



Oklahoma's Exterior Decorators

BY SUSAN DICKENSON

Wilshire Garden Market encourages customers to create outdoor living rooms with durable weatherproof fabrics and updated versions of classics such as these fiberglass planters.

THIS YEAR MARKS Oklahoma City retailer Wilshire Garden Market's 10th year in business. Carol McPheeters presides over the operation, assisted by daughter Christy White as general manager. The store's home, a former lawn mower repair shop, has been transformed into a local mecca for garden shop chic, especially welcoming when weather allows for the original glass garage doors to be raised and open to the outdoors.

"Our knowledge, personal service and relaxing, serene atmosphere set us apart," said McPheeters, a former teacher who, after her husband died, sought a way of life that was nearer to her heart and would keep her closer to her family.

The store is 100% garden decor, dis-



Mother-daughter owners Carol McPheeters, left, and Christy White, transformed a former lawn mower repair shop into a chic garden shop.

played beneath cedar ceilings, exposed ductwork and terra cotta masonry walls. The first of three rooms is filled with herbal soaps, beeswax candles and a 6-ft. bower from which hand-blown glass hummingbird feeders, wind chimes and decorative votives are hung. A 6-ft. gazebo is the centerpiece of a second room, where visitors rest on hanging swings amidst outdoor art, cast stone planters, statuary and wall fountains. French bistro furniture is set throughout with colorful cotton and oilcloth table linens and garden-themed tableware, coordinated with outdoor pillows made from vintage oil cloth, casual polyester and braided/fringed outdoor fabrics.

Scented candles and classical music add to the tranquility, encouraging visitors to take time browsing the wide variety of items and price points. "Our customers' needs vary greatly according to finances and lifestyles, but most share a desire to make their entryways more welcoming and to add charm, comfort and functionality to their garden retreats," McPheeters said. Average customers are women aged 35 to 70, but an increasing number of men are coming in for small tools, gift advice and quality garden accessories.

Gardening has always been McPheeters' hobby, and a love. Twenty years ago she enrolled in horticulture and landscape design classes at the local university extension and took evening classes for 12 semesters while working as a development and marketing director for a private school. "After the death of my husband 10 years ago, I had an epiphany about working, doing what you love and with those whom you love. I discussed this with my youngest daughter Christy who lived nearby and shared my interest in gar-

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Vignettes behind the original glass garage doors, above, invite window shoppers to enjoy early Spring arrivals, relax in a porch swing or spend a tranquil moment in the serenity area.



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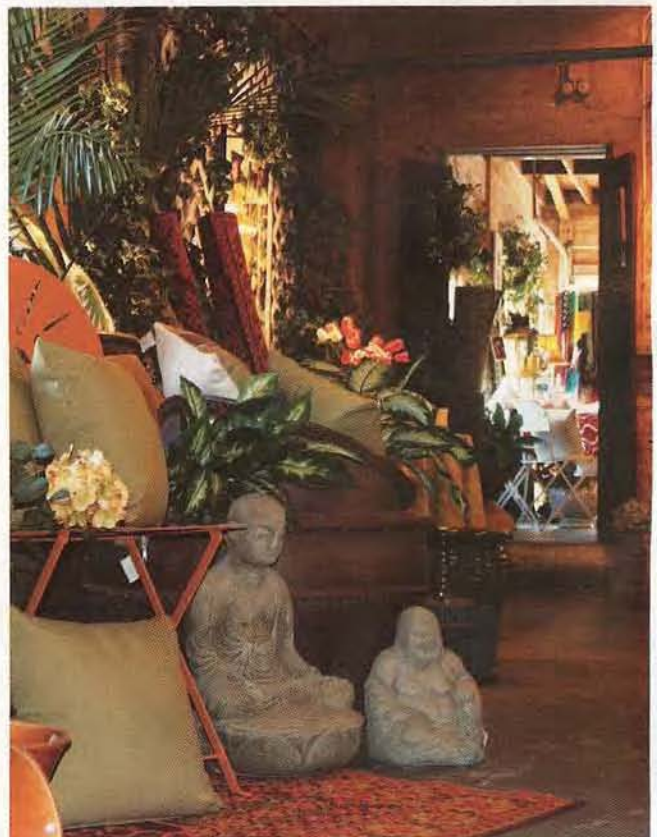
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dening," McPheeters said.

White reflected on her mother's energy and drive. "My mother is in constant motion, works without making a mess and strives for perfection," she said. "In Oklahoma, spring time means tornado season. Growing up, every time the warning sirens would blow, my mother would vacuum and put her children into the closet for safety. I just presumed that if the house was to be hit by a tornado, she wanted it to be as clean as possible before the roof was torn off. I later learned it was just nerves."

Starting the business wasn't easy and both say their best move was to take a six-month course during which they did extensive demographic research and wrote a 50-page business plan. They presented the plan to a local bank, incorporated, found a building within a half mile of their homes, hired contractors and opened six months later. "My son was three years old at the time, and he would call the customers 'visitors',"

White recalled. "For the first few years my grandmother, an award-winning watercolorist, would come to the store and paint in a bright studio we had built in the back section of the building."

Ten years later, Wilshire Garden Market is growing its local and national presence with television commercials, newspaper advertising and a dynamic Web site. Community outreach includes participation in the Symphony Decorator Showhouse and donations to nonprofit

groups benefiting children and community beautification. "Our webmaster suggested the newsletter and it's become the perfect tool to keep us in touch with our customers, and they tell us they look forward to reading it," McPheeters said.

The mother-daughter duo said they've received enough pats on the back to last a lifetime, and have made many friends. "We know the difference between working at your business and working in your business; we still love working in our business." □

Wilshire Garden Market

Store opened July 1997

Average annual sales under \$1 million

Size 2,500 square feet of retail space and a 4,000-sq.-ft. warehouse

No. employees 2 full-time, 3 part-time, some contract labor

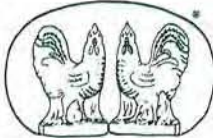
Product categories planters, fountains, statuary, trellises, outdoor

furniture, pillows, outdoor rugs, garden flags, doormats, permanent botanicals, candles, soaps

Best sellers outdoor pillows, rugs, cast stone fountains and planters

Key vendors Campania, Magnolia Traditions, Mariachi Imports

Tradeshows/markets Atlanta



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