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Reinventing the Retail Store

By Stewart Lytle, Reporter

AMESBURY – Anna Hardy is moving to an old building on a side street here with the goal of reinventing the retail environment in an era when the Internet appears to be eating many retail stores' lunch.

The British-born entrepreneur has leased 4,400 square feet with plans to offer homeowners, interior decorators, architects and builders with something they can't get on the Internet – custom-designed and built furniture, kitchen and bath cabinetry as well as unique fixtures and art.

When her shop with its 12-foot loading dock opens this spring, she plans to blend wholesale and retail services with a focus on events for her customers. Each of her business customers will be given a Platinum key that allows them to shop every day.

She also plans to produce three-day weekend events for retail customers who want to learn how to do building projects themselves or at least how to talk to an artisan or builder about what they want for their home.

Her space will be finished out to include a full kitchen for food demonstrations and classes in home and decor projects, gardening and plantings and book signings.

Hardy will also offer clients her expertise in the management

of construction projects from renovating one room to a whole house. She said she is an expert on budgeting projects.

Her company, In Home Design Builds, offers a combination of interior design services and construction management.

At 13, Hardy got what she describes as "the bug" for renovating and repurposing things. She took a side chair and repainted it, removing the caning and upholstering the seat.

"Transforming this chair launched a passion and a career in refurbishing furniture and rejuvenating spaces," she wrote on her web site. "For the next 30 years as an artist and designer, she has been dedicated to reimagining, reinventing and 're-finding' pieces."

She still gets excited when she drives along a street and sees a pile of old metal or corrugated metal or a broken down chair. She is a child in a candy store at the Amesbury Industrial Supply. Her imagination is boundless as she talks about converting old stove burners into feet for chairs or adapting metal hooks as stabilizers for tables.

Hardy blames her father for her passion. She was raised in a 500-year-old "derelict" home that her father spent much of his life renovating. Her parents

also owned an antique shop, where her father taught her and her twin brother to repair and restore furniture.

Her brother now renovates old homes and builds custom cabinets. She studied art, textiles, sculpture, painting and design and has lived in Europe, Morocco, New Mexico, Florida and the Caribbean before settling in Exeter, NH.

A person who is happy only when busy and being creative, Hardy bought a 4,000-square-foot building in Exeter for her shop until she realized that the building would not work for her plans. She converted the building into five condominiums that she built herself. And she spent a year searching for the right location for her business.

"When I walked into CI Works, I felt such energy," she said. "What I love is all these resources to collaborate with. It's a village."

She is also excited about Amesbury, which she said has "something" – an entrepreneurial spirit, business-friendly city government and a lot of old mill buildings - that appeals to her as an entrepreneur and a designer.

CI Works encourages the 60-plus manufacturers that rent space in its renovated mill buildings to collaborate with one another. They share



Photo by Stewart Lytle

Anna Hardy with Sir Oakley at Amesbury Industrial Supply

equipment, ideas, experiences and expertise.

Owners Robert O'Brien and Mark Friery plan to introduce Hardy to Chris Harris at Hedgehog Designs, another CI Works tenant, which creates custom furniture out of reclaimed wine and whiskey barrels. They believe the two tenants and other companies can share high-end paint and refinishing equipment.

"I can't wait," Hardy said.

On her web page she writes: "We believe that community stems from an openness to bridge different skill-sets and perspectives, to create an opportunity for learning through collaboration and creative endeavors."

For more information on Hardy and her company, visit www.inhomedesignbuilds.com.

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