler says. "We had one of our employees trace the images with chalkboard marker."

Geranium is a "hands-on" company, often involving employees in the creation/maintenance of its signage and décor.

"The chalkboard wall is not only visually pleasing, but also allows us the flexibility to change out what merchandise is featured in this area at any given time," Riegler says.

The Boulevard location also boasts a book wall, which is a plethora of Reader's Digests spread out over a board and nailed to the wall. Some of the pages are fanned open while others remain closed.

When Geranium opened its second location, Anthon made sure the artistic ideas translated.

"When we opened our West County store, we wanted to carry on the book theme because our book wall here is so popular," Riegler says. "We had employees folding book pages and everyone was very hands on."

All Signs Point to Success

In conjunction with the sizable signs that instantly attract a customer's attention, the

boutiques also have smaller ways of alerting customers to its merchandise.

"Some of the little signs that we put next to merchandise and around the store to describe the pieces, our employees made by hand," Riegler says. "We have some really talented girls here who either have a flair for art or a background in art. As a retailer that's really to our advantage because [the employees] can make these cute little things in their downtime for us that really help our customers and just make it feel homey."

Before customers can feel comfortable in the stores, they actually have to walk inside.

"I think signage is important because it's your conversation with your customer," Riegler says. "If you are walking by and you don't have something to draw them in, they could just keep on walking. So we feel like not only do you have to have signage, it also needs to have a presence and inform. Also, [at Geranium] we like to make it very unique so it stands out."

At the West County Mall location, Geranium was able to build the storefront out and design the space with Anthon's ideas.

"It really looks like a little shop that you would find in Europe or France. Everything is black with gold trim and we've got our signage, which is very vintage looking with black and gold accents," Riegler says. "It has a really neat old store kind of feel."

The Boulevard location's outside showcases the company's logo with gooseneck lights over it. Anthon's husband cut down thick trees from their backyard and used the tree stumps in the front store window to display merchandise.

"We like to bring the outside in," Riegler says.

A huge center tree branch hangs over the main jewelry table that displays earrings on unique jewelry stands crafted by a metal worker. Two old doors with their original knobs hold purses that are hung with oversized nails.

Besides designing conversation pieces and inspiration for brave DIY'ers, Geranium's signage tells a showcasing story. What story does your signage tell?

"It's not only signage that informs," Riegler says, "But it's also like a piece of art." **LGR**

Lynn Tangorra is associate editor at Lawn & Garden Retailer. She can be reached at ltangorra@sgcmail.com.