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Once More Into the Fray

Amanda Thomsen



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This is the month that I open my own little garden center. Yes, that's right—I thought I'd put my money where my mouth is and do the thing.

Can I tell you the dopey way I got the idea? I heard that Elizabeth Fraser from Cocteau Twins was putting out new solo music and I went to check and see when the last time they put out new music was. There was an anthology I had never heard of called "Stars & Topsoil" and it was like a full body ZING. I wanted a store called Stars & Topsoil. I would SELL stars and topsoil! Oh, it's so weird when inspiration hits. At first it was a goth garden shop, but it's morphed into a slightly granny, slightly mid-century, certainly chic operation. It won't be called Stars & Topsoil though because I have GOOD friends that stopped me from doing that to myself.

So I've been working on this behind the scenes for over a year now and I just got the keys last week. A recent demo exposed the original 1894 brick on the south wall of the 1,500 sq. ft. indoor part of my little garden shop. I'll be focusing on indoor plants and accoutrement, as well as vintage houseware and a little bit of kitsch. Since I'll be situated next to a swanky mid-century modern cocktail bar, it would be SILLY to not let that theme carry over into what I'm selling. I'll also have a function room for classes and rentals, and I'm hoping to make some sweet utility bill payments in January thanks to classes given to Girl Scouts, et al.

A little later this summer the 1,800 sq. ft. outdoor component will open. This way I get to have TWO opening parties (and therefore two great outfits!). I plan on carrying a curated group of my favorite plants and not offering anything with red flowers. My shop, my rules. The outdoor area will also have a large seating area where I hope to make bank with rentals for parties, small weddings, whatever.

The shop is in the small, but burly, historic village of Lemont in the suburbs of Chicago. This town has recently exploded due to this bonkers aerial park that went into an old quarry on the outskirts of town. My demographic is "moms who do not want to be at The Forge while their families are."

Totally sound business decisions I've made:

1. I don't have a landline. I'm running this store from an iPhone. I can answer calls and emails on the fly, turn the music up or down and check someone out without heading to the register.
2. After getting a big-name distributor account, I have to say I've found more compelling products on the Faire app

and now will be offering artisanal fertilizers.

3. Like cilantro, I'm not for everyone. It'll be interesting seeing how this plays out. I am definitely seeking a certain demographic and people outside of the demographic may truly be at a loss with what I'll have going on. Loud music, black-painted walls and a Pride flag on the door is just the beginning. Also, I will not be selling red geraniums. Or spikes.
4. I'm staying open late to catch the people that had a few cocktails at the bar next door.
5. I opted to not buy a new URL and start over with a new website, naming the shop Aster Gardens to piggyback on the Kiss My Aster name and my 17 years of web presence. I believe this is either brilliant or it isn't.
6. The bathroom is too nice so I think I'm going to glue moss to all the stone tile walls.
7. Does anyone have a firm "No Dogs Allowed" practice they want to advise me on? I love dogs, I have three of them, but I do not want dog pee on my plants.

I have plenty of experience and I'm pretty decisive, but if you'd like to send me constructive criticism or send me a kind note (or an Edible Arrangement, of course) you can reach me at amanda@kissmyaster.com. **GP**

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