

Kiss My Aster

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Faster Horses

Amanda Thomsen



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While I was getting a tattoo recently, she asked: “Is this a good size?” Me: “I trust your knowledge and judgment on this. It’s what you do all day and I only do it once a year. Do what you think would be best and I reserve veto power before needle hits skin.”

While discussing fences for our little garden shop courtyard with my landlord: “Amanda, do you want it to open this way or this way?” Me: “Honestly, you are my landlord and an actual brilliant engineer. You would know what’s out there and what makes sense for this, your property, better than I. Do what’s cool to you and just loop me in.”

Me to a flower wholesaler: “You know how most bouquets go ‘beep beep boop’? I want flowers that say ‘BIZZZ WHIZZ WAHH.’ Now, I don’t really know what that means, but you know me and you know flowers—can you make the connection?” Her, guffawing: “Actually, yes.”

Customer to me: “I don’t know anything about anything, but I know red petunias. I demand only red petunias, and they must be red petunias tolerant of all situations and watering predicaments.”

Chicken vs. egg—Was I like this with people before getting into retail or did retail make me like this? Hard to say since I’ve been hustling since I turned 16. I trust professionals to make good decisions with, or even for, me on a daily basis. It’s like reading the reviews section, but in real life. Ask the bartender what her favorite rum drink is? Absolutely. My stylist asks me how short I’d like my hair; “If this was your face, what would you do?” I love how I get the best out of people with this approach and I love how trusting them makes a connection.

But that’s not really what this column is about. It’s about this quote: “If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.”—Henry Ford

People come in looking for faster horses from us CONSTANTLY, and it’s our exasperating lot in life to try and provide them with the first automobile, but they’ve never driven one or even heard of one before (and no wonder we’re tired all the time). We cannot ask people what they want because they have, rarely, any clue and then when we suggest things that are, frankly, BRILLIANT, they’re often resistant because they’ve never heard of that or their neighbors don’t already have it. What a pickle.

If people would just let their guards down I could help them find their ideal 1979 MG Midget or 1985 Chrysler LeBaron Town & Country or 1991 Saab 900 Turbo, but they’re so stuck on horses our job becomes psychological. Here are

some things I've said lately to strip away at the "faster horses syndrome":

"I see you like red petunias—can I show you my favorite thing?"

"Do you like petunias for sentimental reasons? Tell me about it."

"If something WAY better was available, would you want to see that?"

"Would you like to see this container I'm working on and I'll tell you why I made some of these choices?"

"Would you say red is your favorite color? Does it go with your house? Wanna see something cool?"

And then I drown them in the "why" of it all like it's gravy and they're lil' hot, flaky biscuits just waiting to absorb literally any flavor at all. For me, it seems that "why" is an absolute lightsaber against resistant attitudes, lack of taste and other kinds of, for lack of a better word, ignorance. It doesn't always result in a sale, but I do always feel like I'm at least helping more horses toward a peaceful retirement.

For my container program this year, I told customers to drop off the pots and send photos of their houses and what I created for them would be more appropriate than anything they could dream of and if they didn't like them, they were wrong. This went unexpectedly delightfully for me. I look forward to satisfying those ready for a new age and alienating those that can't get past horses. Plus, it makes me feel like a mad genius. **GP**

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