

# Elizabeth Hoerske: Victoriana meets the 21st Century

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Elizabeth Hoerske's sensibilities are those of an earlier era, but her business sense is definitely 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Germantown residents may remember Hoerske's gift shop, Rose Hart Gifts, which was located in the Market Square shopping area from 1993 to 2006.

Hoerske's original shop, The Sewing Room, was started in 1985, but when she expanded her inventory to gift items, she moved those and her vintage dresses into what became Rose Hart Gifts.

Both shops were fulfillments of Hoerske's dream to become an artist and create beautiful things after 20 years of working as an oncology nurse. But the next phase of Hoerske's life required that she shut the door to an actual storefront and open another to virtual retail.

Before she'd retired from brick and mortar retail, she'd already started building a Web site version of Rose Hart Gifts. Then an addition to her family prompted her to take the next step.

"I wanted to spend more time with my grandbaby and I was actually bringing him to work with me as an infant. I had a white cast-iron antique reproduction cradle in the shop and I actually placed Noah in it to sleep. I remember a customer once came up to me and said, 'That baby doll in the cradle looks so real.'"

"I said, 'He *is* real!'"

"The final decision to close came when someone wanted to rent my building," she continued. "It was like God was trying to tell me something."

Today Hoerske sells her wares on both the Web site and from a booth in the Sheffield Antique Mall in Collierville. And business is booming.

Hoerske's wares include vintage lace dresses she restores herself and then sells for graduations and weddings. Her love of antique lace started when she was a teenager and she's been collecting pieces ever since.

Another handmade item that is displayed in her booth in Collierville is a teddy bear she made from an antique pattern. Hoerske also sells collectible Limoge boxes, and displays one that was painted just for her by artist friend Kim McCool.

The image on the box is one of her Himalayan cats, another attraction at Hoerske's physical shop.

Hoerske also sells Lady Primrose toiletries, decorative key finders and NAO collectible figurines by Lladro. But her newest line of products is a handmade item.

Hoerske sells oversized powder puffs made from Australian Merino wool sheepskin. The puffs are functional and durable, but if you prefer, you can just display them on your dresser to "look prissy," Hoerske says.

Shortly before Hoerske closed her shop in 2003, she was recognized as one of "50 Women Who Make a Difference in Memphis" by Memphis Woman magazine.

She started a project helping restore family heirlooms (antique linens and dolls) for victims of Hurricane Katrina. "For some of these people, the heirlooms were all they had left in life," she said.

Hoerske has also made a difference by her example as a business person who is passionate about her vintage wares and yet embraces a new technology to show them to the world.

"In today's market you have to have multiple streams of income," she says. "Every business should have a Web site today."