

Home Accents Today

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Chesapeake Chic

Bountiful brings elegance
to the Eastern Shore

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Eastern Shore Elegance

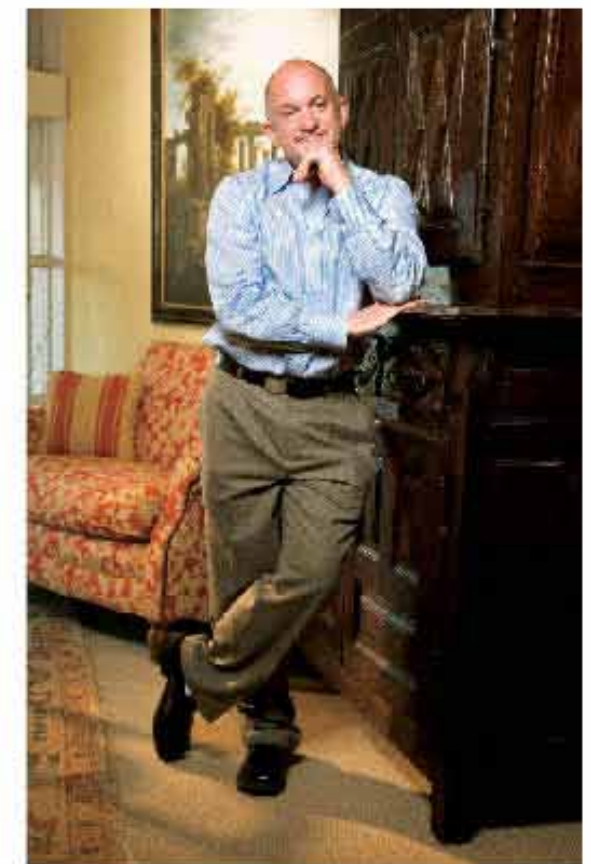
James Merida offers a unique blend of Chesapeake chic, country charm and Old World sophistication in his Bountiful bayside shop

Susan Dickenson
Photography By Mike Morgan
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When weary Washingtonians and burned-out Baltimoreans load up the car for a little weekend rest and relaxation, many head for Maryland's Eastern Shore where miles of shoreline, meandering creeks and rivers, hidden inlets and pastoral countryside offer endless opportunities for recreation and retreat. The rural beauty and small town sophistication found throughout the shore's nine counties have, in recent



Jamie Merida's decision to open Bountiful in Easton, Md., a town he describes as "city-sophistication without the downside" grew from a desire to settle down in one place for awhile. The store opened first as a high-end antiques shop, added a gift shop in 2000, and expanded to its current size of 18,000 square feet in October 2006.





years, swelled population numbers as empty nesters and small business owners have taken up residence in renovated farmhouses, historic homes and new waterfront developments.

The slower pace and quality of life are what lured Jamie Merida to the area. Merida is the owner of Bountiful, an 18,000-sq.-ft. home furnishings, gifts and design gallery located in the historic town of Easton. Easton, known for its tree-lined streets and historic buildings such as the Tidewater Inn, one of Merida's commercial design clients, is also famous for its annual Waterfowl Festival, a wildlife art exposition featuring the work of hundreds of artists.

Merida, who grew up in Louisville, Ky., came to know Maryland while he was training as a classical pianist at Baltimore's Peabody Institute of Music in the mid '80s. After earning his degree, he spent a number of years working with his father, an arts and antiques dealer. Eventually, he tired of the extensive travel to East Coast antiques shows and decided to settle in one place for awhile.

That brought him to Easton where, in 1997, he first opened Bountiful as a small high-end antiques shop. "We purchased from local estates and imported French and English antiques from Europe and South America," Merida said. A small gift shop was added in 2000 "to fill a need in Easton." From there he added upholstery and case goods and expanded from 2,000 to 7,000 square feet.

Driven by customer requests, Merida added interior design services and eventually grew Bountiful into a

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The floor is refreshed with an ever-changing selection of traditional, coastal, English Country and French Country gifts, furnishings and accessories. In recent years, with the addition of three interior designers, a flooring department and an expanding fabric and wallpaper library, Bountiful has earned a reputation as a one-stop shop for all interior design needs.



Merida merchandises the inventory in specialized "stores within a store" to increase Bountiful's appeal as a destination location for the area's second homeowners, retirees and weekend visitors. Chesapeake and coastal influences are depicted in crab, waterfowl and sailboat motifs and vintage nautical posters and signage.



business that, in 2007, took in \$2.6 million in revenues, nearly double the number from two years before.

