

Part three of a series on professional store renovation brought to you by Rough Brothers



LITTLE THINGS Mean a Lot

If you're going to get into the frou-frou gifty stuff, keep it from collecting dust through strategic display placement.

By Judy Sharpton

As many of you know, I maintain that plants are the core product for the retailer/grower and any foray into gifts — that stuff that Mike Berns calls frou-frou and I call geegaws and jimcracks — should be done with great care. The easiest thing in the world to do is go to the merchandise mart in Atlanta or Dallas or Chicago or San Francisco and load up on stuff that just sits and gathers dust. Being judicious about gardening-related items is even more important now that products with a gardening motif can be found at every department, specialty and discount store at every mall in America. Even personal care stores like Bath and Body Works have eaten our lunch on botanicals and other gardening-themed personal products.

PLACEMENT MATTERS

My caution to buyers is always this: When you look at a product at the gift mart, ask yourself which one of your customers will buy that thing, and at retail!

Because of this product aversion, I don't specialize in renovating gift areas. I do advise my customers on the placement of these departments. As with all other product categories, customer-merchandise contact is critical. So many gift areas are isolated or invisible that it's easy to see why they are less than successful. The products must be visible, and the customer must make contact — more than once if possible — as she moves through the store. At the same time, I maintain these products are add-on sales and not core merchandise. For that reason, I usually

Above left: A fresh coat of light-colored paint not only makes the exterior wall more visible, but it helps emphasize the garden ornaments displayed outside. Above right: Mary and Jim Wallitsch in the entrance slowdown. Glasshouse in rear. (Photos courtesy of Judy Sharpton)

recommend the gift area be placed where the customer can walk through it on the way to and from the plant sales area.

One of the best examples of this arrangement is at Homewood Garden Center in Raleigh, N.C. Customers shopping the greenhouse must walk through the gift area twice. If such an arrangement is not feasible, the gift area should be placed so the customer will walk through it on the way to the cash wrap.

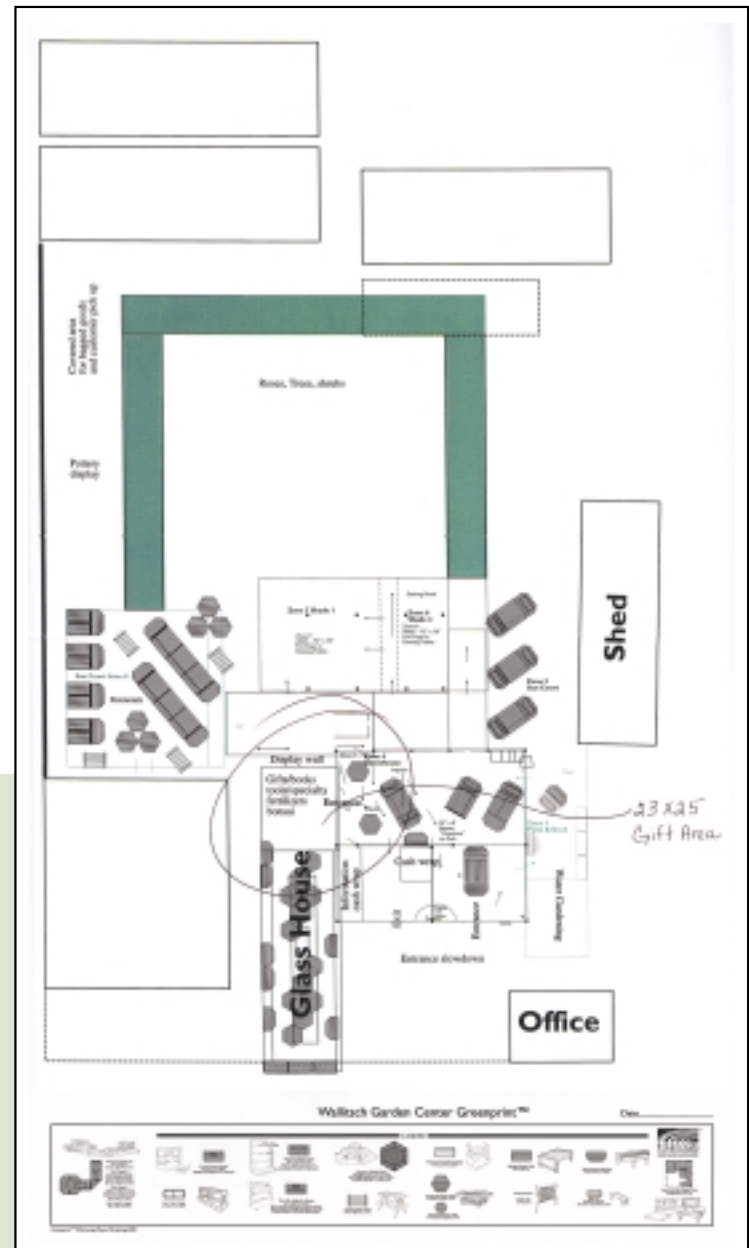
FROM INVISIBLE TO VISIBLE

When Mary Wallitsch began planning the renovation of her small and relatively invisible gift area, I stuck to what I knew — placement and visibility. Mary worked with a Louisville interior designer she knew for specialty items like lighting, wall color and interior fixtures.

For this project, we could not change the location of the gift area in the overall layout of the store. What we could influence was the visibility and accessibility of the area. ▶

THE NUMBERS

The gift area at Wallitsch Nursery and Garden Center is 23 x 25 feet or approximately 575 sq. ft. The space has a hardwood floor, slat wall on approximately one-third of the vertical space and bookcase-style shelving on approximately one-third of the wall space. The area is used to display small tools; specialty fertilizers and other gardening helpers; bonsai and orchid products; books; a limited collection of furniture; and gardening shoes, hats and wind chimes. The area is most useful in the winter months as a retail space adjacent to the glasshouse where bonsai, orchids and houseplants are displayed. Although only a very few product changes were made in the area, the renovation resulted in a 200-percent



First, fresh, lighter-hued paint on the exterior of the building made it more visible. An added benefit of the lighter color was to make exterior garden ornament products displayed on the outside of the building more visible. Mary has been careful to keep ground displays surrounding



the structure narrow so as to maintain easy access to the decorative wall hangings. Customers can easily examine the products and read the price tags.

We then added a double glass door to the building to create a more visible entrance for the gift area. The shopping area just outside the entrance is kept open so customers approaching the impulse area directly ahead of the cash wrap can easily see the entrance to the gift store.

Inside the space, Mary added white slat boards to the dark corner to the right of the door, a corner counter in the back right corner and attractive shelving around the rear and left walls. The white slat wall brightens the space and provides horizontal display area for small tools, specialty fertilizers and other seasonal products. The gift area is adjacent to a quaint glasshouse that is original to the Wallitsch growing operation. Mary installed a cottage-like, paned glass window



Left: The addition of a double glass door serves to draw customers into the gift area; Right: Adding a white slat wall to a dark corner brightens up the space and provides a horizontal display area for fertilizers, tools and other seasonal products.



and double doors to connect the gift area with the glasshouse and allow more light into the gift area. Track lighting around the ceiling added changeable directional lighting to focus on products in the area.

The gift area becomes very important in the winter as it and the adjacent glasshouse are the garden center's only heated retail spaces. Mary's signature bonsai products take on greater significance, and the glasshouse and adjacent gift area are the store's prime retail sales areas for the entire garden center. 🌱

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Left: Versatile ceiling track lighting lures the eye to particular items in the display; Right: Glasshouse adjacent to the gift area with new concrete walkway and fixtures.