

Features

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Finding Their Wings

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If you attended Cultivate'18, then you may be familiar with the work of Columbus-based Planthropy through its moss wings, which started as an art installation and has now been donated to a Chicago-area women's domestic violence shelter aptly called WINGS.

It's symbolic of the company as a whole, which started three years ago when co-founder Jessie Laux merged businesses with long-time landscape designer Michael Creath. They offer living walls, moss walls and succulent creations.

"We were doing a lot of living walls when we launched our moss walls; we had a 50-50 mix, but the moss walls became so popular they became 80% of what we're doing," Jessie notes. "We have the freedom to create with natural elements inspired by nature: bark, grape vines and various mosses. So it's a fun process."

Pictured: Planthropy co-owners Jessie Laux and Michael Creath stand in front of their moss wall installation at Westies Tavern in the Short North (walking distance from the Columbus Convention Center next time you attend Cultivate!).

The part corporate and residential clients love is the moss goes through a proprietary preservation process, so while it maintains that green, soft texture and vibrancy, it's still zero maintenance.

"The zero maintenance is the appeal—we do living walls, but they require maintenance like proper water, light and plant selection," Michael adds. "This is what we call the green feel for the brown thumb. A lot of bigger corporations, they want the zero maintenance."



They're also finding corporate clients are changing their viewpoint on incorporating "green" elements. "In the past six months the requests we're getting have been a shift from businesses to architects and interior designers," Jessie says. "There's already a vision there and most of the time they have a vision and we get to run with the final project." One such example is a 22-ft. moss tree at a brewery, which consisted of metal for the tree and branches and moss for the "leaves."

Planthropy has started hearing from potential customers across the country and now has installations in Dallas, Seattle and Palm Beach. Pretty impressive for a company that wasn't planning on leaving its Columbus market.

Pictured: The wings started as an installation at Art In Bloom at the Columbus Museum of Art, then made their way to the Chicago Flower Show and Cultivate'18 before residing permanently at the WINGS women's

domestic violence shelter in the Chicago area.

"People are reaching out and we did not initially anticipate that," Michael adds. "We wanted to dominate the Columbus market, but people are finding us through other outlets." Those outlets would be a mix of social media and Planthropy's website, which houses beautiful photography of their projects thanks to Jessie's background in graphic design and photography.

In fact, it's that background of digital marketing and website development that indirectly led her to where she is today.

"I grew up in a really small town (Bellville, Ohio) and we lived on 20 acres of really fun property. I was outside playing all the time," she says. "I got burned out sitting behind a computer screen and wanted to reconnect. I launched Planthropy initially as a hobby because it was my outlet to de-stress. I make living art arrangements."

Michael, meanwhile, spent 15 years as a landscape designer, and eight years of that working on perfecting and creating living walls. Michael, however, didn't have the marketing background Jessie had. When he met her three years ago things changed.

"We joined forces and that is really where everything took off," he says. "She brought the marketing and artistic side and that's when people found out what we could do. It happened really quickly."

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What's Next?

Where can Jessie Laux and Michael Creath go from here with Planthropy? They unveiled a new product line in early November that will be sold through local Columbus vendors and on their website: the Forest Line of shippable framed moss pieces. They come in 12-in. by 12-in. and 16-in. by 16-in. sizes, just in time for the holiday season.

Also on tap for the near future is to find a space in Columbus to open a showroom. They hesitate in calling it retail because the goal is to have a space where they can show installation examples to clients, as well as to rent it out in the evenings for events. “Those are becoming very popular event spaces,” Michael says of showrooms. “We want a destination people will want to go to and enjoy and take a lot of pictures.”

A New Way to Workshop

Since the owners of Planthropy don't have their own space right now, they have to get creative with their workshops. They've taken their talents on the road, hosting team-building events (at the office or an off-site location), private planting parties and public ladies night workshops at wine shops, restaurants and even candle-making shops, pairing up with the host to create a total maker's night of fabulous.

With the Candle Lab event, called Scents & Succulents, participants make a candle first and while that's drying they plant up a succulent in a candle holder. At North Country Charcuterie, guests learn about dried meat and create their own charcuterie spread while sipping a BYOB beverage. That spread is whisked away to be wrapped up and replaced with succulents at the table. Discussion turns to creative dinner party ideas and creating centerpiece arrangements. Ages for guests at the workshop range from kids to young adults 20 to 35 and they find themselves answering a million questions about plant care.

“They love to show us a picture of their dying plants and how they kill everything, but when they leave they have the confidence to go home and recreate what we're showing them and keep everything alive,” Michael says. “That's why we keep doing them.”

Check 'Em Out

Great photography helps to tell the story of Planthropy. See for yourself at www.planthropy.co (notice .co, not .com), on Facebook at www.facebook.com/planthropy and on Instagram at www.instagram.com/planthropy. **GP**