

# Malls & Mainstreets

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**Cocoa suds:** Chocolate bar soaps from Lori Karbal et al in Birmingham.

## We've got the dish on soap

Most people don't use soap when they shower or wash their hands. So says Sandy Comeau of Berkley. Known as the "Soap Lady" and "the Soap Guru," Comeau owns a home-based soap-making company called Earthly Delights (her products are available at several Oakland County stores and in eight bed and breakfasts in southern Michigan -- a real feat considering she just started her business in February). She also teaches soap making classes at the Birmingham Community House and in her home.

In short, she knows a lot about soap. And what most people have in their bathrooms is not soap, but detergent, she claims. Soap occurs when you mix a caustic agent, like animal or vegetable oil. When you substitute petroleum for the fat or oil, chemically, you get a detergent instead of soap, she said.

"During World War II, when animal tallow (soap) manufacturers started using petroleum in their products and never went back," Comeau said. I, for one, like the soap -- or -- body detergent that I buy at the store. It smells nice and gets the job done. But Comeau believes that the pure soap is better for the skin than detergent. "Your skin will feel great when it is no longer a haven for all the chemicals found in a commercial soap," she says in her company's brochure. Soap also lathers better and is creamier than detergent, because it contains more glycerin, she says. Instead of animal fat, she uses coconut, palm and olive oils to make her soaps. The caustic agent she uses is lye -- the same thing "Granny" used to make soap on "The Beverly Hillsbillies."

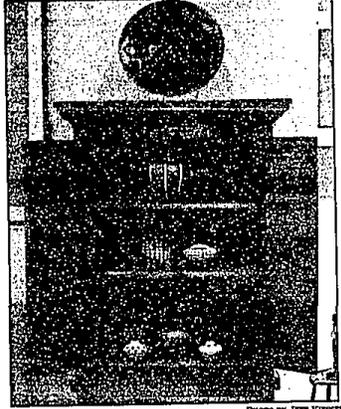
To keep her soaps all-natural, she colors and scents them with herbs, spices, flowers and essential oils. And to be different, she wraps them in pretty fabric instead of paper. Her soap "flavors" include almond crumb cake, lemon creme, rosemary and dill, chamomile lavender, lavender blossom, peppermint, rain forest, oatmeal, rose petal, chocolate mousse, jasmine nights, ginger and coffee (which is supposed to be great for removing odors like garlic). Prices are \$3.50 for a 4.5-ounce bar and \$2 for a 1.75-ounce bar. Earthly Delights soap is available at Betty's Grocery Store in Birmingham, Jasmine Bath and Gift Shop in Ferndale, Healthstyles in Royal Oak, Southfield Family Supermarket in Southfield, the Royal Oak Farmers Market, and by mail order. For more information, call Comeau at (248) 398-4773.

Speaking of soap, the Lori Karbal et al boutique in Birmingham received a fun new line of foot-wrapping bath products about six weeks ago and it's been selling like hot cakes. Made by G-Star in Australia, some of the products include: a bar of soap that looks and smells just like a chocolate candy bar, strawberry jam bath gel, a toast-shaped and honey-suckle soap in the shape of a stick of butter. Prices range from \$8 to \$10.50. For more information, call (248) 258-1959.

Another place to find fun and unusual bath products is at Natural in downtown Plymouth. The store's biggest seller is its "Soap by the Slice," said owner Susan MacGonigal (the soap kind of looks like beautiful leaves of Jello with fruit cocktail suspended inside); the cost is \$5.95 per one-inch slice, and the most popular "flavors" are orange cantaloupe and stained glass. MacGonigal said. For more information, call (734) 463-9491.



**Linens and lace:** Bischoff's "Royal Lily" Swiss lace bedding collection from Cristions in Birmingham.



**Artful blend:** A contemporary glass plate sits atop a handmade cabinet filled with Southwest pottery. All from Mesa Arts in Birmingham.



**French garden:** Painted sap buckets and an antique pie safe fill Home's garden room.

## New shops offer inside advantage

BY LINDA BACHRACK  
Editor

If you've ever been to Santa Fe, your memories of the landscape are colored in vivid hues of turquoise, sky blue, terra cotta and shades of gold as intense as the Southwest sun. Ellen and Sue Rental recreate the desert ambience in their new Mesa Arts gallery in Birmingham. The Maple Road space, scheduled to open next week, features painted tin ceilings, an arched entryway, sand-colored painted plywood floors and soaring ceilings accented, fittingly, in ochre and adobe, the perfect setting for an exciting collection of Southwest and Native American art and furniture, as well as contemporary handcrafted pieces from across the country.

"We have surrounded ourselves with the things we love," says co-owner Sue Rental. The women's venture began in Franklin 11 years ago with a shipment of painted furniture from Texas, examples of New Mexican art that Sue and her husband had collected for years. Close friends and sisters-in-law, Ellen and Sue were convinced that the Detroit area should be introduced to Southwest decor, so they rambled down dusty dirt roads and onto reservations in New Mexico on a quest to bring home the best of the West. Their Franklin gallery spawned an area-wide interest in Folk Art and silver jewelry that endures today.

