

**BEST
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FEET**

**2010
TOP
ART & FRAMING
RETAILERS
AWARDS**
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Awarded to the art gallery/frameshop with the most beautiful, well-planned art and framing retail space to give customers an exceptional shopping experience

WINNER: Bellport Arts & Framing Studio

OWNER: LuAnn Thompson

LOCATION: Bellport, N.Y.

WEBSITE: www.bellportarts.com



LuAnnThompson is the owner of Bellport Arts & Framing Studio, which she opened as a retail location 2½ years ago.

photo by Kathleen O'Donnell



photo by Kathleen O'Donnell

Bellport Arts & Framing Studio is located in Bellport, N.Y., which is a village located on the South Shore of Long Island.

For anyone else, the size of LuAnn Thompson's frameshop would seem a huge obstacle. What the store might lack in square footage it makes up for in everything else, though. Thompson prides herself for making a small space inviting to customers and fully functioning for her services.

Bellport Arts & Framing Studio in Bellport, N.Y., has been the brick-and-mortar home for Thompson's framing business for 2½ years. She started framing out of her home more than six years ago, then she rented a space in a gallery

a few doors down from her. The space, which was under the steps of the gallery and less desirable for people to hang their work, wasn't exactly enough space for framing pieces, either. So Thompson would be there on a daily basis, talk to customers and get framing orders. Then she would take the orders home, do the frames and bring the pieces back.

Now, no longer in the small space under the steps, Thompson has made Bellport Arts & Framing Studio a warm and inviting space. It's a space that complements her store's slogan: "Creative framing preserves memories."

"People come in on a daily basis just to say hello," Thompson says. "When



Thompson makes the most of her 560-square-foot frameshop with a warm and inviting store. "You have to work extra hard to find space," she says.

they come in my small showroom they get the sense that they're in a cozy and comfortable atmosphere and that gives them a level of trust."

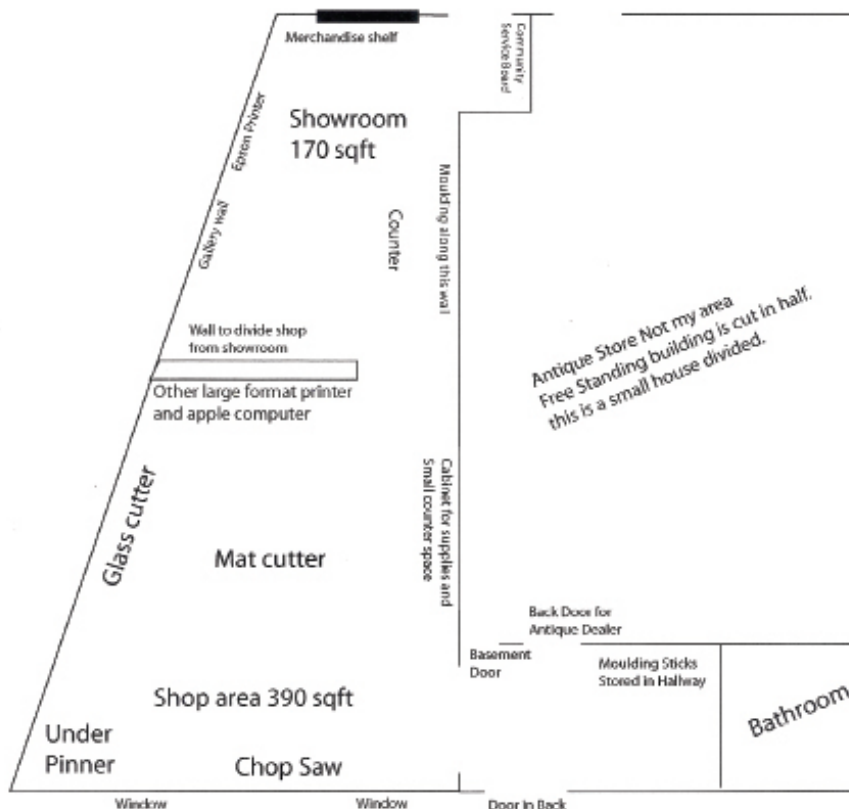
She's excited to win DECOR's best interior design award. "Sometimes I get frustrated to have a small shop, but when I see the opportunity to make it work for me, I'm proud of that," she says.

There are nights that she has to work at the shop late just to be able to clear out floor space to work on large pieces.

"You have to work extra hard to find space," she says. "When I win an award I say, 'Alright, I might be small, but I'm making it work.'"

She's always trying to add extra counter space or ways to display moulding and never turns down a larger project, despite others' doubts. A friend who helps Thompson in the store sometimes

Bellport Arts & FRAMING STUDIO Inc.



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Bellport Arts & Framing Studio.



asks her, “Where are you going to put that now?”

“And then when I put it in there she says, ‘Oh, that makes sense,’” Thompson says.

The area surrounding her store is the perfect environment for the framing business. International and local artists like Malcolm Morley and Barry Rockwell live in the area, as well as broadcast journalist Charlie Rose and actress Isabella Rossellini.

“When they bring in their fine collectibles they get the sense of comfort in a small area, and I find that actually really works for me,” she says.

The store itself is sort of the shape of a slice of pie, with the rear area widening as it goes back. The showroom space is just 170 square feet, but don’t let appearances fool you.

“People might think that I don’t do very large pieces, but I do,” she says.

She does a lot of framing for Morley, whose pieces can run 6’ long. Thompson

has also framed a map of the same size.

Two of the walls in her store are reserved gallery space. She tries to only give the space to local artists that she does framing for. Much of the work is of local scenes or by friends who have newer trends they’re working on.

“People come in and see that and know that it’s not something I bought from another state,” she says. “They know that it’s an artist that they could actually meet.”

The third, and final, wall displays all of her framing techniques. Thompson offers a number of services aside from framing. She has a large-format, Epson Stylus Pro 7900 printer for printing on canvas, watercolor paper and giclée prints for some artists. She will shoot portfolios or photos of fine arts for some antique dealers for their websites. With the help of her husband, who is a woodworker, she can create custom mantels for homes and overhead lighting for pictures.

She also does frame, photo and painting restoration. She has been a corporate photographer, and her knowledge of painting restoration comes from years of working with paint herself. She went to trade school for commercial art and has learned the reactions products have to different chemicals.

Thompson puts considerable effort into making her window displays an extension of her welcoming store atmosphere. She usually shows frame samples and photo restoration examples but also incorporates the town’s important events. For instance, her town celebrated its centennial in August, which marked 100 years of Bellport being an incorporated village. Thompson displayed two of the posters that were created to commemorate the occasion. She also held a contest for students to design a postage stamp for the centennial. She photographed the 323 stamps and cre-



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ated a poster that said, “Happy Birthday to Bellport.” Six students’ stamps were printed.

That interest in staying connected to the community helps Thompson in return. When she ran the postage stamp competition, for instance, there were parents of the participating students that came into the store saying, “I never knew this frameshop was here.”

“You want to run things that give back to the community and then it works for you because they do come back,” Thompson says.

She attributes much of her store’s continued success to the fact that she works with her community. She has served as the vice president of the Bellport Chamber of Commerce, and she also helped form an art walk in the area for October.

“Stay close to the people around you because they’re the people that come in first,” she says.

—Valeria Turturro

TAKEAWAYTIP

“Make your shop inviting. Look at it from a customer’s point of view. If something looks cluttered, you don’t want to over put. You have to actually walk through the shop yourself and see where the eye leads from item to item. Sometimes you have to give a break to be able to move into the next section.”

—LuAnn Thompson