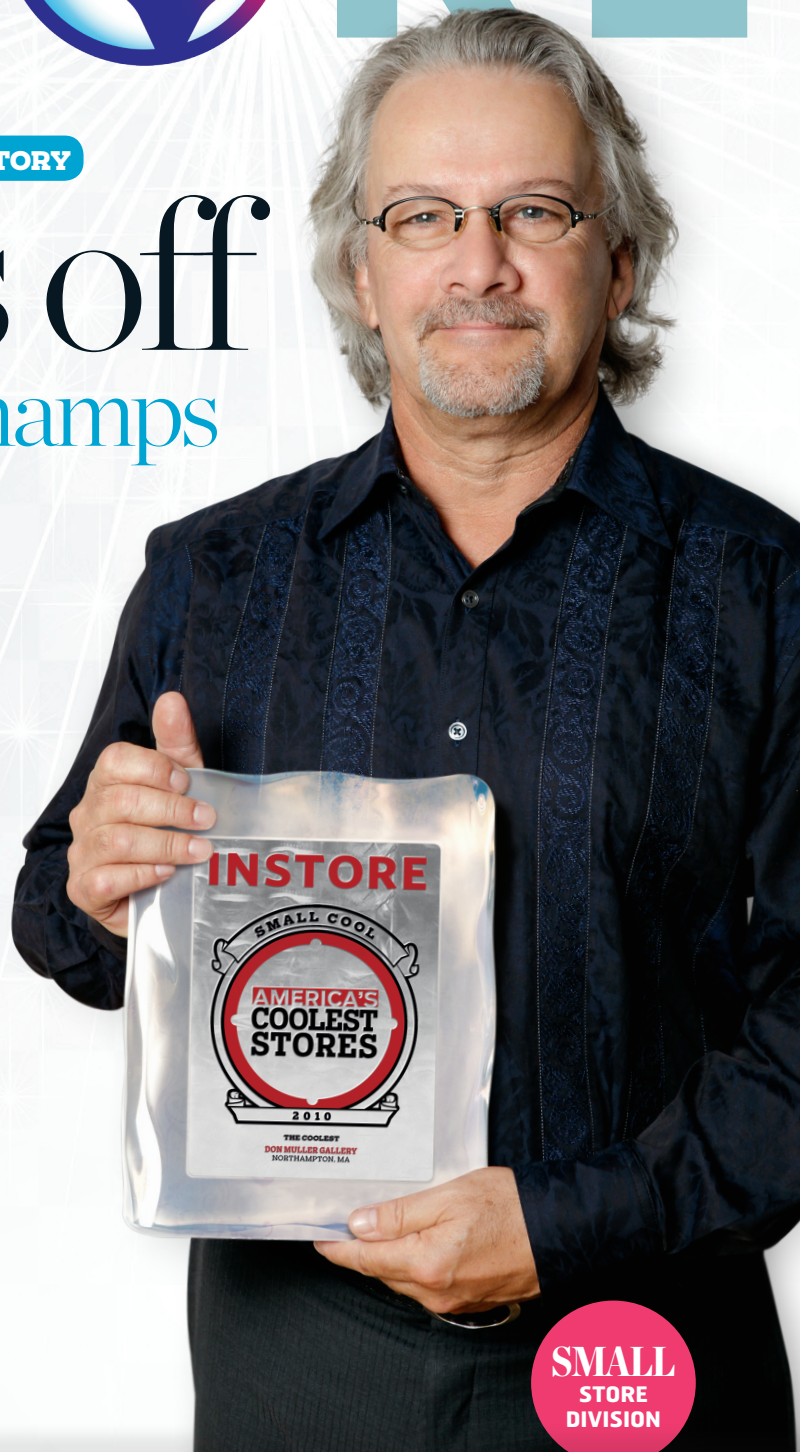


INSTORE



THE BIG STORY

Hats off to the Champs



NEW ARRIVALS
MIXED MATERIALS

CATEGORY FOCUS
SHOPPING BAGS



← 1ST PLACE: **o.c. tanner**

2ND PLACE → **cornell's**

3RD PLACE → **lily & co.**

4TH PLACE → **jackie abraham**

5TH PLACE → **lee michaels**



↑ 1ST PLACE: **don muller**

2ND PLACE → **alara**

3RD PLACE → **churchill**

4TH PLACE → **goldworks**

5TH PLACE → **e.e. robbins**



**quick
facts**
→

ALARA, Bozeman, MT → **URL:** www.alarajewelry.com | **OWNER:** Babs Noelle | **FOUNDED:** 2004 | **STORE AREA:** 1,400 square feet | **EMPLOYEES:** 5 | **SLOGAN:** "Dang, we're good." | **TOP DESIGNERS:** Babs Noelle, Sarah Graham, mono, GelinAbaci, Toby Pomeroy, Tezer, Pascal Lacroix, Alex Sepkus, Nuria Ruiz, Zoltan David, Kalahari Diamonds.

alara jewelry

BY EILEEN MCCLELLAND

For owner Babs Noelle, **being different** comes naturally.

“

I DIDN'T REALIZE – IN THE WORLD OF JEWELRY STORES – HOW DIFFERENT WHAT I DO IS, because I'm in my little bubble,” Noelle says. “I started realizing that maybe this is a little more unusual than I thought.”

Before Noelle found her niche as a jewelry designer and creative retailer, she earned bachelor degrees in biochemical engineering, classics and English. She seriously considered becoming a concert violinist and pursued the hobby of competitive Cajun dancer.

Among her priorities as a jewelry store owner are artful displays, products in a broad price range that aren't commodities and education that is neither boring nor condescending. She designs her own jewelry and cultivates the work of other creative designers.

The backdrop for her creativity is a light and airy loft-style store with an interior brick wall, and vertical island showcases that encourage a partnership between salesperson and shopper. Above all, her sense of humor is always clearly on display.

