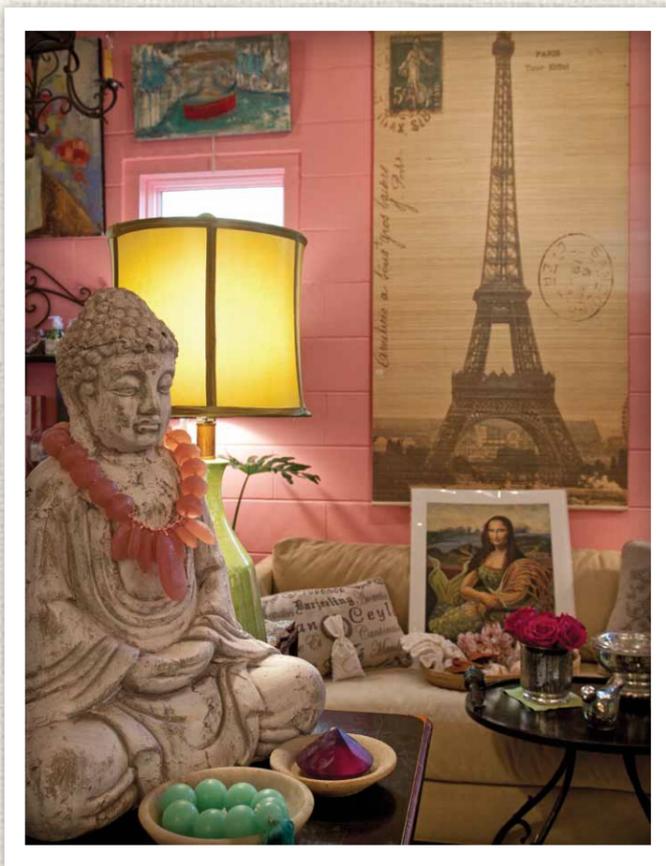


*Un Appartement à*  
**PARIS**

The City of Light Inspires a New Seaside Boutique



By WENDY O. DIXON · Photography by JACK GARDNER



*"We're in An Apartment in Paris."*

As I browse in the cozy art gallery, savoring the scent of fresh cut roses, listening to opera tenor Andrea Bocelli sing a sweet ballad, and eyeing a romantic painting of a ballerina twirling as if on air, shop owner Sylvia Forbes shares a story about a customer's cell phone conversation. The conversation, apparently, went something like this:

"Where are you?" says the voice on the other end of the cell phone.

"We're in An Apartment in Paris," the customer says, stroking a small painting of an angel.

"What? I thought you were visiting Seaside," says the voice.

"We are."

"I've heard that sort of conversation more than once," Forbes says, delighting in the confusion it must cause.

An art gallery featuring home furnishings and accessories, gifts, jewelry, and clothing in Seaside's Ruskin Place, An Apartment in Paris is reminiscent of a Parisian apartment with contemporary home decor. The cheery potted pink impatiens and hydrangeas on the front porch hint of the eclectic shopping experience awaiting beyond the front door. Inside, the unframed artwork on the bold pink walls commands attention. "Usually you don't see pink walls in an art gallery,"

Forbes says. "But it works for me. I like stepping out of the box and seeing things differently."

The boutique is laid out like a tiny apartment, complete with a Parisian-inspired kitchen from which customers can choose dishes and kitchen decor. "I have a French rolling cart," she laughs, "which I use when going to Modica Market."

In the bathroom, you'll find artwork hung on the walls, also available for purchase. "It gives people a chance to see something displayed, so they can imagine it in their own home," she explains. An open closet holds a small clothing collection, including a slip that has been converted into a tank, pairing well with a French country skirt. A selection of handmade artisan jewelry displayed on a dresser features one-of-a-kind pieces.

