

Winsome Wisteria

Traveling to exotic locales, this young Dallas couple finds great treasures for their catalog customers.

A dusty warehouse in India. A hidden hotel in Vietnam. A bustling flea market in Paris. Andrew and Shannon Newsom comb the world, sniffing out home and garden decor items for their catalog customers. Such an exotic pastime might make the Newsoms seem a bit James Bondish—until you learn about their everyday life back in Dallas. It doesn't get any more down-to-earth than this real-deal couple—whether it's changing diapers, handling household problems, or pitching in to pack products when a container shipment comes in late.

Sure, Wisteria, their catalog business, provides some sophisticated perks. But customers receiving the publication find the couple's witty, warm tidbits about their day-to-day life as enticing as the storied items.

Opposites Attract

Take a tour of their home, and you get a snapshot of the couple's differing personalities. Even with two young children (Cooper and Susanna), Shannon, organized and focused, managed to square away their new house in a week's time.

Andrew's spontaneity, enthusiasm, and varied interests show up in their unfinished backyard. Bright blue tarps cover to-be-continued projects.

So how did such disparate personalities get together? "We were both Southerners freezing to death in Boston," says Shannon, laughing.

Bean Town Bonus

"I was working on a documentary film about a [Harvard] child psychologist," explains Andrew, an Atlanta native. Shannon, a Houston native, was pursuing a graduate degree in education from Harvard. After they left Boston to pursue further studies, the couple continued a long-distance relationship.

When the two married, they wanted to combine their love of travel with their new interest in home and garden decor, so they came up with Wisteria. Shannon and Andrew complement each other when the subject concerns their five-year-old catalog company.



Andrew and Shannon, with daughter Susanna and son Cooper, mix Wisteria products with antique finds in their Dallas home.

Armchair Journey

Flipping through a Wisteria catalog is a bit like looking through a beautifully exotic travel log. After immersing yourself, you feel as if you've roamed French markets, bargained with Asian vendors, and bartered with Bali artists. Andrew and a designer in San Antonio write small stories to accompany each item.

"We are a story-bound culture," says Andrew. "Part of what we are



above, left: Wisteria plans to produce six issues in 2006. "Every catalog is important," says Andrew about the fledgling company, "and every catalog is a roll of the dice." above, right: With help from Masami Overstreet and John McKenzie, Shannon (center) adds finishing touches to a tablescape. The Newsoms often use their own home for Wisteria photographs.

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A festive beaded crown from Nigeria warrants this pithy description: "These hats work well as centerpieces, and are, at our house, appropriate raiment for Birthday Boys—for a little while. We calculate there are 50,000 beads on the one we have, and it gets heavy fast."

trying to do in the catalog is tell the story behind the product." There's no fiction involved. "I'm not putting any product in the book I don't like," he adds.

Traveling Man and Busy Mom

To find those special products, Andrew travels overseas 4 to 5 times a year at 10- to 14-day intervals. "For two weeks, I might go to five countries and literally travel around the world," says Andrew. "But it is a tenth of the job that Shannon has at home with these two kids." Since the children were born, Shannon stays home but plans on traveling again once they're older. The couple also wants to take the children on their treks. The Newsoms' goal is to pass along their views of the world to their children—and their customers.

We Are the World

"Since we began going to just about everywhere, looking for things to put in Wisteria, we've found something nice," reads a passage in the catalog. "It is a happy world. The same planet that we had heard and read was such a mess turned out to be pretty sweet. People of whom we might have been wary have proven to be friends."

"We're a catalog business—we have to sell products," says Andrew. "But we also want to be more than a catalog. We want it to have all the good things that are happening. We want to say, 'Hey, this is an amazing world.'" NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON

For more information: Call 1-800-767-5490, or visit www.wisteria.com.