

shopkeeping

Devoted to Displays

A shop owner's knack for creating magical displays keeps customers coming back for more fresh ideas.

BY MALENA JAIME
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
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AFTER MORE THAN 20 years of traveling as a public-relations representative in the technology industry, Melisa Bleasdale decided to follow her passion for interior design and open her own shop. “I had always been creating, designing and building for myself and friends. I thought the best thing would be for me to start a little shop where people could look at the things I’ve collected,” she says.

Melisa, the owner of Apartment 46, first took to the idea after living in Amsterdam, frequenting local shops where vintage items were showcased in thoughtful ways. “Shops there feel like whatever [the owners] finds at flea markets, which they bring in and display in a beautiful way.” This romantic notion was the driving factor for opening her store in San Mateo, California. “I want [the store] to be the sort of space where people can come in and get inspiration for their own home. I always want it to be fresh and show that there are an infinite number of ways you can display things with the same objects,” Melisa says.

When a space became available six years ago beneath a 1930s apartment building in her neighborhood, Melisa instantly fell in love with the storefront and decided to

take a gamble. She opened Apartment 46, an eclectic home-décor shop that offers unique collectibles. Located in a residential area just outside San Francisco, Melisa was initially unsure about how much attention her shop would attract.

“[At first] people couldn’t figure out if we were an antiques store or a thrift shop. But over time, creative people started magnetizing to our shop.” The local response was boosted by her efforts to garner attention. By utilizing social-media outlets and building a website, she was able to appeal to a niche of eclectic buyers. “We’ve been told we are a very San Francisco-type store in a really strange city,” Melisa says.

Melisa chose the name Apartment 46 to capture the intimate atmosphere of the store. “I wanted it to feel sort of like visiting an eclectic friend’s home or your strange aunt’s apartment,” she says. In fact, customers often ask if she lives in the apartment above the shop; while she doesn’t live there, Melisa’s shop serves as a living lookbook for her interior designs.

On days Melisa isn’t there, her 18-year-old daughter helps run the store, which adds to the homey feel of the shop. “What I love about working alongside my daughter is it makes it very personal; customers meet the most important per-



INSIDER TRADING

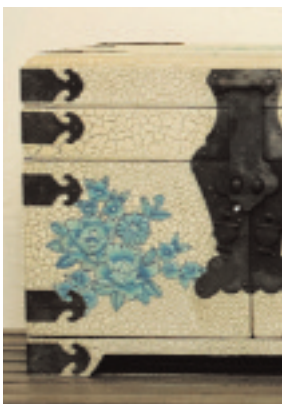
Melisa Bleasdale shares her secrets to a relaxed and inviting shop.

- Make your shop interactive. Invite customers to take things down off shelves, and encourage them to pick things up and get a feel for them. In Melisa’s shop, “nothing is sacred,” but instead accessible and interactive. This way, customers can engage with you fully and they feel comfortable discussing the piece they are interested in.
- Get to know your clients. The best thing about having a shop is being the interesting and thoughtful shopkeeper. Find out what your customers’ interests are and keep an eye out for items that might appeal to them. They will appreciate the thoughtful service.
- Create an environment. “People want to feel transported. I go to Anthropologie because I love the way it makes me feel,” Melisa says. To enhance the experience, she always lights candles and has fresh flower arrangements so everything looks and smells amazing.
- Keep things clean and interesting. Melisa’s shop is her fantasyland for playing with style and creating inspiring vignettes. It’s important to her that the store feels as though it’s constantly moving and changing. The staff is constantly dusting and cleaning to make sure customers always find a dazzling display that looks new and fresh.
- Always ask new customers how they heard about you. To keep small shops afloat, particularly those in areas that don’t receive a lot of foot traffic, it’s important to find out what’s attracting people there. By getting to know new customers, Melisa has learned that most of her marketing is word-of-mouth.

Apartment 46
1618 Palm Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94402
(650) 356-0558
apartment46.com

BESTSELLERS

- Vintage items (20 years and older)
- One-of-a-kind art
- Rare 1800s etchings
- Modern photography
- Mid-century mixed media
- 1960s statement necklaces
- Leather cuffs with French ephemera
- Jewelry and hair clips
- Decorative home accessories
- Garden statues



son in my life when they come in. So I’m very accessible,” Melisa says.

“[Apartment 46] a place where I can experiment with vignettes. It’s never going to be the kind of retail space where you’ll find multiples,” she adds. “Items are those found throughout my travels—one-of-a-kind pieces. I work hard to change the store environment and window displays at least weekly. This way, people can get ideas. Established

customers come in and swear they’ve never seen an object before, but really it’s been around for six months and was just characterized in a different way.”

Currently, Melisa’s favorite piece is a pair of giant papier-mâché garlands from a London theater in the 1800s. “I think they are kind of decrepit in a beautiful, romantic way. That’s why I prefer vintage items; they already come with a story.”

