

## Marley's motto: personal touch, unusual choices

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SPECIAL WRITER

You may be a stranger to Shirley Marley when you first walk into her store, but you'll walk out a satisfied customer and friend.

In The Townsend Hotel in downtown Birmingham, the store is Marley's personal haven. She is the owner, buyer and main employee of the boutique, which is filled with her hand-picked merchandise.

She works at her 4½-year-old store Monday through Sunday and sees almost every customer who comes in.

"I can tell my customers about every item in the shop," said the Madison Heights resident. "Everything I sell at Marley's is art."

She talks to her customers about the collectible Christopher Radko glass ornaments she sells. These include traditional Santas and non-traditional seahorses, peacocks and watermelon slices.

Radko created the colors and clothing for her limited-edition, German-made Santas. The papier-mache and plaster Santas are made by Thomas Schaller, who molds them after ones his great-grandfather made in 1895.

Marley likes to point out the uniqueness of the Sheila Terry perfume bottles and luggage decorated with antique fabrics.



WILLIAM HANSEN

Ho, ho, ho: Each Santa in this limited-edition, German-made Santa collection has a secret opening where you can tuck away favors such as candy or jewelry. From \$50 at Marley's, in The Townsend Hotel, Birmingham.

She loves to show customers the one-of-a-kind Lucy Isaacs necklaces and the Sharon Smith blouses made from antique linens.

"I had a customer visiting from Palm Beach, Fla., who bought one blouse from my store. She was so taken with it that I've sent her seven more since her first purchase," Marley said.

Marley is proud of the Jo-Dean dresses she sells, which have hand-

banded collars and cuffs, and of the stylish ceramic vases and pots made by Sue Bolt of Charlevoix.

"When Madonna was scheduled to come to the hotel, I put one of Sue's vases in her room. Some of Madonna's video 'Truth or Dare' was filmed at The Townsend Hotel. The vase shows up in the video," Marley explained.

Marley hasn't forgotten men in her selection of merchandise. She sells unusual money clips, pill boxes and col-

lectibles such as Limoges miniature briefcases, golf balls and tennis balls, and masculine picture frames and clocks.

A model for many of her store's wares, Marley also is a floral arranger and decorator. She composes flower arrangements for all of the hotel's celebrity guests and for its lobby. And she decorates the two display cases in the Townsend Hotel with items from her boutique.

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