



Owners and brothers, Beau & Thompson Lange combine plants, gifts and artwork with furniture and accessories found on their travels around the world.

Photo by Keri Marion

# Homescapes, Carmel: An Oasis For The Soul

BY KERI MARION PHOTOGRAPHY BY BATISTA MOON STUDIOS

The brainchild of brothers Thompson and Beau Lange, *Homescapes, Carmel* combines Thompson's treasure-hunting ability with Beau's green thumb to create an unparalleled shopping experience. Referred to as a "Lifestyle Store," this oasis of home furnishings, plants and more brings style and aesthetics to a new, unexpected level. This endeavor has landed them a very well received place on the Monterey Peninsula and has gained national recognition. With a dedicated clientele, these boys have shown that being adventurous can pay off.

All right, I admit it: I hate to shop. Growing up, shopping was considered a rite of passage. Once you could shop, you were fully declared woman. Honestly, I just wasn't any good at it. I would labor for hours pouring relentlessly over hundreds of items and never seeing anything I thought would fit my personality, my home or

my body. My friends, however, could sniff out coolness like bloodhounds do foxes. Instead of shopping for myself, I'd just borrow from them.

As a woman, my girlhood fear of shopping (and my lack of friends willing to loan me anything) has escalated to the point where my options to acquire interesting things are limited. Commission-based salespeople make the frugal woman in me squirm; the homogeneity of city malls makes the artist in me cringe and strip-malls give my inner-Buddha heartburn. So we're back to square one, I don't like to shop. I hate to feel intimidated by staff. I don't like mass-production and I need spiritual satisfaction. I realize it's a lot to ask for, but I think I found it in Carmel, California (of all places!).

When I was in college, one of the things the faculty would try to push us art students to investigate was the function and dysfunction of an object.

What could we do with this object to surrender its normal function and make it more interesting? Could we use it for another function? Could we disable all functions and make it decorative? Could we abandon decorative and make it simply "be?" *Homescapes, Carmel* has taken this concept of avant-garde and applied it to the home: a home where Duchamp and the Dalai Lama could have tea and seasoned squid.

First, there's the building itself: it used to be a bank. Rather than demolish it and reconfigure it to fit their needs, Thompson and Beau made their idea fit into the structure of the bank and even made use of many of its characteristics. "We wanted to create something comfortable," Thompson said, "Something easy for people to walk into and not think, 'this is intimidating, I don't understand this.'"

*Homescapes, Carmel* kept the bank

vault in all its glory intact and repurposed it for an intimate art gallery. "The bank vault is really fun," Beau said, "When we found this bank for our location, we knew we wanted to incorporate its spirit and characteristics into the store. So we turned the vault into a little gallery featuring local artists and we change the art every couple of months. It's just kind of a neat thing to see that big, heavy door and the nice grey walls. We like it very much."

One of the most interesting things about the product line Homescapes, Carmel offers is its renewal of function. Like the building itself, the Langes and the buyers look for items that once had a different use and turn it into something else. "We will find primitive things," Thompson said, "Benches, mortars, stones, animal troughs, all of these things that had a use, have a spirit, have a life." They transform these things into beds, planters, garden décor and tables. This premise alone makes Homescapes, Carmel stand out from the rest - giving these old objects a new lease on life. "We clean them up, put them in the store in a vignette and show people, 'okay, it was once primitive, but now it's really artistic,'" Thompson said.

Gift items range from \$12 to \$95 with an average of about \$65. The store is stacked with exotic plants, floral arrangements, soaps, lotions and incense. Music floats down from the 35-foot high ceilings, soft and gentle - the world outside no longer exists. When combined, these elements create a gentle and inviting ambiance.

Visually, the store is displayed to inspire the way you might arrange the pieces in your own home, not set up in cookie-cutter fashion or worse, row by row. "Every time we sell something we rearrange the vignette," Thompson said, "Because our concept of setting it up as a home encompasses everything: the leather, the antiques, the reproduction pieces, the gift items, the orchids, the flowers; so when we sell one item, everything has to change. We really concentrate on balance and color because that's what you're going to do at home, so it makes sense to people. One of the things we always hear is 'Oh, this gives me the greatest idea for when I get home.' Ideas are free; we love it when people take ideas from us."

While Homescapes, Carmel is an upscale store, it conveys a very relaxed environment. So relaxed, in fact, that it isn't uncommon to find a lone husband spread out on a sofa, soaking in a little atmosphere while his wife shops. The staff has noted that on occasion, they do hear snores.