Things are good in Bozeman (“Our tourism influx is stronger than it's ever been,” she reports) and her custom-design individuality has led to the development of a national following she will pursue this year with development of an e-commerce site.





■ A charitable donation buys a photo-op with a Christmas elf.



■ Unique displays are accompanied by a designer bio card.



■ Above cases hang poster-size versions of the store's print ads.

try this



→ **take your packaging out of the box** "You have to spend money on packaging anyway. It wouldn't be much of an investment to get packaging that's going to get people to say, 'What a cool box! What a cool bag!' We have three tiers of packaging that correspond to the price levels of the jewelry."

■ Noelle kept rearranging cases "until it just felt right."



5 cool things

see her on the 10 o'clock news

1 Noelle teamed up with the local downtown association and five other downtown businesses, to produce two slick, high profile TV commercials to air during the 10 o'clock news, a time slot that few small local businesses can usually afford. Because the downtown association is nonprofit, they were able to get a reduced rate, which was split six ways. "During the worst of the recession, the last

thing we wanted was to have our historic downtown area suffer and turn into a ghost downtown. As long as our downtown stays vital, I'm going to do fine."

2 seizing the bridal market

In 2009 Noelle announced that she is the bridal specialist in her market. She not only captured a great deal of market share locally by promoting the store that way, she also began to get national business through word of mouth. "So many people come here for destination weddings, so it's just blossomed." She also has developed a technique for doing custom and bridal work by phone and e-mail, allowing out-of-town customers to log onto her computer while she is designing their jewelry. "This has led to a



■ Hand hewn beams hold conventional displays.

