

Hippo Press November 23, 2006

Design for the planet Downtown Concord shop acts globally

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Meredith Gonzales opened Your Home, Your World at 138 North Main St., Concord, on Nov. 8. Focused on ecologically sustainable home improvement and design products, the store practices what it preaches. The sales counter is made from bamboo plywood and surfaced with recycled paper in natural resin. The walls are painted bright white and green with low-toxicity paints. (The floor, however, is plain old hardwood as it was when Gonzales moved into the space.) Product offerings range from tropical forest flooring to natural wood baby toys and hemp linens.

Q: What's the philosophy behind the store?

Everything here is environmentally friendly and/or fair trade. I had started looking around, my husband and I just bought a house about a year ago, and noticed that you couldn't find the environmentally friendly products here, in particular the building products, renovation products. It just suddenly struck me. Actually took a couple months rolling around in my head, I thought, hey, you know, maybe I should open up a store ... I've got the environmentally friendly paints that are low VOC or zero VOC.

What does that mean?

Volatile organic compounds. Those, to make it simple, are essentially the chemicals that evaporate and give you a headache if you're in a room that's freshly painted. Those are VOCs. They're also bad for the ozone, so it's not just us.

Is that water-based, latex paints...

It's water-based. I'm not sure of all the science behind it, but these guys are not really a natural line; it's all synthetic, but it's the low and zero VOC. Up here [on the next shelf] I've got some milk paints if people really want the very natural paints. They're literally made out of milk. It's really historical; people have been doing it for hundreds of years, I'm not exactly sure how long.

Do you find these basic building materials are harder to find than finished products that are more environmentally sound?

It is, and actually I've had a lot of people asking me if I'm going to do the FSC, which is the Forest Stewardship Council. They certify that woods are sustainably forested, sustainably harvested. People have been asking me if I'm going to carry lumber and plywood made out of that, but I just don't have the room for it. I have an interior design background, so I was trying to decide in the beginning if I wanted to go that route or more the interiors, and I just decided to go more the interiors since that's more what I know.

Yeah, for a small shop such as this, it's a standard Main Street kind of shop, you can't really go the Home Depot route.

Right. Well, and Home Depot does in California and states that are really environmentally conscious, they do carry the FSC-certified woods, so if we create a demand for it, maybe they'll start carrying it.

So what's the front of the store all about?

Well, here, see, I've got the mattresses; they're all organic and natural. It's natural rubber, natural wool — wool that's not treated with any chemicals at all; free-range sheep, in fact. Then it's all covered in organic cotton. The wool is a fire retardant, that's what they use instead of heavy chemicals to pass all the codes that we now have. And this part of the store I'm trying to do more home décor items, environmentally friendly cleaning products that smell really really good, mostly scented with natural fragrance, and then some gift items, since the holidays are coming up and your home isn't just about paints and flooring and beds, it's about everything.

Is there a price premium for this kind of manufacturing?

It depends upon what you're looking at. The cork, the bamboo, the Marmoleum back there, which is linoleum which is all natural ... it's made of linseed oil, sawdust, pine resin and pigment — all those are pretty affordable, between five to seven dollars a square foot, depending upon which one. You compare that to oak

flooring or your other hardwoods and it's cheaper. But then if you've got the sustainably forested tropical hardwoods, those are going to be pretty pricey, so it kind of depends. The paints run from kind of designer level paints, your Ralph Laurens and stuff, to a little higher. So it can be more expensive. It can also be a little cheaper.

Are you buying mostly from small suppliers?

Yeah, just the nature of the field, they are pretty small generally. I am trying to include local New Hampshire people, although there aren't too many people doing natural products.

— John "jaQ" Andrews