

The Sweet Smell of Success

By Janice Llanes Fabry

A little shop at 1969 Palmer Avenue in Larchmont has awakened the senses of a growing clientele. The brainchild of owners Barbara Truesdale and Janet Robinson, Szent & Company is the only store around where patrons can create their very own scents.



Owners Janet Robinson and Barbara Truesdale

Typically, customers pull up a stool at the fragrance bar and blissfully choose from a myriad of perfume oils, designer fragrances and essential oils. Then mixologists Truesdale and Robinson custom blend the scent to create a unique perfume or another one of their beauty products. Their selection includes lotions, shampoos, conditioners, body scrubs, exfoliating body wash, bath salts, massage and burning oils, as well as travel essentials.

"We love creating something special for our customers," said Truesdale. "When they are here, they're happy they've got our attention and when they leave, they're happy to have a new scent to wear. The whole experience is very personal. There's a lot of give and take over the bar."

Not stopping at the olfactory sense, the shop is beautiful and inviting. Definitely conducive to personal service, 225 square feet never looked so good. The owners captured an apothecary look with tall storefront windows, a high ceiling and a paneled mirrored backdrop. Its bamboo floor, gold walls and green ceiling provide a warm, comfortable, zen-like ambience, hence the 'zen' in the Szent & Company.

"Our store forces you to relax," explained Robinson. "A custom scent is not something you can just come in for, grab and go. You need to chill and slow down. We take time with each customer."

The store opened in March after almost a year and a half of meticulous planning. How did the entrepreneurs come up with the innovative concept? It might have been something in the genes that motivated Truesdale, whose father worked in the industry. "I grew up around scents and flavors," she recalled. "My father put the vanilla in Pillsbury cakes and the peppermint in toothpaste."

Friends for ten years and most recently on the same bowling team at the Larchmont Shore Club, she and Robinson were ready to immerse themselves in a new business venture. "Barbara had this great business idea and I've always been a beauty product junkie, so we went ahead," said Robinson, who was involved in floral design at the time.

They flew to San Francisco where they underwent extensive training on blending fragrances and mixing appropriate oils. On the retail end, their painstaking attention to detail is evident in everything, from their attractive apothecary bottles to chic packaging and snappy gift-wrapping.

Although theirs is a high-end operation, the women are determined to offer their products at a reasonable price point. The perfume

oils sell for \$55.00 for one ounce; \$35 for half an ounce; \$20 for a 1/3 oz. travel size. Lily of the valley, gardenia, china musk and pomegranate are just some of the scents available. According to the Szent mixologists, none of their products contains alcohol, so they are softer on the nose and longer lasting. In addition, they suggest that it's best to roll or dab on a scent, instead of applying with an atomizer.

Szent & Company has been attracting clients from all over Westchester, ranging from ten-year-olds to bridal parties. The shop also offers men the opportunity to customize their own after shave lotions. In addition, for those customers who prefer picking up something a bit more effortlessly, there are glycerin, tea and organic hand soaps, K. Hall candles and lavender sachets for babies, adults and dogs.

Truesdale and Robinson are as delighted to offer teens the opportunity to buy affordable birthday gifts for their friends as they are about offering their peers exciting gift options. For instance, clients buying



a gift may leave a bottle half empty, so that the recipient can head over to the shop and choose a scent herself.

Another fun idea is their Ladies' Night Out. For \$30 per person, patrons may enjoy wine and cheese and a fragrance roller with nine of their friends. They also encourage passersby in the neighborhood to drop by and sniff their "scent of the day", which was a lovely blend of aloe, baby powder and lavender on my visit.

It is Robinson and Truesdale's perfect blend of hospitality, a discriminating nose and a good eye for business that make theirs a successful duo. Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Extended hours during the holidays. For more information, call 834-1516.