

CONVERSATION PIECE

BY MONICA ALBERS

WHETHER IT'S AROUND A VINTAGE COFFEE TABLE, A FUNKY LAMP, OR A FAVORITE PIECE OF ARTWORK, A NEW SIOUX FALLS BUSINESS WANTS TO GET YOUR GUESTS TALKING ABOUT YOUR HOME'S SENSE OF STYLE.

Mother **Patience Pickner** and daughter **Chelsea Tracy** have joined forces to become a small business powerhouse downtown at **Conversation Piece**. They're no strangers to the task – Tracy launched **Chelsea's Boutique** nearly nine years ago, and Pickner celebrated 20 years with **Picket Fence Floral** in Chamberlain this past spring. They say the new home décor store on Minnesota Avenue and 11th Street combines each of their areas of expertise.

"I've been doing home décor for 20 years, and it's fun for me to find unusual items, very eclectic items," said Pickner. "Home décor is everywhere, but what you really want to find for your space is something unique and different that starts a conversation."

Tracy and Pickner say inspiring customers also goes beyond just finding products. They say part of what makes Conversation Piece unique is their attention to the store's layout – taking products off of shelves and displaying them in a way that helps customers go further.

"We're helping customers picture [products] in their own home through store design," said Tracy. "You can see 'yes I love that' and this is how you would style it in your home. I think that's really unique about us."

They also plan to continue providing consultations to customers looking to re-decorate and will host various workshops and seminars this fall.

And, as they're guiding customers, they're learning from each other, too.

"I love her style and what she brings to the business, and I'm guessing vice versa," said Pickner about partnering with her daughter. "Especially when you've been in business a long time, you can kind of get stuck... but it helps you step outside the box."

Tracy agrees. She says her mom's years of home décor history and her own experience in marketing and management combine into a partnership that carries two valuable perspectives, drawing in a variety of customers.

Tracy says they nearly doubled their goal on opening weekend in June, and have attracted visitors looking to spruce up everything from offices to dorm rooms to retirement homes, with a variety of price points to match.

"I think that's why we're pulling in such a wide range: because we have two people with a wide age-range buying, so we're really keeping that in mind," she explained. "I'm buying stuff that 20-30-year-olds are going to like... something that's a little more modern... and she's buying the 40-year-old look that's a little more traditional. And it's worked out well in that way."

When I asked how they each manage several businesses and their own families, Tracy says an effective scheduling system is important if you don't want to feel overwhelmed. Both cite reliable staff at each business as essential to being able to step away and focus on other ventures when necessary.

But while finding time for projects across the Sioux Empire, they agreed that one of the major challenges has been pacing themselves as Conversation Piece grows in these early weeks.

"We have to remember to slow down, take this one step at a time. Sometimes it's been a challenge to just put the brakes on and focus on just this part when we want to expand already," said Pickner. "We don't sit still easily."

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“ [HOME DÉCOR] IS MORE ABOUT YOUR PERSONALITY AND YOUR STYLE, RATHER THAN WHAT'S TRENDY. IT'S ALMOST LIKE FASHION FOR YOUR HOUSE.”
– PICKNER