Art is not a handicraft, it is the transmission of feeling the artist
--Leo Tolstoy

shoptalk

alaholic \a-la-ra-HO-lic\ **noun. 1. our best customers.** “We have business cards printed up that look just like ours, but with a line for the customer to fill in their name, and their title is printed on them as ‘alaholic.’ If someone brings in one of these cards with someone else’s name on it, the alaholic on the card gets a 10 percent in-store credit.”

touron \TOU-ron\
noun. 1. moron tourist Tourists of such a nature that they leave their manners and common sense at home. Tourons are a particular class of tourist, not tourists as a whole.

canardly diamonds \CAN-ar-dly DI-a-monds\
noun. You can hardly see ’em.

second wave of custom work, an unexpected effect of the whole bridal thing.” Finally, she added bridal designers to her roster.

an open-door policy

3 Noelle overcomes threshold resistance (and lets in fresh air) by leaving Alara’s door open. Chica, a 70-pound golden-doodle, lounges in the threshold, extending an automatic invitation to reach in and pet her. “People are coming in and throwing down a couple thousand dollars just because they wanted to pet my dog,” Noelle says. “It’s a huge ice-breaker. People who can’t manage to be nice for whatever reason, who are cranky or curmudgeonly and can’t speak nicely to anyone on my staff, will talk baby talk to the dog. It gets them in a better place where they will be more likely to buy.”

4 a part of the community

As a concession to the recession, Noelle began offering free, steel and diamond tension rings to any customer willing to write a short essay about how they want to propose, and show proof of their hard time. Names and details are confidential. For nonprofit



■ A golden doodle offers bones and a water bowl to canine passersby.





■ A sandwich board advertises exclusive lines.

organizations, Alara designs and manufactures charms with universal appeal, each designed to benefit a specific local charity.

a work in progress

5 Alara began as a 300-square-foot store. The most recent expansion dramatically increased showcase space. Noelle emptied existing cases, added new and previously stored cases, and arranged them all from scratch. “It shows you what you can learn from just moving stuff around,” she says. “We kept rearranging (plus sporadic cussing) until it just felt right. We got suggestions from everyone from my husband to first-time visitors to the store as well as long-standing alaraholics.”



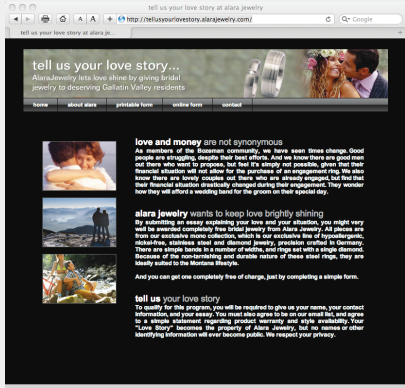
strong promo

FLIRTY Alara's ads are marked by memorable, sassy, sometimes even suggestive writing, always with a dose of humor.

what the judges say

ken nisch: Alara has created a sense of down-home authenticity to the sometimes stuffy and pretentious process of buying jewelry. From offering their customers a bit of liquid fortification before making their purchase, to the sexy, but wholesome Mrs. Claus in the window, they are not only willing to “color outside the lines,” but totally redefine the lines that can make a jewelry store an intimidating and fearsome visit.

kate peterson: I absolutely love this store! “Cool” to me is all about staying true to yourself and your brand — and about communicating your vision to your consumer. Babs has raised that to an art form.



Any hard-up customer who writes an essay about how he wants to propose and who shows proof of his hard times gets a free ring with which to propose.

scorecard

STORY	→	76.0%
INTERIOR	→	72.6%
EXTERIOR	→	74.6%
MARKETING	→	80.0%
WEBSITE	→	82.0%
INDIVIDUALITY	→	84.0%
OVERALL SCORE	→	77.8%

sarah graham: When it comes to marketing, Alara is pure genius. Babs has a style that is humorous and irreverent but still manages to instill complete confidence — an amazing skill! Alara really is the total package — unique product, beautiful display, knowledgeable staff and an enviably strong brand identity.

wolfgang möckel: The store’s tagline, “Dang, we’re good,” certainly works for this nice and creative store. I like their fun approach to retailing which is obvious also in the décor and marketing efforts. I particularly love their “Tell us your Love Story” and other services the store offers to help the community.

patti david: I think that Babs is the queen of inexpensive, but effective, marketing. She has taken her very hip persona and infused it into the store and her staff as well.

