



Coming Up ROSES

A Kentucky attorney turns her hand to retailing ■ By Meredith Schwartz

In 2001, Sarah Jones, an attorney in Murray, Kentucky, was visited by a client with questions about closing her store, Vintage Rose Emporium. Located in Murray's historic downtown district, Vintage Rose was also one of Sarah Jones' favorite places to shop.

"It was one of those 'ah-ha' moments, when your gut instinct is so powerful that you're compelled to

act," recalls Sarah. She asked if the client would sell the business to her.

When Jones took over the store, she immediately began to revamp the merchandise selection to reflect her personal style. The new Vintage Rose Emporium featured casual and formal tabletop, linens, kitchen and

Above: The old store's exterior sign is repurposed to add a familiar touch to the atrium.

gourmet goods, gifts and home decor, and a selection of products made in Kentucky. Jones sources mostly in Atlanta and at New York's tabletop show, as well as buying from visiting reps. She also gets ideas by accompanying her husband, Chuck, on business trips. "I like to look at stores like mine — boutique stores, particularly in different regions," she says.

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Even though Vintage Rose's sales grew 42 percent in Jones' first year, Sarah faced challenges. For one, the shop was too small, with a shotgun layout that presented display challenges, and left no room for storage.



A light-colored, floating wood floor makes the space look sunny, and audible footfalls provide cues to employees.

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LOOKING FOR OPTIONS

Jones began searching for a location with increased space, high visibility, and parking options. She knew of a local business complex with a couple of retail stores and a salon, as well as office space. The largest space (3,800 square feet) was divided into ten offices used by a tanning-products company, and she purchased a unique, open-air atrium. Jones mentioned her interest to the center's owner, even though the space was occupied. But less than a month later, it became vacant. It was perfect, but it certainly wasn't ready for a gift store.

Before going to law school, Sarah Jones had considered architecture and was able to work up a drawing of the space she envisioned for Vintage Rose. One of her staff members has a degree in interior design, and he helped choose the colors. And since the space would have a Vera Bradley Signature Showroom, an interior designer from Vera Bradley visited the site to discuss the merchandising plan.

A top priority was to involve Vintage Rose's four full-time and part-time employees in the process. All made lists, edited, brainstormed, and tried to prioritize the ten most important features to include. To address concerns about the Emporium being downtown Murray, Jones involved customers in the process.

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EXISTING FEATURES

Fortunately, there were some features of the vacated office space that would adapt well to the new design. The front entrance was flanked by two built-in semi-circular counters, boxed

moldings with recessed lighting, and an unusual light fixture purchased at auction from a Chicago theater. One of the rooms boasted an antique fireplace and built-in cabinets. Things were also promising behind the scenes — a back room featured a working



Vintage Rose Emporium installed a Vera Bradley Signature Showroom in its new, larger space.

kitchen, and a huge storage area with a garage-style door was perfect for shipping and receiving. Second floor space allows for privacy and more storage.

Jones initially considered tearing out only the fronts of the offices and using the three-walled spaces for vignette settings, but eventually decided that openness was a better plan. All the walls had to come down, and new wiring had to go in. Unfortunately, the ceiling and walls were damaged in the process. Jones used faux beams to cover the damage. Pulling up the carpet revealed discolored and uneven concrete, so Sarah installed a "float floor" of natural hardwood laminate in a light, sunny color.

MAINTAINING CONTINUITY

It was important that the new Vintage Rose maintain continuity with the old store. To give customers a feeling of familiarity, Jones found a similar pattern of wallpaper for the entrance and cash/wrap. She removed

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the outdoor sign from the old store, and made it fit inside the atrium. The original store was also known for its double cherry doors — another feature replicated in the new space.

To highlight the atrium, its interior



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wall was painted sky blue, and plantings were cut back, revealing a brick walkway. Customers can see from one side of the store to the other, bringing a touch of light and nature inside.

Vintage Rose moved to its new location over Labor Day weekend 2004, and had a grand opening during Murray State University's Homecoming weekend. As a result of the move, store traffic has increased, and the Vintage Rose Emporium gained many customers who were discouraged by downtown parking and traffic conditions at the old location. The store has also attracted more out-of-town customers, and sales have increased 37 percent, to approximately \$600,000.

The secret to Sarah Jones' success? "Real product knowledge and real service, and enjoying what you do," she says. "Compared to practicing law, this is a breeze." ■

QUICK TAKE

Vintage Rose Emporium

Murray, Kentucky

Purchased: 2001; moved to new space in 2004

Location: Mixed-use complex on main thoroughfare

Selling Space: 3,800 square feet

Merchandise: tabletop, linens, kitchen, gourmet, gifts, home decor, men's gifts, made in Kentucky.

Annual sales: Approximately \$600,000