

# LIFE Style

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■ Dining out 3C ■ Review

## Minneapolis entrepreneurs turn gas stations into hip shops



# Gardeners' delight



**T**here's nothing that's more of a neighborhood eyesore than an abandoned gas station. Monty's Blue Plate Diner on Madison's east side long ago proved such places can be transformed and given a vibrant second life. One that not only belies the site's oily history but continues to be an equally important economic factor in the community.

In Minneapolis, enterprising entrepreneurs have turned two such locales into hip, hot garden centers. Peggy Poore opened Uncommon Gardens in the fall of 2001 (see sidebar) just down the block from Bachman's, the area's biggest and best known garden center, while Tangletown Gardens was founded in 2003 by UM horticulture grads and buddies Scott Endres and Dean Engelmann.

**Linda Brazill**

THE ARTFUL SHOPPER



Tangletown Gardens in Minneapolis (top photo) is housed in a 1939 Pure Oil Co. building with plants and garden ornaments displayed cheek by jowl outside (bottom right). Cedar shingles disguise the typical gas station that became Uncommon Gardens (above center), which also includes space to read and enjoy a cup of coffee (inset above).

MARK GOLBACH PHOTOS



Poore transformed her typical gas station/garage building by covering the whole thing in cedar shingles, giving it a casual country feel. Endres and Engelmann started with a 1939 Pure Oil Co. building in the traditional English cottage style: stucco with a blue tiled roof. Among other things, the duo added a charming pair of matching sentry boxes at the entrance gate, giving their property a sophisticated Euro appeal.

I recently toured both garden centers with a group of mostly Midwestern garden writers under the sponsorship of the Garden Writers of America. Poore told us she opened in the fall to give herself time to get ready for the spring season. She added a second story at the time she converted her building so that eventually there will be room for

more classes. She also left the big overhead garage doors in place so she can leave them open in the summer, the way they were on the day we visited.

Poore knows gardening and she tests potential hires to make sure they do too. Business is a mad rush during the first two growing months of the season — May and June — with the shop open until 8:30 p.m. and staffed with 10 summer employees. That's when

Poore earns 75 percent of her income, though she notes that Christmas is good as well. She sells trees but it's her wreaths, berries, branches and natural materials for holiday decor that are her specialty.

No matter what the season, Poore offers extras: personal service, lots of shade plants geared to the surrounding neighborhood of big old trees, free classes (Tangletown has free classes too) and a comfortable seating area to have a cup of coffee and browse through garden books.

**O**n Tangletown's Web site, the owners say they've "achieved an ambience that is tranquil yet intoxicating." Intoxicating for sure but hardly tranquil. This is a garden center that is teeming with life, ideas and plants. It's so crowded it's just this side of claustrophobic. But the sense that the space — indoors and out — is filled with must-have material keeps you poking into every corner and behind every planter. The indoor shop is just as vibrant with the latest unusual garden tomes and tools, as well as more of the team's creative construction and design work.

Endres and Engelmann, in fact, did almost all the work themselves, building everything but the high wrought iron

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