He credits much of the store's success to a supportive customer base of upper-income empty nesters and second homeowners — the weekend residents from Washington, Baltimore and Philadelphia who shop Bountiful's extensive selection of coastal, traditional, English Country and French Country accessories, furniture,

tabletop, lighting, wall decor, gifts and antiques. Some are mixing with pieces from their earlier lives, others want everything new. The look is understated luxury, high-end finishes, high-technology, nothing flashy or showy. Merida describes it as "Long Island Stanford White ... cedar shingles, English or French countryside."

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with the addition of three interior designers, a flooring department and an expanding fabric and wallpaper library, Bountiful has earned a reputation as a one-stop shop for all interior design needs. Merida also deserves credit for his ability to identify and respond to a market opportunity with new products and services, and for knowing when it's time to pull back. Such was the case for the second store location he opened in 2001 in Naples, Fla., when the Florida real estate market was booming and where several of his customers had winter homes. When things began to turn south, Merida headed back North.

"We closed the Naples store in 2007 as the market began to soften in Florida and began to focus on mak-

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ing the Easton store a destination location,” he said. “We did this partially by creating several stores-within-a-store. For example, The Gardens at Bountiful captures the market for silk floral, pre-made arrangements, fountains, small outdoor items and accessories. Bling at Bountiful is a small boutique of designer-look jewelry and handbags. The Library is merchandised with cool coffee table books, cookbooks and books that you don’t find in other stores. The ‘stores’ change almost as often as the merchandise. It keeps the whole store looking fresh and continually provides new surprises for our customers.”

He also hired three interior designers and added a flooring department. “We have tried to make our store a one-stop location for all interior design needs — with designers on staff, the largest and most complete fabric and wallpaper library in the area, a complete selection of carpet, tile and flooring, and a large selection of case goods and upholstery available for immediate delivery and special order.”

Merida merchandises the inventory in specialized “stores within a store” to increase Bountiful’s appeal as a destination location for the area’s second homeowners, retirees and weekend visitors. Chesapeake and coastal influences are depicted in crab, waterfowl and sailboat motifs and vintage nautical posters and signage. Sales are tracking a little ahead of this time last year, and Merida said the expanded design component should help cover any slowdowns. But he’s still thinking ahead. “Keeping the business profitable as the economic picture has changed in the last six months and anticipating what the retail environment will be like in 2009 are, of course, significant challenges,” he said. “I have to make sure that I can adapt to what comes my way so that the business can not only survive but thrive.”

One thing that’s sure to continue is the exceptional customer service. “We have a try-before-you-buy policy that allows customers to take items on approval or we will deliver large pieces of furniture for them to try in their space,” Merida said. The store offers custom gift-wrapping in signature toile-patterned bags and strives to provide the same level of high quality assistance for each purchase, no matter how big or small. “We also use fun and inventive merchandising and are constantly looking for new, interesting gifts and accessories that you can’t find in other stores.”

Advertising is done through local print media. The Bountiful Web site is updated monthly, and the store sends out three or four newsletters a year. Merida also participates in and hosts fund-raising events, including his annual Holiday Kick-Off which benefits a local charity and has become a must-do event for hundreds of people in the community. “The store is decorated from the rafters to the farthest corners with over four tons of holiday decorations for purchase,” he said.

Spot lighting is used to feature themed vignettes, samples of room fragrance products and candles scent the air, and the background music CDs mixed exclusively for Bountiful are available for purchase. And does the classically-trained pianist ever tickle the ivories for his customers? “Once in a blue moon. We have pianos in the store on occasion, usually around the holidays, and I’ll play once in awhile.”

Bountiful

Store opened 1997

Approx. size in square feet 18,000

2007 sales \$2.6 million

Number of employees 15

Accents as a percentage of total store sales 45%

Key vendors Chelsea House, Charles Sadek, Bradburn Gallery, Global Views, Hooker, Sarreid, Chatham Crossing, Peking Handicraft, Raz Imports, Castilian, Primitive Artisans, Aldik, Paragon, Majestic Mirror, Sterling Industries, Currey & Company, Sedgefield by Adams, East Enterprises, Robert Abbey, Wesley Hall, Vanguard, E.J. Victor, Artistica

Average retail price points Accessories, \$10 to \$1,500; lighting, \$100 to \$4,500; tabletop, \$5 to \$1,000; garden, \$5 to \$400; wall decor, \$75 to \$5,000; case goods, \$250 to \$20,000; upholstery, \$500 to \$10,000

What trade shows and markets do you attend? High Point, New York, Atlanta, Maison & Objet

How do you get rid of slow-moving merchandise? Once in a Blue Moon Sale in late summer with tents in the parking lot, two days only, all items reduced 50% or more.

Web site bountifuldecor.com