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 "You can't have everything"

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# Carissa's of Nashville



It's full speed ahead for this furniture entrepreneur nicknamed "Little Torpedo."

Carissa Meyer Pereira's family aptly christened her the "Little Torpedo" when she was a child growing up in Arkansas. The petite girl's heavy schedule could have sunk a battleship: gymnastics, basketball, cheerleading, volleyball, charity work, etc. She continued her frenzied pace while earning a business degree from Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

So when she moved to Nashville nine years ago, folks back home never doubted Carissa could handle the heavy lifting of a business start-up. After all, they knew the legacy of her family. Her father, Chuck Meyer, became the third generation to operate the family's bakery chain. His daughter, however, set her sights on something far bigger than a breadbasket.

When she opened Carissa's Armoires & Antiques in Nashville's Hillsboro Village, her new neighbors soon discovered for themselves that there's no stopping a speeding torpedo.

## Bigger and Better

"I knew I wanted to be in business," she says about those early days, "but I never thought I'd be doing retail." At one point, she thought she might try gymnastics. In college, she dreamed of working on a cruise ship as well as opening a travel business. "But when I moved to Nashville, I couldn't find an armoire," she says, laughing about this quirk of fate that led to her business. Her adopted city possessed "high-end antiques stores and junky antiques stores, but nothing in-between. This," she says about

Carissa shares a laugh with husband Tim and son Luke. The businesswoman adores Nashville, especially the quirky and artistic Hillsboro Village.

her furniture domain in one of Nashville's coolest neighborhoods, "is in-between."

Gesturing toward the rear of her 5,500-square-foot store, Carissa says, "I started in the back there." Her retail area took up about 1,500 square feet. "This was a Western store that sold boots and leather jackets." People shopping for cowboy couture stumbled upon Carissa's tucked-away corner often by accident. "At first, we were just a lucky find," she says.

At age 25, she was too young to land bank loans, so the entrepreneur used credit cards and a beat-up pickup and rental trucks to haul her inventory and get her tiny business off the ground.

"I really couldn't afford shipping, so I would drive U-Hauls all over the South" to pick up merchandise, she recalls. Friends

The eclectic shop offers beautiful accents, such as these candle-filled sugar molds.



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Carissa goes over business details with store manager Margi Hargrove.

from church and her Hillsboro Village neighbors helped. "I didn't know what I was doing," she confesses. "I didn't even know how to tag my inventory." She asked a lot of questions, took a lot of notes, and learned by doing. When the cowboy store rode off into the sunset, Carissa leaped at leasing the entire space.

### More Than Antiques and Armoires

"We're known for armoires," she says, referring both to antiques and reproductions. The large pieces range from \$700 to \$5,000, with most averaging \$1,500. Carissa designs many of the armoire reproductions herself, fulfilling customers' requests for furniture that will accommodate computers, big-screen televisions, or even wine collections.

"We have about 150 small boutique lines," she continues. "I go to market and pick what I like. I don't like froufrou, dainty, small furniture that's not livable." The store also carries modestly priced tables; upholstered and slip-covered furnishings; lighting; rugs; art; flower arrangements; and accessories such as pillows, throws, boxes, and candles.

She imports from all over the world. The store features finds from China, Mexico, Turkey, India, Indonesia, and France. Carissa also works with a nearby French-antiques dealer. "I go to his warehouse and hand-pick from everything that he's bought," she explains.

Carissa makes sure the atmosphere of the store stays comfortable. Photographs of her family—husband Tim, a real estate developer, and their two children—as well as pictures of employees' families fill picture frames in store displays. Coffee for grown-ups and candy for children make browsing a relaxing experience, with background music ranging from country to Motown.

### Each Day a Moving Target

"Every day is different. It's wild. It's fun, though," says the un-sinkable Carissa. She and the staff might spend the day redecorating, especially working on the oft-changed window

*At the sacred place,  
my love and I  
exchange our vows.  
We drink from  
this one vessel,  
as we will share  
one cup of life.*



*Though we shatter  
the vessel  
to seal our vows,  
it is not destroyed.  
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changes form,  
and moves beyond us,  
may it live forever  
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displays that attract a steady stream of foot traffic. In fact, a local publication cited Carissa's store as Nashville's best place to window-shop.

A celebrity might drop in. The retailer rattles off names of a handful of recent visitors: Martina McBride, the Dixie Chicks, LeAnn Rimes, Kenny Chesney, Amy Grant and Vince Gill, and Phil Vassar. "You name them, and they've probably been in here," Carissa says. "We just treat the celebrities like normal people. We let them shop, and we don't fawn over them."

She may not fuss over the famous, but this young woman with the large personality certainly knows how to zero in on making all of her customers feel special.

NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON

**Carissa's Armoires and Antiques:**  
1801 21st Avenue South,  
Nashville, TN 37212; (615)  
292-6994 or [www.carissasarmoires.com](http://www.carissasarmoires.com).

"Nashville is such a friendly city with so much beauty and culture, and it's such a melting pot of people," says Carissa.



## Perfect Site

"I wasn't looking for a high-end center," says Carissa Meyer Pereira about the location of her furniture store. Instead, she searched for an area where all types of people hung out. "I was looking for a place where anybody could come and feel comfortable," she explains. She found just that near the Pancake Pantry and The Belcourt Theatre in Hillsboro Village. "It's right in the heart of town," she says. "This is truly the nucleus of where things are happening."

Only a couple of drawbacks dimmed Carissa's enthusiasm. Her store boasts neither a warehouse nor an unloading area. "People thought I was crazy to set up shop here," she admits. Instead, trucks pull directly to the front door. "We've had a shipment of 35 armoires lined up out front that wrapped around the side of our building," she says. "It was hysterical. We have to wing it and pray for good weather."

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