

GROWERTALKS

Under an Acre

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Embracing Their Unique Brand

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Carolina Home and Garden in Newport, North Carolina, has defined itself as an entertainment destination, using their retail space to showcase beautiful plants and products. Developing this strong identity involved an extensive journey, which Brian Watson began four decades ago.

The adventure began in 1989 when Brian and his close friend Jimmy Farrington decided to start their own lawn care business during college summer break.

“I owned a mower and Jimmy had a weed eater,” shared Brian. It didn’t take long for the young partners to realize they’d stumbled upon an industry that was ripe with opportunity. The following year, Brian transferred to local a college and the two decided to expand their services to include landscaping. The demand exceeded their expectations and the partners decided to make this business the launching pad for their full-time career.

After a few years, the partners decided to try their hand at retail, investing in an old hardware store in Newport. It was an extremely successful partnership, where they developed a strong foundation in both areas of the industry. However, the external demands in their lives were increasing and the partners recognized that it was time to branch out on their own. They divided the business, with Jimmy taking over the landscaping end, and Brian focusing on the retail side and garden center.

“We are still great friends,” said Brian. “Jimmy still has his own landscape business, and recently, we hosted

his 50th birthday in our venue and Jimmy’s daughter will be celebrating her first baby’s shower in Carolina Home and

Garden's green room.”

Pictured: Brian Watson with his wife Stephanie (left) and daughter Logan (right), owners of Carolina Home and Garden in Newport, North Carolina. Photo: Casey Futrell Photography.

It was a good time to separate. The economy was exploding and the opportunity for horticulture appeared seemingly endless. The retail space had a broad selection of products from plants to mulch, offering the customers whatever they wanted and needed. This upward momentum continued for a few years, allowing both Brian and his wife and partner Stephanie to establish a strong independent business.

The retail environment was on the brink of dramatic changes as the entry of large box stores and a volatile economy dramatically reduced the amount of profit coming in. Brian actively sought out other areas of income, including returning to landscaping and trying his hand at growing. It was a challenging period, where the extreme diversification resulted in a murky business direction.

“We floundered during the decline and through it we lost a bit of our identity,” he shared, admitting that by being a bit of everything, the company lost their individuality. “We needed to find our identity again and make sure it was shared with our customers.”

In 2012, Stephanie decided to apply her expertise as a creative designer to two external properties, The Watson House and Gardens, and Palo Alto Plantation, where she both rented the spaces and developed a niche as an event planner. The new company, Dream Makers Wedding Estate, focused on outdoor weddings, offering her clients a service that was both unique and special. It was through this experience that the Watson family began to learn about the value of entertainment and pondered how this knowledge could be applied to their primary business. However, it wasn't until their now adult daughter, Logan, entered the business that they put all of the pieces together.

“She saw an opportunity and presented me with a concept that would help streamline the business and provide focus to the entire operation,” said Brian. “It was amazing.”

Logan's boutique was born and with it a refined identity for Carolina Home and Garden, transforming the space from a shop to a destination. As part of this shift, the Watson family ventured away from growing, allowing them to streamline their business towards their areas of expertise.

“It's not that we weren't good at growing, but once we discovered who we wanted to be as a business, we realized that growing got in the way of being able to deliver the experience that we wanted to offer,” he said.



Logan's boutique provides a more intimate shopping experience, where the customer can peruse beautiful products, including an eclectic assortment of plants, apparel and giftware. The onsite bar provides customers with a selection of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, while the regular entertainment both draws new customers while encouraging existing ones to linger.

Embracing the uniqueness of today's shoppers

"People want to be entertained, which at first I may have interpreted as a bad thing, but today, I see how much more opportunity this offers for spaces like ours to create an experience that cannot be felt in Walmart, Lowe's or Amazon," said Brian.

Carolina Home and Garden uses the space on evenings and weekends as an experiential venue, bringing in music, dance, yoga and other activities that complement the existing retail space. Food is often a huge part of these events, with their son, Jordan, bringing in his food truck to serve meals that complement the experience. Shopping remains an essential part of this experience, with both Logan's

boutique and the garden center remaining open for those individuals who want to bring a piece of Carolina Home and Gardens home with them.

Pictured: On evenings and weekends, Carolina Home and Garden has music in their outdoor garden. Photo: Mel O'Berry.

Each aspect of Carolina Home and Gardens has been carefully considered, from the Living Wall showcasing a diversity of plants to the beautiful green room, which has become the perfect space for photographers and events.

"We've made this space so easy for events—it's ready for entertainment all of the time," he shared. "Here, if we plan to host a wedding on Saturday, we can set it up and clean it up on the same day because the venue is indoors."

When asked about his vision for the future, Brian shared that he foresees a future where the need for the garden center, which currently holds the majority of the plants, no longer exists. Instead, Logan's boutique will become the primary space to shop for plant life. The journey has already begun, as the company strategically narrows its selection of products to help evoke interest and demand for hard-to-find plants.

"When you get too big, you end up using a percentage of your space as a plant hospital or storage," said Brian. "Now, we make sure that each section is used to showcase the eclectic variety that we are proud to carry." **GT**

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