



SOUTHERN SANCTUARY

With good customer service, a friendly attitude, and a welcoming atmosphere, Tavana Taylor's store will always have a loyal following

by Amanda Baltazar

Call it divine intervention or whatever you will, but the compulsion that led Tavana Taylor to move to North Carolina and open Eclectic by Nature is reason for Greensboro inhabitants to be counting their blessings.

"I just felt compelled to be in Greensboro," says Taylor, who decided to leave the Florida Keys when things started getting expensive and the threat of hurricanes loomed ever more.

After visiting her sister in Greensboro and seeing a house that caught her eye, she simply decided to stay. After that it was so easy. It was one of those times when you know you're on the right path, because things fell together so effortlessly.

Taylor left Florida in November 2003 and opened Eclectic by Nature one scant month later. The store's name, she says, came from the book *Dancing Down the Moon* (Penguin), a history of Neo-Paganism by Margot Adler.

Moving on up

"Eclectic by Nature was sparse when it opened," Taylor says. She sold books from New Leaf, cards from Learn! There, music from Music Design, and white sage amethysts from Native Scents. What made her life easier were the great relationships she'd built with these companies' vendors while she managed a store called Crystal Loft in the Florida Keys. It was there she got her first taste of New Age retailing.

Taylor initially opened her store in downtown Greensboro, where, she says, "businesses are either thriving or they're not." Two and a half years later, in June 2005, she moved to the State Street Station shopping district—three blocks of stores, restaurants, and services, located downstairs from a health center. The new location had more space, not to mention an outdoor patio. It turned out to be the perfect move, as business has increased by 10 to 15 percent since then. "I don't think it would have happened in the old place—there was very little parking, and customers had to pay to park," Taylor explains.

And now her store is fully stocked with Wiccan, Pagan, shamanism products, and more. Her biggest sellers are crystals, mineral specimens, and jewelry, followed closely by books. She also has some niche products for the hoodoo market, such as oils for "conditions." Lavender Love Drops help guys and lesbians attract a mate, and King Solomon Wisdom, which is often bought by students, helps with studying and is said to make people wise. Another popular hoodoo product is sachet powders. These can be sprinkled on business cards or papers to pass on power to those who touch them. Favorites include Unearthing, Money Drawing, Attraction, and Hot Foot, and are believed to dispel evil or bring good luck, love, or happiness.

Saturn Return brings changes

Computers have made life easier for shop owners in the 21st century, and Taylor orders 75 percent of her products online or through catalogs. But the downside is not meeting and working with vendors in person. "The best thing about being in the metaphysical trade is your vendors are the nicest people," she points out. She does buy items such as jewelry and some textiles from gem and lapidary wholesaler shows.

Taylor grew up in West Virginia, Connecticut, and Massachusetts and was influenced by a grandmother who believed in fúddies. Although she has never been particularly religious, Taylor has always been interested in nature. Her personal interest in the metaphysical world blossomed around 10 years ago, when she was going through her Saturn Return (the period of time between the ages of 28 and 30) and getting divorced.

"I had friends who were Goddess-oriented, and I took solace in those people to get through my divvies," she says.

PROFILE

Store Name: Eclectic by Nature

Owner: Tavana Taylor

Location: Greensboro, N.C.

Grand opening: December 18, 2002

Website: www.eclectichynature.com

Store phone number: 336/373-0733

Square footage: 640

Store hours: Tuesday to Saturday 11 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., closed Monday

Total number of employees: Two—Taylor and her employee Melonie Penn, her full-time "Sales Goddess"

Yearly gross sales: \$150,000

Approx. number of items in stock: More than 100

Events/workshops: New Moon Drumming Circle,

Monthly Reiki Share, Sage Review Book Club, Stained Glass

and Fairies on the Patio, Tarot and Intuitive readings every

Saturday and Sunday, Monthly Channeling Event, Henna

and Glitter Tattoos

Classes: Beginners' Tarot, Meditation, Wise Woman Herbal

Medicine, Reiki, Huna, Energy Healing



2008 March



FAVORITE SUPPLIERS

(in alphabetical order)

- 2 am Altars (www.2amaltars.com)
- Azure Green (www.azuregreen.com)
- Ephemeria (www.ephemeria-inc.com)
- Ganz (www.ganz.com)
- Kheops (www.kheopsinternational.com)
- Llewellyn Worldwide (www.llewellyn.com)
- Lucky Mojo Curio Company (www.lucky Mojo.com)
- Music Design (www.musicdesign.com)
- Native Scents (www.nativescents.net)
- New Leaf (www.newleafdist.com)
- San Francisco Herb Co. (www.sfherb.com)
- U.S. Games Systems (www.usgamesinc.com)

Creating a community

Working in retail comes easy to Taylor, as she's been in customer service jobs since the age of 16—everything from a waitress to the counter girl at a car rental place to an analyst for the aerospace industry. "That's probably my greatest asset," she says. "I provide great customer service. I think of [my store] as the Nordstrom of the metaphysical industry."

One of Taylor's goals was to create a community space in her store. "I wanted it to be a safe place because I knew it was difficult for Pagans, especially in the South, to find an area where they could talk," she says. "People come into my store to relax, unwind, and feel safe. It's a sanctuary."