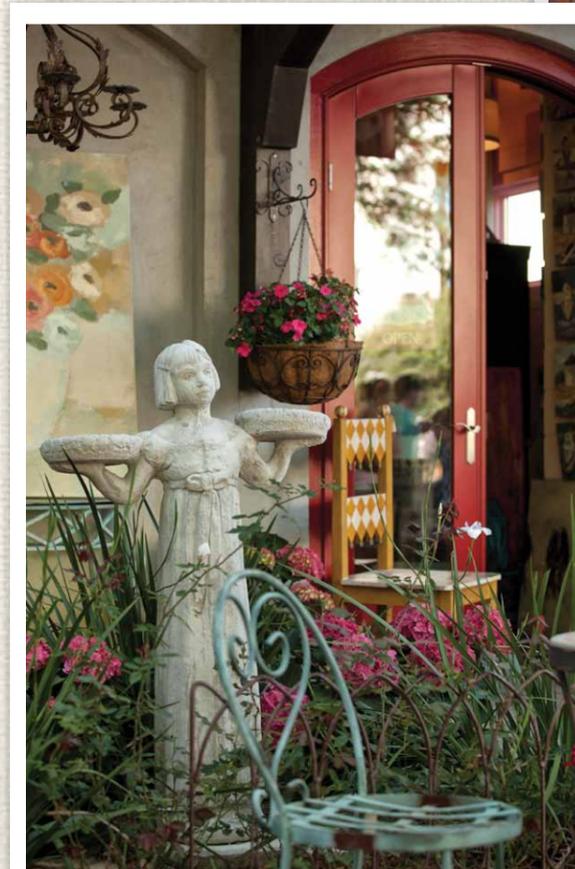
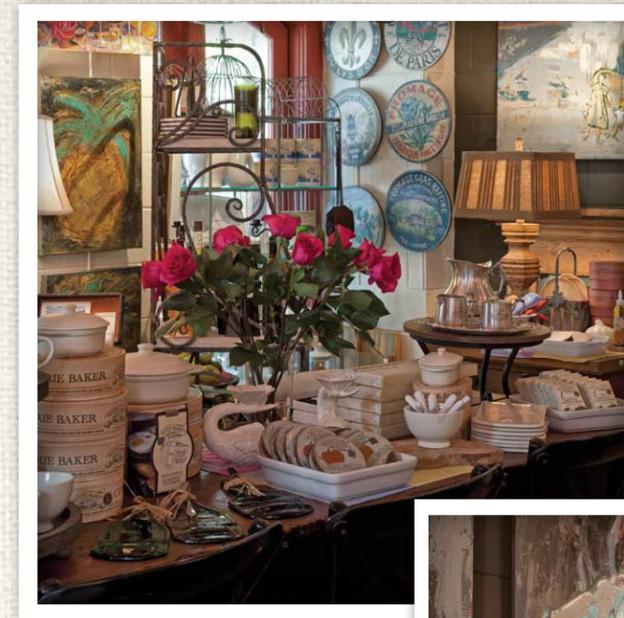
From the dining room table, you may want to pick up a French butter container, a charming Brie baker, or a goat cheese baker; both bakers come with instructions in English and in French. Forbes is admittedly obsessed with white dishes and has them on display throughout the shop. "Many people buy just one café au lait cup for themselves, saying it will be their special cup," she says, pointing out the stacked café au lait cups, which could easily be mistaken for soup bowls by Americans.

Forbes grew up in Fort Walton Beach and later ran a modeling school and agency there. She then lived in Virginia Beach for ten years, working as a set dresser for several television series, documentary films, and commercials. Though she's had no formal design training, she says she has always had an eye for the way things should look and wants people to feel inspired when they shop at her gallery. "If they are artists, I want them to get their creative juices flowing, whether the inspiration is from the fashion, the jewelry, or the paintings in the store," she says. And Forbes loves to show people different ways of using something they purchase. "You can use platters, vases, jars, and pitchers in different ways and in different rooms of your home," she adds, pointing out a water pitcher filled with pink roses and a painted platter she converted into a lazy Susan.

Jack Gardner, whose photographs are displayed in the gallery, is one of those inspired artists; he says Forbes has a great appreciation for all things beautiful. "She easily endears herself to people," he says. "And she connects with people. You can see her passion and appreciation for travel, music, and the arts."

At age 65, Forbes's focus is now on her shop, which she opened in the fall of 2011. An artist herself, she doesn't feature her own work in the gallery. "I've never had instruction—I'm such a novice," she says. "My store is like my canvas."

Featuring local artists including Ruth Moses, Aaron Sutton, Jack Gardner, Denis Wintersong and Marti Schmidt, as well as some from across the country, the shop is in the artist colony, which many still haven't discovered. But visitors and locals



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who wander beyond Seaside's Central Square will find this hidden gem in Ruskin Place. "A lot of people in Seaside still don't know this place is back here," Forbes says. "But some really nice shops have opened up." And though a few other art galleries and home decor shops surround hers, Forbes doesn't see it as a competitive environment. "I welcome other art galleries and jewelry shops," she says. "I'm glad we have the variety we have here."

Some of the Apartment's best sellers are lazy Susans with vintage cheese labels painted on them. "You can hang them or use them to serve on," Forbes says. The shop carries a line of French soaps, shea butter, and lotions, which are handcrafted in Provence, France. Small religious statues and Eiffel Tower figurines are artfully scattered throughout. Slow-burning Santa Rosa candles add romance to the gallery—they would be a welcome addition to any room or patio.

Forbes has artifacts from other European countries and even lamps made from wine bottles—her own design. Among her favorite recent finds is a collection of facet-cut soaps in the shapes of jewelry pieces. "They are so beautifully done and come in many colors," she adds.

After going through a recent health crisis, Forbes changed her priorities—and her answer to an oft-pondered question. "Years ago people would ask, 'What would you have if you could have one wish granted?' And I would say, 'An apartment in Paris.' If I were asked that now, I would say, 'Good health, world peace, and then An Apartment in Paris.'" ❖