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Ricardo Thomas / The Detroit News

Fuchsia Frog manager Alicia Geier, left, and Meg Ferron, store owner, help Carrie Doelle, who is shopping for her baby's room.

Birmingham shop brims with unique wares, gifts

Fuchsia Frog offers exclusive items such as French scented candles, diaper bags for men.

By Mark Hicks / The Detroit News

BIRMINGHAM -- On a sweltering Friday afternoon, Eva Dodds immersed herself in French scented candles, delicate glassware and embroidered pillows.

The 35-year-old teacher from Birmingham breezed through The Fuchsia Frog shop, passing floral aprons, decorative electrical cord covers and glistening statuettes before selecting her sought-after item: a yellow Vineyard Vines necktie in a Labrador print for a friend.

"I can find everything here," Dodds said, clutching a rose-tinted shopping bag. "It's unique."

Dodds is one of many customers who have sampled exclusive, jaw-dropping wares at The Fuchsia Frog, a specialty gift store that opened in May 2003.

The shop -- which blends the tailored accents of a boutique, gift shop and upscale retailer -- offers more than 20,000 luxury items

The Fuchsia Frog

Where: 320 E. Maple Road, Birmingham

Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday; noon to 4 p.m. Sunday

For information: Call (248) 203-6550 or go to thefuchsiafrog.com

Source: *Detroit News* research

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ranging from ladies' golf gloves to textured cocktail napkins and furry, multicolored stuffed animals.

The Fuchsia Frog is the rainbow-toned brainchild of Meg Ferron, 31, of Bloomfield Township. Ferron, who grew up in Birmingham, spent five years in Chicago after graduating from Bucknell University in Pennsylvania. Following a stint as owner of a gourmet cookie company, Ferron envisioned a hometown boutique brimming with floral prints, European wares and charming merchandise not found anywhere else.

Ferron began venturing on buying trips to cities such as New York, Chicago and Atlanta, acquiring products from vendors such as Vineyard Vines, a New York-based designer tie company, and The Hamptons Collections, an international clothier.

The name Fuchsia Frog -- an homage to alliteration in poetry and left-of-center art -- personifies the "unique, practical gifts" regulars crave, Ferron said. "I wanted to be creative. I wanted to fill a void."

The shop carries specialized handmade signs from Birmingham native artist Denise Copp and Diaper Dudes, portable diaper bags for men. A baby section features a children's fabric play teepee; another display includes porcelain dog-portrait plates by artist Edward Russell.

The store's fastest-selling item: Seda scented candles, imported from France. Stocked selections exude enticing fragrances, including one reminiscent of a spring tulip bouquet and others retaining a tangerine scent.

Stocking up on such luxuries fulfills The Fuchsia Frog's mission of "having something for everyone," said manager Alicia Geier. "Shopping is supposed to be enjoyable."

Today, more than 11,000 customers traipse the 2,400-square-foot space for gifts, necessities and special treats such as shell-shaped measuring tape, garden statuettes, frog-ribbon tassels and floral mini-magnifying glasses.

One such visitor is Trisha Forman, 36, a business process manager from Birmingham, who recently visited the "great little shop" to gather a gift basket for a friend.

"I always find something unique here," she said, gazing at a green-and-violet ball gown sachet. "Whenever I buy something and take it out, someone always asks, 'Where did you get that?' It's not run-of-the-mill."

With its unusual concept, the shop has "reinvigorated" the downtown area, said John Heiney, executive director of the Birmingham Principal Shopping District, which monitors nearly 300 downtown businesses. "This environment fosters entrepreneurs who want to try a new concept," Heiney said. "Now, we have stores that are one of a kind."

The Fuchsia Frog is just of many new uniquely themed businesses. While the overall number of store startups has decreased in the past decade, female-owned beginning retailers continue to sprout statewide, said Rob Fowler, president and CEO of the Small Business Association of Michigan, which represents more than 5,000 businesses.

Those launching specialty or niche shops such as The Fuchsia Frog, Fowler said, usually thrive in tourist-heavy areas or regions rich in "chic reputation" and other successful boutiques. "They must be inventive on how to draw the market."

The Fuchsia Frog draws many curio-seeking customers. Jennifer Hannett discovered a deep-blue and turquoise Aid Through Trade beaded necklace during a recent browsing excursion at the shop. "It's exquisite," said Hannett, 30, a marketing coordinator from Birmingham. "This is a neat store."

Cindy Raick, 32, a nurse from Birmingham, says she frequents the shop every few months. During her buying trips, she has purchased scented candles, towels and pillows for friends.

"It's fun and bright and cheerful," Raick said, scanning the shop's aisles. "Everything is unique. I always find great gift ideas."

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