george whalin: The store splendidly presents its jewelry to customers, but most impressive is Babs’ highly creative, quirky, and fun marketing and promotions exemplifying the lifestyle of people living in Montana.



try this

→ **valentine’s promotion** Stock up on greeting cards, roses and chocolates imprinted with the name of your store, as well as signature champagne and gift certificates for massages. Use them as gifts with purchases based on the amount spent.



bess anderson is director of Visual Strategy for Chute Gerdeman Retail, a strategic retail design and branding company in Columbus, OH. Anderson helps clients develop and interpret business objectives into visual concepts through merchandise presentation, store layout and design.
www.chutegerdeman.com



patti david holds a graduate gemologist degree from the GIA. She and her designer husband, Zoltan, own Zoltan David in Bee Cave, TX, which won the 2009 America's Coolest Stores Small Cool division. zoltandavid.com



sarah graham is a San Francisco-based jewelry designer who pioneered the use of blackened metal in fine jewelry. Her award-winning designs are collected by celebrities and carried in more than 140 locations, spanning from jewelry galleries to traditional jewelry stores. sarahgraham.com



wendy furrer is a freelance journalist who lives in New York City. She formerly reported on-air for CNBC's *High Net Worth* program, where she covered fashion and beauty trends, food and wine, travel, the luxury market and more.
wendyfurrer.com



gurhan is an international jewelry designer renowned for his revival of pure 24K gold jewelry. He showcases his passion for unusual metals, not only with gold, but with pure platinum, silver, bronze and most recently with his revolutionary new 4/24 gold.
gurhan.com



jean philippe meunier started NK newlook, a store fixture design and manufacturing company for the retail industry, in 1999 with business partner Bob Nottin. Based in Hialeah, FL, NK newlook has worked with high-profile brands like

Pandora, Rolex, Mont Blanc, Christian Dior, and Estee Lauder.
nknewlook.com



wolfgang möckel founded KWM Exclusives in 1994. Based in Miami Beach, FL, the branding specialist provides service for worldwide brands seeking to develop a U.S. presence.
kwmexclusives.com



ken nisch is chairman of JGA, a global leader in brand strategy and retail design based in Southfield, MI. JGA has built its reputation by assisting retailers and brands in realizing their visual marketing potential and attaining leadership within their niche. jga.com



kate b. peterson is president and CEO of Performance Concepts, a leading sales and management consultancy for U.S. retail jewelers based in Canton, OH. She is also the author of INSTORE's *Real Deal* monthly feature.
performanceconcepts.net



candy udell and her husband Mark joined the family-owned London Jewelers in Manhasset, NY, in 1973. London won the 2009 America's Coolest Stores Big Cool division. londonjewelers.com



george whalin is the founding partner of Retail Management Consultants based in Carlsbad, CA. He is a well-known author whose newest book is *Retail Superstars: Inside The 25 Best Independent Stores in America*. He is also a highly sought-after speaker for trade shows, conferences and corporate events.
whalinonretail.com

■ → SMALL COOL JUDGE ■ → BIG COOL JUDGE

M E T H O D O L O G Y



THIS YEAR'S CONTEST WAS OUR THIRD YEAR IN WHICH WE SPLIT THE STORES INTO TWO DIVISIONS: Big Cool for stores with six or more full-time employees; and Small Cool for stores with five or fewer. From a total of 111 entries, 20 finalists per category were selected by INSTORE's editors. Six industry-expert judges chose the top five Small Cool stores, and five judges chose the top Big Cool. Judges viewed the entries on a specially created website and rated stores on a scale of 0 to 100 in six categories: story, exterior appearance, interior appearance, advertising and marketing, website and overall individuality. Total scores were calculated weighting the categories according to importance: story 50 percent, exterior 75 percent, interior 100 percent, advertising 50 percent, website 25 percent and individuality 100 percent. After determining the top five in each division, judges revisited the entry website to comment on each winner. Many thanks to our terrific judges and all those who entered! And kudos to this year's Coolest Stores!