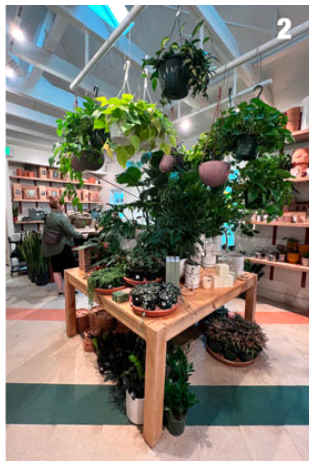


Cover Story

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Houseplants and ...

Jennifer Polanz



I popped into The Victorian in East Atlanta Village on a dreary Tuesday in January, not sure what I would find. What I found was a great cup of coffee from co-located Bellwood Coffee, some great-looking houseplants and accessories, and an affable and enthusiastic visual manager in Jordan Walker. She sat down with me as I enjoyed my brew with a splash of almond milk and told me all about the business founded by Libby Hockenberry and Cary Smith, which has two locations.

The other location at the time I visited was moving from its original 2017 location of Ponce City Market to Atlanta's super trendy BeltLine and in the process of

renovation. The BeltLine is one of the largest urban re-development programs in the U.S., transforming a 22-mile stretch of rail line into affordable housing, shops, public parks, transit and trails. The Victorian's new location there will feature a two-story shop with houseplants and accessories on the first floor, and Burle's Cocktail Bar on the second. The bar is named after Roberto Burle Marx, a Brazilian landscape architect who's a favorite of the owners.

"The vibe in the new shop is cool, sexy and relaxed, and it's designed to the 'T,'" Jordan said. "We're looking at the opening at late spring, early summer."



They were already there on the BeltLine, though, in a nearby temporary space selling plants and working in the new location getting it ready, which means there won't be much transition for customers when the time comes.

The shop we were in, meanwhile, opened in June 2021 and immediately found a following in an area known for its eclectic art scene and independent shops.

"It was so well received by the East Atlanta community—it's a super tight-knit community that supports small business," she said.

The shop supports customers wherever they are in their plant journey and has become a space for regulars who pop in weekly, if not daily, to get their coffee and a dose of greenery. They offer a Dirt Bag Club to earn loyalty rewards, and host workshops often to introduce plants and talk about plant care. They also make their own soil and educate customers on the benefits of those, even marking the plant pots with the type of soil they're in. Jordan added they offer repotting for a fee, unless it's the same day you buy the plant—then they'll do it on the house.

It's clear the goal is to match any and every customer with the plant that works best for them, based on their ability to care for it and their lighting situation. And just about

everything in the shop is tailored toward helping customers stay successful with their plants, from pottery to pest and disease controls, watering, misting, fertilizers, pruners, books and more. It's also mostly from small businesses and they strive to carry products that are sustainably and ethically sourced. For example, much of the pottery is handmade by artisans.

And while Jordan said excitement over some houseplants has cooled, interest in others has heated up and she doesn't see an end in sight.

"I see people every day at work who are so excited about houseplants," she added.



1 | Bellwood Coffee is co-located in the store. It's a locally brewed coffee business with three locations, including this one. It's a darned good cup.

2 | The shop is quite small, but they make great use of the space with this centerpiece display featuring everything from hanging baskets to plants, books, saucers, candles, art and more.

3&4 | The vast majority of pottery offered was terracotta and Visual

Manager Jordan Walker said most of their pottery is handcrafted by artisans. For example, this sign highlights pots made by Will Preman of Yum Yum Ceramics out of Kansas City, Missouri.

5 | Associates blend their own soil at The Victorian, ensuring the mixes work for the plants they carry. They offer bags of the mixes and each of the plant labels show what blend works for that plant.

6 | The Victorian curates a small assortment of accessories for houseplants, including these cleaning and care products from We the Wild.



7&8 | The Victorian shows co-owner Cary Smith's love of desert plants with its cactus room full of unique offerings.

9&10 | Two things I think every shop should have: swag that has your company's name on it and stickers. Custom stickers are really easy and fairly inexpensive to have made these days. Even better, work with local artists on them. **GP**