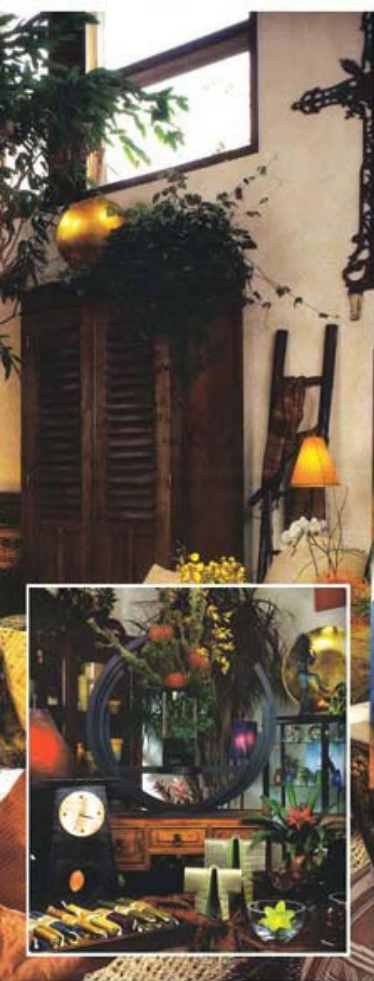
The sales staff is not only approachable but also knowledgeable and helpful. They are more than happy to show you the latest finds the boys have discovered from around the world or even help you find the perfect gift for even the most hard-to-buy-for person on your list. They are creative and sensible and aren't out to squeeze the last dollar from your pocket.

But Gift items aren't the only thing Homescapes, Carmel sells; in fact, quite



LEFT: Artifacts and locally crafted artisan pieces combine to create an exotic décor. TOP: Homescapes, Carmel fills its showrooms with a diverse collection of orchids and large specimen plants, bringing the outside in. INSET: The mix of imports, plants, art and accents creates a home-like, relaxed environment.





the contrary. "Our main product is imported items," Thompson said. "We look for interesting pieces we think fit our clientele. In the warehouses, factories and countries we explore, there are thousands of things to choose from, but we're very specific about what is interesting to us and what our customers want. All of these things have a history, a spirit, and our customers can bring that into their homes if they want."

While each salaried staff member is a salesperson, inventory manager and

human resource associate, they also have special talents:

Edward Chiorazzi is a designer and buyer whose specialty is to create mixed media floral arrangements by taking the old and new and combining them into interesting statements with textures, scents and colors.

Mitsuko Gammon is a buyer and a floral designer who uses her native Japanese culture as a basis for making beautiful, stylish contemporary arrangements with an emphasis on formalism and feng shui.

The gurus of all things green, Kathy Apodaca and her son, Leland Slarrow, order and keep the reasonably priced exotic orchids, succulents and houseplants in perfect condition. They offer a wealth of knowledge on the extensive variety of plants ranging from delicate exotics to hearty houseplants.

Art curator, Sally Higgins, applies her passionate commitment to the Peninsula Art Community as a means to bring in new, exciting local artists that use both formalism and experimentation. She mingles the emerging with the established offering a community of artists and a flexible pricing range.

"We're kind of a family business," Beau said, "Thompson and I are brothers and all of our employees have been with us from the beginning."

About four times a year, the Langes host community events at the store. This might be a night to meet the local artists whose works are on display, to celebrate the store's anniversary or to ring in the season at the annual holiday bash. They always have an incredible spread of catered food and live music. "We make it a priority to hold events for the community often. This serves two purposes; it enables us to introduce or re-introduce customers to our store and its product and it allows us to relax and have some time to socialize with our regular customers," Thompson said.

These brothers aren't stingy either. In an average year they donate thousands of dollars of product to

local charities, as well as participate in community events. The Lange brothers even gave up a little pride and their clothing for the fundraising calendar that benefited Arts Habitat, a projected multicultural community of artists and art organizations being developed on the grounds of our closed army base, Ft. Ord. During the Spring of 2005, Thompson ran the Great Wall of China Marathon as a fundraiser for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing Service Center in Salinas, to help promote deaf awareness, culture and advocacy. They've also sponsored fundraising efforts for the Carmel Art Association and Meals on Wheels. If there's a cause, these guys are on it. As if this weren't enough, they've lent the store floor after-hours to community groups. For example, they let the Monterey County AIDS Project hold an annual auction to raise funds for AIDS research.

This is much more than a place to buy great stuff - it's a small business that has securely nestled itself into the heart of the community. Homescapes, Carmel - in all its efforts - symbolizes what is the backbone of American commerce.

If you already like to shop, it's a paradise. With more than 3,000 items on average to browse, and new shipments arriving every day, a "shopaholic" could spend every day in the store and never get bored. If you have to shop, this is the place to do it. Homescapes, Carmel merges the usual with the unusual, allowing everyone an opportunity to be gently moved into creating a stylish life, even a stereotypical financially exhausted artist such as myself. The skeptical shopper and the excessive shopper both can find a haven at Homescapes, Carmel.

*Homescapes, Carmel, located on the SE Corner of 7th & Dolores in downtown Carmel-by-the-Sea, is open daily from 10 a. m. to 6 p. m. with free and ample parking. Preview their collection at [www.HomescapesCarmel.com](http://www.HomescapesCarmel.com). For more information call 831.624.6499.*

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