Just recently, Taylor leased space next door. Called Eclectic by Nature Too, it is used for readings, classes, and a quiet space for customers to read or meditate. She plans on offering WiFi in the near future. She's not selling any product, but wants to construct a permanent "trade blanket" area where people can recycle items on a "give one, take one" basis. Taylor will also rent the space to like-minded groups for events.

Another of Taylor's hopes was that her store would help empower women, which is also not the norm in the South. Soon after she moved to her State Street location, a Goddess group started meeting in the shop. "And the fact that I had a small part in making it happen fills my heart with joy," Taylor says. "Women are important, and they deserve to be loved and cherished and to enjoy the company of other women."

Because of this almost motherly attention to her customers, many of them have shipped with Taylor ever since she opened. This is not only their good luck but hers, too, and she cries sometimes when she realizes she's made such a difference in so many people's lives.

New additions

The store has also given Taylor some surprising good fortune. One of her customers, John Schmidt, was particularly taken by more than her good customer service.

Two years after opening Eclectic by Nature, one of her readers told Taylor she would soon move, meet a man, and have a child. She dismissed all this, considering she had just moved to North Carolina, had decided there were no eligible males in Greensboro, and definitely decided not to have children.

Two weeks later, Taylor moved the store. Two weeks after that she met Schmidt, and they now live together with their two-year-old daughter, Tristan.

Having a daughter has brought some changes in the store. Taylor used to run it as a one-woman show, open six days a week. She worked right up until she had contractions, but then handed the baton over to sales assistant Melonic Penn, who now manages the store three days a week.

Finding a good employee has been one of the few challenges that Taylor has faced. "It can be hard to find competent, capable help," she explains. "Fortunately someone who's also interested in metaphysics. They need to know a little bit about everything that's in the store so they can explain things in a way that's informative."

Luckily, Penn, whom Taylor refers to as "Sales Goddess," more than meets these requirements.

Experiencing the real thing

Modern days bring modern conveniences, even though many Pagans may choose to ignore them. The Internet has made life easier for Taylor, because her website makes it convenient for potential new customers to find the store. It is also set up for online shopping, but

she doesn't push it, because she prefers people to come in and "get the whole experience."

This experience often stretches to a two- or three-hour session. There's a garden out back, and many customers bring their dogs to break up their browsing with a bite and a free cup of always-brewed tea.

The atmosphere that allows customers to dally is an important thing, Taylor believes. "Based on customer feedback, it doesn't matter what you carry, but if you don't have a warm atmosphere, an open spirit, are friendly, and have good service, you won't have repeat business. I treat everyone like I'm greeting them by their first names, and asking them about their families—and I encourage Melonic to do so also."

The storefront of Eclectic by Nature is deliberately not to ease customers who may worry about being seen in a store. Although located in the Bible Belt, Taylor has never had any bad feelings from religious groups.

The most trouble she's had is from other retailers on the street who claimed she was a witch and asked for her lease to be terminated. Not wanting to pass up a chance for good press, Taylor's local newspaper and gave them her side of the story, which got full spread, showing her store was the antithesis of scary.

Tincture for success

Taylor's success has relied on many facets of both her personality and her store. She keeps business fresh with tarot and intuitive readings on the weekends and features eight regular readers throughout the month. The store is also a venue for book readings and classes, as well as new moon drumming, meditation, beginner Wiccan rituals, love spells and the history of Wicca), herbs, and basic voodoo.

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2. Jewelry
(The Jewelry Factory, www.crystalbiz.com)
3. Perfect Balance Musical Healing, Vol. 2
(Sequoia Records, www.sequoiarecords.com)
4. Nag Champa
(Sai Baba, www.khospisinternational.com)
5. Condition Oils
(Lucky Mojo, www.lucky Mojo.com)
6. White Sage Smudge Sticks
(Native Scents, www.nativescents.net)
7. New Moon and Full Moon Candles
(Coventry Creations, www.coventrycreations.com)
8. The Crystal Bible by Judy Hall
(Godsfield Press, 9781841811758)
9. Wishing Boxes
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African religion—different from hoodoo, which is a form of magic that traces its roots to Christianity.

Because she has a good relationship with the health center upstairs, Taylor can rent classrooms and reading space, and gets a discounted rate since she's not only a regular, but also a neighbor. Readers get 70 percent of what they make at the readings and the remainder goes toward the cost of the rental space and advertising.

Taylor even looks after her teachers and readers. She makes sure the calendar of events is posted in the local newspaper and on her website. "If people are taking the time to read or teach, I want to make sure they get exposure," she says.

There are not many metaphysical stores in Greensboro, but Taylor would welcome more competition. "I don't really believe in [fighting] competition," she says, "because there are so many places where people can get things. We need more metaphysical stores in the South, so if people want to open a store, they should come here."

The love Taylor has for her job shines through. Her existence, she says, is stress-free and if a little does creep in every now and then, there's always a tincture at hand to help dispel it.

"I feel this is what I'm supposed to be doing," she explains. "And I can't believe I get paid to do this. I'm always learning new things—it's a constant education. It feels good knowing I have a purpose and am making a difference to people."

"I love that I'm constantly interacting with people and all my friends come from this store. The fact that my daughter exists is because of the store."

Arcanda Ballazer is a freelance journalist who recently relocated to Anacortes, Wash., from New York City. She has been a journalist for 14 years and specializes in retail, food, and business stories.

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