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UrbAna inspires a new generation to discover the lost art of elegant entertaining

by Amy Gross
Photographs by Chris Corrie

The woman in the black-and-white photo was elegantly dressed, perfectly coiffed, and completely put together in a patterned blouse and crisp white skirt. She might easily have been out on the town, but in fact she was slapping black paint on window frames set up on sawhorses.

"She wasn't posing for a picture; she was dressed the way she dressed every day, which was very well," says Brian Wells of his grandmother, the late Hazel Wells. His wife Ana, who was especially struck by Hazel's grace and flair, was equally amazed a few years later when she discovered Mrs. Wells's entertaining diary, a journal of birthday parties, tailgaters, and dinner get-togethers that detailed who attended each event, what was served, photos, and recipes.

"This was our aha moment," says Ana. "If we were ever going to make it happen, this was our inspiration."

UrbAna (urbanashop.com) became the boutique that Ana, whose retail experience includes

10 years with Anthropologie, had long dreamed of owning. Located on the edge of Arcadia in the same shopping center as Flower Child, the sparkling new shop that blends its owners' first names and is filled with gifts, décor, kitchen items, and entertaining products is at once homey, hip, urban, and genteel—a direct reflection of its young proprietors, their love of entertaining, and Arcadia's midcentury roots.

"We like the midcentury thing, but we're more modern, more urban," explains Brian, whose own retail experience includes training and opening stores for Tommy Bahama. "UrbAna is more about that culture of the '50s and '60s, where everybody entertained. Everybody had dinner parties; it was something you were supposed to do. We're in a good spot for it—this neighborhood really gets that"

The Wellses asked architect Cathy Hayes of Hayes Inc. Architecture/Interiors (hayesstudio.com) to help them turn a plain space with zero ambience into a charming boutique with func-

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Above: A farmhouse "kitchen" at the rear of the store displays cooking and tablescaping items;



Large double doors at the front of the store let in natural light and encourage passersby to stop and check out new and seasonal vignettes.

tional product displays and an inviting, old-timey storefront Hayes, whose design credits include La Grande Orange and Revo Burrito (now Mexx 32), is, like Brian and Ana, an Arcadia resident herself and passionate about this eminently walkable, self-sustaining community.

“Cathy is really one of the first professionals we met who really echoed what we were hoping,” says Brian. “We suggested maybe there was this shopping and dining renaissance going on in Phoenix, and she put a stamp on that and said, yes, there is!”

In designing urbAna’s spaces, Hayes says, “I wanted to make sure we wouldn’t outshine the product Brian and Ana were going to put in, or that they couldn’t keep changing it as they grew and as their product grew.” A fan of what she calls “little vignettes,” Hayes suggested that as merchandisers they use familiar objects—a table here, a sofa or wing chair there—to create focal points, with ample shelving and a kitchen element in the back to showcase product. Wheeled tables and carts stacked with dinnerware, glassware, and party products easily roll around to create new merchandising vignettes or to make room for in-store events such as cocktail parties, yoga classes, and giveback nights for the American Cancer Society.

Brian notes that the team actually reduced the square footage of the space in order to create usable space beyond the front windows. Hayes, working with Alexander Building Company, added large double doors—an homage to the Arcadian ’50s-style ranch house—that remain



Left: A festive table setting complete with placemats, china, silverware, glassware, and ribbon. Above: The perfect gift for a Scotch drinker: glasses, a metallic decanter, and a cocktail tray to serve everything on.



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open during good weather and allow for the setup of fun outdoor vignettes beneath the jauntily painted striped awning. “We literally drew Brian and Ana’s space out so that we could draw customers in,” says Hayes.

UrbAna, which launched just before Thanksgiving in 2014, has attracted a dedicated and largely female clientele. “Our customer likes to support local, she loves to know the story behind the items, and she lives in Arcadia. She’s our neighbor,” says Ana.

Popular products right now include vintage, silver-plated cheese markers; candles made by local businesses Mame and Standard Wax; Le Cadeaux melamine dinnerware that looks like real china; and marble and wood pedestals and cheese boards from India. The shop carries products in a wide range of prices, which is perfect for couples looking for an eclectic wedding registry location, or for young people looking to develop their own entertaining style without breaking the bank.

“Brian and Ana have infused their space with graciousness and then let other young people realize that [joy of] throwing a fun little party,” says Hayes. “I love that they’re learning to express a new art of entertaining for this whole generation.” &

“We love to have people at our house, and it always seems like ours is the house people gravitate to,” says Ana Wells (on right, with architect Cathy Hayes). “The shop revolved around that idea: anything you might need to host or attend a dinner party.”