In the new Mesa Arts storefront, art-glass plates and Mission-style lamps share space with Hopi Indian ceremonial masks, figure paintings by Native American medicine men and primitive whirligigs. You'll find contemporary ceramics, quilts, porcelains and hand-wrought jewelry. The furniture, all made by hand, is imbued with a mix of cultural traditions, including Native American, Mexican, Spanish and Scandinavian. You can personalize it to fit your own design tastes. "The pieces are so sophisticated they complement every decor," says Ellen.

The shop also carries an array of gift items, including hand tooled leather address books, mugs, bookmarks, letter openers and pens.

"There's something for everyone," say the duo who, like sisters, finish each other's thoughts and share each other's appreciation for fine arts and crafts.

**Mesa Arts, 135 E. Maple, Birmingham.** When you're in search of the perfect down pillow and you come up empty-handed, what's there to do but open your own bedding accessories boutique? Such was the inspiration behind Cristions, the newly opened fine linens shop in downtown Birmingham.

Manager Kathy Thornton relays the "pillow talk" while showing off the sumptuous European linens that spill from cupboards and swaddle beds inside the restful dove gray-painted shop. The cottons here are no less than 300 thread-count, a fact easily established by careful caress. You'll find Anichini Italian sheets and coverlets in their original matelasse pattern as well as tapestry prints and other custom-order designs.

Delicate hemstitching distinguishes Bellino linens, and Swiss lace is the hallmark of Bischoff, whose boudoir pillows carry a \$300 price tag. Exclusive to the store is the Ludovica line of embroidered linens with which you can customize your entire bedroom, from upholstered headboard to bedskirt. If Irish linen is your preference, choose Greenhorn sheets and cases.

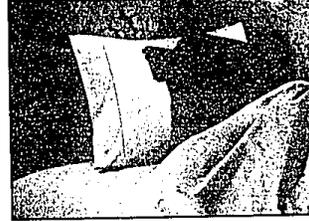
The shop also carries linen and cotton hand towels, Aromatherapy of Rome candles, resolutely priced down products, Christy Egyptian cotton towels and chenille and cashmere throws.

Don't miss the exquisite baby bedding and christening gowns. Liz Wain creates whimsical hand-painted children's linens and Nay-Et-Al designs more formal washable silk crib dressings. Anichini beds and cashmere baby blankets round out the layette line.

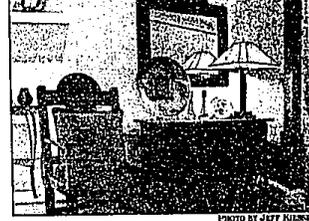
**Cristions, 215 N. Old Woodward, Birmingham.**



**Comfy cozy:** A family room vignette at Home in Royal Oak.



**Italian textiles:** Elegant Anichini linens dress a bed at Cristions in Birmingham.



**Eclectic interiors:** Mesa Arts has a mix of original furniture and accessories.

Notes of special events for shoppers is included in this calendar. Send information to: Malls & Mainstreets, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009; or fax (248) 644-1314. Deadline: Wednesday 5 p.m. for publication on Sunday.

### ADDED ATTRACTIONS

**THURSDAY, SEPT. 10**  
**REV 'N READ**  
The General Motors Women's Club of Detroit presents a "Book Fair" at Livonia Mall to benefit the Make-A-Wish Foundation. The books are from "Books Are Fun," and the prices are discounted from 40-70 percent below retail. The sale continues through Sept. 12 during mall hours. Livonia Mall, Seven Mile and Middlebelt roads.

**OUTTA SIGHT**  
Selma, Soho's hip new spectacle designer, exhibits her optical fashions at Shades in Birmingham, from 6-9 p.m. See the hottest French frames to hit the eye scene in 20 years. Shades, 205 E. Maple, Birmingham.

**SATURDAY, SEPT. 12**  
**TROPICAL TREAT**  
The Living Science Foundation presents "Rainforest" at Livonia Mall. Shows are every hour from 12-3 p.m. at the stage near Crowley's. Meet and touch Monty, the Burmese python; Dali, the Salvadoran tortoise lizard; Greytoke, the African gray parrot and many other rainforest creatures. Livonia Mall, Seven Mile and Middlebelt roads.

**SUNDAY, SEPT. 13**  
**COOL CLOTHES**  
Teen Explosion presents a "Back to Skool Dayz" Fashion Show Extravaganza at Livonia Mall, 2 p.m. on the stage near Crowley's. The show features teen

clothing as seen in Delta's, Girlfriends, Just Nikki, and a Mexigirl catalogs. The first 25 people to purchase back-to-school wear at Teen Explosion will receive a gift certificate. Livonia Mall, Seven Mile and Middlebelt roads.

**WELL ENGINEERED**  
The Plymouth "Model Railroad & Toy Train Show" returns to the Plymouth Cultural Center during "Fall Festival." Show hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission is \$4; ages 4-12 \$1. Dealers and collectors will sell new, used, antique and collectible model railroad and toy train supplies. The Plymouth Fall Festival runs Sept. 11-13, 526 Farmer St., Plymouth.

**THURSDAY, SEPT. 17**

**A LA MODE**  
Saks Fifth Avenue and Mode magazine present the fall 1998 collection for sizes 14-24, featuring Michelle Weston, fashion and style director for Mode. 6:30 p.m. Call (248) 614-3323 for more information. Saks Fifth Avenue, Somerset Collection, Troy.