

Published April 22nd, 2015

From Online to Brick and Mortar

By Sophie Braccini



Irene Chen-Glenby with, from left, Marissa Kjartansson and Alex Bouza Photo Sophie Braccini

Irene Chen-Glenby says she feels a sense of pride when she looks around her boutique, Parker Thatch. She and her husband, Matthew Glenby, recently opened the store at 19-D Orinda Way in the Hilton House Shopping Center. The Lafayette couple created the high-end personalized bag and accessory business 12 years ago, starting by selling personalized stationery online under the name iomoi.com. The Parker Thatch boutique is their first brick and mortar retail store where they can artistically display their collections.

"People often asked if they could see and touch the products," said Chen-Glenby. "What people do with our products is very personal, so it is nice to interact in person to see their reaction."

Chen-Glenby grew up in Lafayette. After college and starting her career in New York, she convinced her Canadian husband to move back to California to raise their family and start a business.

"All our products are custom-made," said Chen-Glenby, showing canvas and leather bags of all sizes and styles that clients can embellish with the prints and lettering of their choice. The relatively small store is filled with gift ideas.

The real magic of Parker Thatch - the combined first names of the owners' two children - happens just behind the Orinda storefront. At the back of the small store, you enter a space 10 times larger, full of computers, printers and shelves of raw materials. "We do everything ourselves," explained Chen-Glenby. Her husband's background is in graphic design and business; Chen-Glenby worked in product development and fashion. Together they develop three collections a year - one for spring, one for fall, and one for the holidays. "It's always a mixture of patterns and icons," she said. "Our esthetic is traditional with a modern twist."

A majority of Parker Thatch products are gifts, celebrating things, said Chen-Glenby. One mother bought "a little something" for her daughter who was feeling blue, a couple ordered a personalized baby bag for their first born, others purchased graduation gifts. "Whether they order online or in the store, what touches us most about our customers is their thoughtfulness," she said.

The bags, made of high-quality heavyweight canvas and leather, are not cheap. A gold personalized leather clutch with a tassel costs nearly \$200. But Parker Thatch also offers personalized items such as Lucite trays, stationery, eye masks and paperweights starting at \$25.

One client from San Jose recently sat with Marissa Kjartansson, one of the associates, designing a canvas bag as a wedding gift. "They are going to Maui for their honeymoon," the customer said. "I want to offer them something that they will use there, keep, and will remind them of their trip." She chose a large canvas bag with leather handles and stripes on the front and back. "Can we use a coral color?" she asked, referring to the couple's wedding colors. She also added their initials on the bag, and inside, a very personal message printed on a canvas square attached to the bag.

The Parker Thatch brand has been regularly featured in fashion magazines, and the company has many celebrity clients. "Julia Roberts did all her stationery with us," noted Chen-Glenby, adding that Kate and Andy Spade have been incredible friends and mentors for her husband and herself. "They are kind and generous with their ideas and thoughts," she said.

People can choose among hundreds of graphics Chen-Glenby and her husband have created

and add any text they want. Many of the whimsical, fun and elegant designs are displayed on the boutique's wall. "I love bright colors," Chen-Glenby said. "We want to be a happy product that everybody uses."

Chen-Glenby and her husband felt they needed to open a boutique in their beloved Lamorinda. "For us, being here is a way to contribute to the community we have chosen," she said.

Parker Thatch

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