

Kiss My Aster

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Snap Out of It

Amanda Thomsen



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The other day I shook off the dust and put my money where my mouth is and went to spend my money and time at some small businesses instead of just festering in and over mine. I brought my 13 year old, who was a baby when I started writing for *Green Profit*, and her best friend since forever out for the day to shop, learn and absorb and that's exactly what happened.

The main destination? Ghoulish Mortals in St. Charles, Illinois. I've been meaning to get out there since they opened six years ago and it's the place that pops into my brain when people tell me they've been meaning to come in but just haven't yet. My brain naturally retorts, "If you wanted to, you would," but I'm reminded to cut them some slack since I haven't yet been to this spooky horror-themed gift shop not even

an hour from my house.

On the approach from street parking we can hear it before we see it—the "preamble" from Disney's "Haunted Mansion" is playing on a loop and there are window boxes with pinwheels that have scary faces drawn on them. I'm already excited. I take note that sound is a great "appetizer" and a tactic that we do utilize here in the shop when the pond pump doesn't blow the circuit to the whole outlet. (Yes, me mentioning it is a cry for help if you have an answer.)

The movement in the pinwheels grabs attention and I'm taking notes. As we enter, someone leaving wearing a Ghoulish Mortals t-shirt tells us we're going to love this store. I sense this is the owner setting us up and I love it. Upon entrance, the shop is set up very much in departments, but the departments are serial killers, "Haunted Mansion," "Stranger Things," enamel pins, cemetery/death, evil doctors, carnivorous plants and killer clowns. There are free pinball machines dotted throughout the shop.

I see a huge similarity to my shop in that this appears to be a place people could come and browse for an hour, have fun and then just leave. They had a fantastic time and didn't feel the need to buy anything because the experience itself was rad. I get a lot of this. I asked the salesperson and she said it did happen a lot, but as people were leaving, after saying they loved it, she'd call them back to the register and give them a card or sticker and chat them up a bit. This is brilliant because my usual reaction is to flip double birds as they walk out the door and that's not healthy. It really isn't. She said she knows for sure that people will come back when they need a gift, which is cute, but I choose to ride that ride with her. Other things I noticed about Ghoulish Mortals: They didn't really have a lot of high-ticket items, which was shocking for such a large and ornate space. The areas set up to be photo worthy were amazing. I bought a t-shirt.

Next stop, across the street: Rocket Fizz is a chain that seems to be growing fast. They sell candy, but more importantly, some super nostalgic candy. They also sell fun sodas. It's very much a "vacation town" shop. I accidentally spent \$10 on a chocolate bar because I wasn't paying attention. Even though it was a Monday the shop was full of screaming kids. I loved it there while simultaneously dying to escape. It was super clean and mega organized. It shouted FUN from the rafters to the "employees-only" areas.

The salespeople didn't go out of their way in any way, but I have to think it was because they get screaming kids all day, every day. Next to the register was an old pickle jar with a shot jar at the bottom and it was filled with water. If you could drop a quarter through the water into the shot glass you won a free soda. This lit me up like a Christmas tree! You mean they harvest quarters all day long from sugared up kids? This is amazing! And a bottle of pop costs them nothing and I bet they don't even give out a 6-pack weekly. GENIUS! The kids I came in with would have emptied their wallets if they'd had more quarters. I want to find a swindle—I mean, fun game—at checkout like this and am actively searching for one.

I left for home feeling revved up, inspired and laden with expensive chocolates. I encourage you to snap out of the every day if it applies! I was stuck and now I'm just a little spookier and sugared up! **GP**

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