



HILL COUNTRY
GIFTS &
WILD HERBS

124 E. MAIN
325-247-3037

Retail

Store Makeover

Photos and Story by Susan L. Ebert

The town of Llano is an indisputable gem of the picturesque Texas Hill Country. Nestled along the clear-flowing, spring-fed Llano River, the town draws throngs of water recreationalists during the spring and summer, who ply the river with fly rods and paddle kayaks and canoes down the crystalline waterway. In fall and winter, hordes of deer hunters (the Llano area boast the densest deer populations in Texas, and deer hunts can range from \$3,000 to upward of \$15,000) descend on Llano, often accompanied by wives, sisters and girlfriends who shop the quaint and beautifully restored courthouse square, rimmed with myriad shops offering clothing, gifts, jewelry, home décor and antiques.

So shopkeeper Gina Shaffer, owner of Hill Country Gifts & Herbs, knew she was making an excellent business move to relocate her store from “out on the highway” to its current location at 124 E. Main Street, just a block off the courthouse square.

But then, the unthinkable happened: Gripped on the throes of an historic drought, the Llano River slowed from its full, lively chortle over the limestone river bed to a lethargic trickle, ceasing water tourism and threatening the town’s very water supply. The drought also decimated the state’s deer herd, slowing the annual influx of hunt-

ers—and the cash- and credit card-laden lady shoppers they had in tow.

Shaffer, on a shoestring budget, knew she needed to reinvigorate her store to take better advantage of local traffic and not be so dependent on Llano’s two heavy tourism seasons, so when the **Triple Creek Products** gang, ably led by Jennifer McManus, proposed a store makeover and offered to fund the project’s modest budget of \$500, she readily agreed.

Triple Creek Products enlisted veteran visual merchandising expert Lisa Kasberg, whose merchandising talents in their Denver Showroom continuously draws *oohs* and *aahs*. Kasberg came by her stellar credentials the hard way, with a more-than-decade-long stint at JCPenney, as head photo stylist for the *Better Homes & Gardens* line of Home Interiors (which was one of the leading home décor companies in the nation from the ’70s though the ’90s), and through her visual merchandising consultation work for Neiman Marcus, a plethora of Dallas-area malls, and for such clients as Triple Creek Products.

In little more than a week, with little more than a coat of paint and lots of ingenuity, Kasberg, Shaffer and a hastily assembled team of volunteers created a more inviting interior—which helped develop store traffic and invigorate sales.

Here's how to apply Kasberg's expertise in your own store:



Reduce Clutter: If it hasn't been selling, it probably won't. Discount it, donate it, or at least box it up and get it out of the way.

Paint It: A fresh coat of paint can do wonders to help create a more inviting interior. Kasberg and her team immediately repainted the drab white walls in a warm adobe candleglow tint. Pick an accent color—Kasberg selected a rich terracotta—to further add drama.

Organize It: Clusters and groupings of objects draw the eye and are more interesting to shoppers than an overall assortment. Use your rugs as anchors for your groupings, to further delineate the area from the rest of the store.

Hang 'Em High: "Use your walls and ceilings," instructs Kasberg. "Hang a cluster of pots and kitchen utensils [or use the rack to display ball caps and trinkets, as she did] from a ceiling rack, and take the time to hang wall décor and paintings on the walls instead of having them strewn about on the floor."

Light It Up: Use table lamps and spotlights strategically to highlight certain groupings, and to shed light on otherwise dark corners toward the back of your store; they'll attract shoppers like moths to





a flame. The lamps serve a dual purpose of “warming up” the pervasive and unflattering fluorescent glare of overhead lighting.

Create Color Vignettes:

Take a page from the playbook of Charlie Chanaratsopon, the thirty-something CEO of Charming Charlie's. He's opened 178 stores in 33 states, in just seven years, and

revolutionized the accessories business by merchandising his inventory in “color stories” instead of by category. Create excitement by grouping reds and pinks together, or by pairing turquoise items with black and zebra prints.

Utilize Drawers: Using a dresser or chest in a display is always enticing: Make it even more so by having merchandise peeking out of a half-opened drawer, so shoppers want to go look more closely to see what's inside.





After



BEFORE



“Magnetize” Window Displays:

As much as you want passers-by to “see” your inventory, give it a little room to breathe. Potential shoppers are far more likely to want to come in and browse if your window displays aren’t all just jammed up against the plate glass — they’ll know that all they’ll see when they come in is a rear-end view of the items. Invite them in by creating room to walk around the window displays; it will pull them in like a magnet.



After

Go With the Flow:

Grocery stores spend millions to analyze store traffic patterns, so take a cue from them when you organize your inventory. Traffic tends to flow clockwise, with some of the most sought-after items (think milk) toward the back wall, so people need to move through the entire store. Avoid “dead-ends” in your store’s traffic patterns; you want your customers to circulate, and not have to return down the same aisle they just browsed.

Add a Touch of Whimsy:

As evidenced in the remerchandising





After



After



BEFORE

of the herbs area, one of the mainstays of Shaffer's store, you can take an otherwise ordinary lineup of bottles and jars and add interest with a touch of whimsy. Kasberg utilized an old sheet of galvanized tin to paint "HERBS" on, surrounded by greenery, dried herbs, and gardening tools such as a sprinkling can, pail and rake. Birdhouses, seed packets, woven baskets and a framed chalkboard further highlight this profit center. Other little "mini-displays" such as the one shown to the left, serve as unexpected surprises throughout the store.





So how's business been for Shaffer since the remerchandising?

“Even though deer season traffic has been way down this year,” says Shaffer, “I’m seeing a lift in sales since before the remerchandising. Lisa did a great job with the window displays; they really pull people in, and definitely help build store traffic. I’ve also been getting lots of compliments from locals, who are taking more notice of the store; the *Llano Journal* also did a feature story in November about my store’s makeover, which has really increased its visibility with our townsfolk. Best of all, I’m seeing quite a surge in my vitamin/herbs sales, since Lisa redid that section to be more visible and eye-catching.”



Gina Shaffer

RESOURCES

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