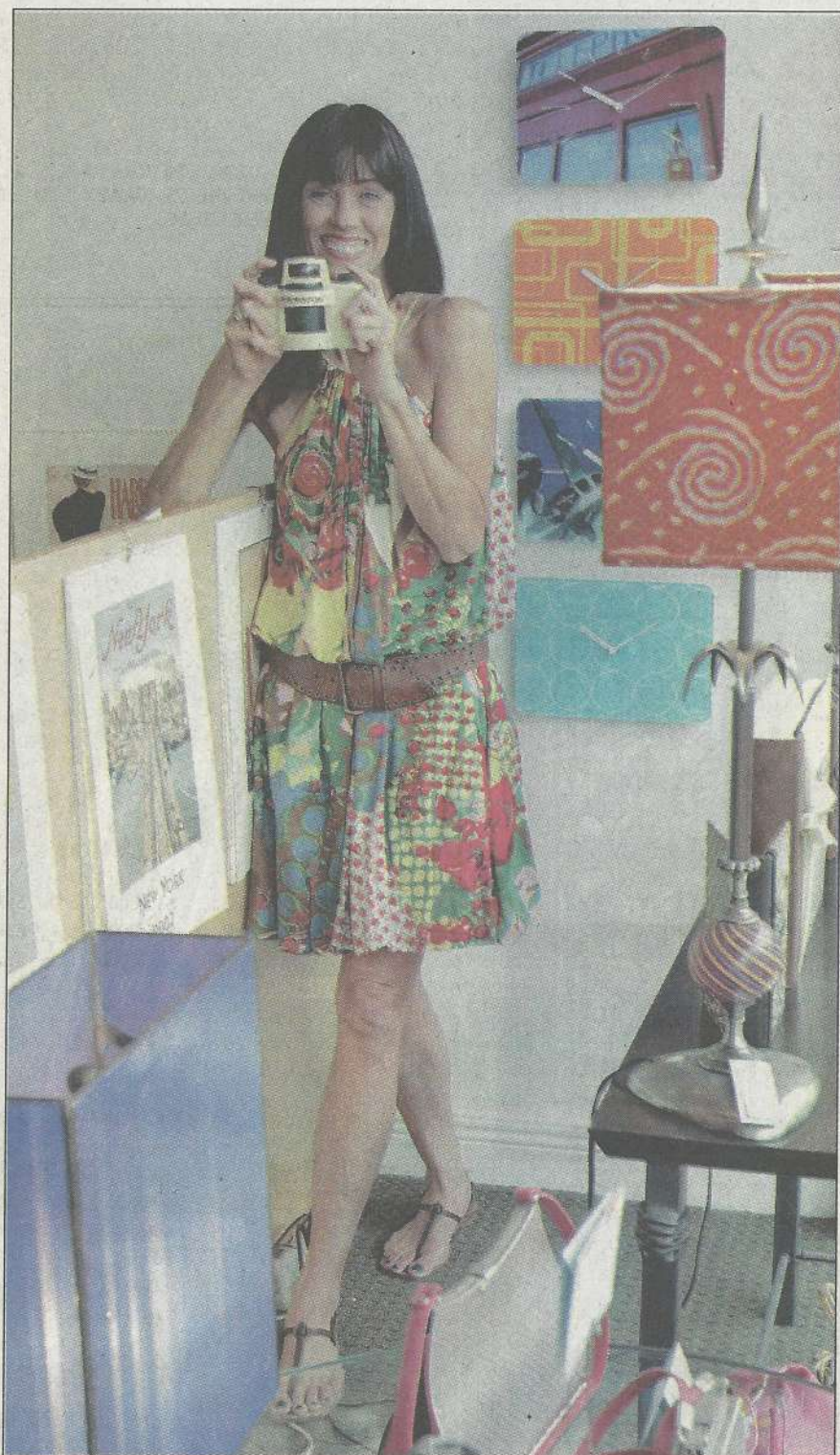


Color your world



PHOTOS BY RONNA GRADUS/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

SAY HELIUM: Gail Langford, store manager, poses with a Horizon Camera by Lomographi (\$350). Other cameras there start at \$30. Orange lamp is from New Yorker Dez Ryan (\$1,100). Glass wall clocks by J-Me from London sell for \$60.

BY SAXON HENRY

saxonhenry@aol.com

Visiting Helium is like going up, up and away in a colorful balloon. The shop is filled with bright decorative items, especially fine art glass in a spectrum of rich hues.

"I'm attracted to vibrant colors," says owner Alfie Feola, who opened Helium in 1991. "People respond to color, especially in Miami Beach because when people think about Miami Beach, they think of bright colors."

His inspiration for Helium was a store on New York's Madison Avenue called LS Collection. "The things they sold were beautiful but extremely expensive, and they had very limited merchandise," he says, "so I wanted to start with some of those very fine products and mix them with other fun, not-so-serious items."

This versatility and his relationships with talented artisans have made Helium a Miami Beach mainstay. During the 15 years since Feola opened the store, he has nurtured a growing selection of creative individuals who exhibit fine craftsmanship.

"It's very important to continually find fresh products," Feola says. "We work with our artists to keep a stream of new items coming into the shop."

Feola finds artists in a variety of ways. "Sometimes I find them at trade shows, but there have been times when I found a group of artists selling their work in fields," he says. "It happened in New Orleans one year when I was attending the jazz festival there."

Many of these talented artisans have become his friends, including Jean Luc Comperat and Minouche Waring. "They are incredibly creative, and they have been producing beautiful work for me for years," he says.

The variety of glass items produced by Comperat and Waring's company, Eleven Seventy-Eight Designs, is varied and stylish. Decorative glass boxes, which range from \$220 to \$360; colorful lamps with glass shades, which top out at \$1,500; picture frames and slumped fused glass platters are among their exquisite offerings. "Their work is like jewelry, it's so detailed," says Feola.

Works by Robin Mix, whose intricately patterned glass vases sell for \$595 to \$1,250; Richard Jones; and Karin Noyes, who produces painterly clay bowls, are also on Feola's shelves. And Feola stocks a variety of inexpensive gift items, such as decorative soaps. Among the store's most recent acquisitions are colorful glass wall clocks made in London.

"I'm drawn to functional art," explains Feola. "But as you see, we're not sacrificing beauty to usability."

Florida Finds is a weekly feature about purveyors of home products in South Florida. To suggest stores, craftspersons or manufacturers to profile, e-mail newhomes@miamiherald.com.