

Real character

Tessa Peach's shop has a family name on the sign and good old-fashioned values at its heart.

WORDS

Philippa Prentice

PHOTOGRAPHY

Bonny Beattie



GOLDEN OLDIES Tessa (top right), who grew up coming to the Arts Centre regularly and working in the on-site market, says she loves her upstairs posse. "The Gothic Revival-style windows let in good light and the thick stone walls mean the shop always feels temperate and calm." Frances Nation was her grandmother's name, and was also given to Tessa as her middle names. "It's old-fashioned, I guess, to have a family name on the sign, but I like it. I think Frances Nation as proprietor fits the style of the store."



Why not have a homeware store that's like a classic corner grocer's, so shoppers can choose quality goods made by local producers from natural ingredients for their homes as they might their stomachs? Interior and event designer Tessa Peach couldn't help but wonder, and the upshot was the opening of her first shop, Frances Nation, in Christchurch's recently restored Arts Centre.

So Tessa, what do you stock? I scout out quality, useful, New Zealand-made wares – from tool boxes and potato mashers to ceramics and fire pokers. They come from all over the country and it's quite an eclectic arrangement that's continually in development.



FOLKS' TALES Tessa does a lot of road tripping around the country to find and meet talented artisans. "I care about every aspect of an object's production, so meeting the maker and going to their workshop is really important. All my makers have an interesting story to tell and their lifestyles are usually as special as their products. I often share their stories with my customers over the counter."



What kind of vibe have you tried to create for customers? The shop's layout mimics that of a traditional general store. It has floor-to-ceiling shelves stacked with goods, a long central table for a rotating display and two counters – one for wrapping and one for displaying soaps.

I styled and designed the interior myself – including the floor, shelving, counters and lighting – and there are also a few pieces I inherited from my dad's craft jewellery business. I remodelled his old market stand for the central table and use his steel paper roll and concrete-based cellotape dispenser.

This is a well-curated shop, but it's quite full and not too fussy, and there are always new things to find. The tactility of the goods is a big part of the experience, and smell has become an important aspect too – people spend a lot of time picking things up and sniffing them! It turns out that when you choose to sell a lot of natural products, the smell of them all combined is gorgeous.

Do you have a daily routine in the store? Running a shop is so busy and varied – there are always different deliveries, different shoppers, different weather. I quite like it when it's raining, as people tend to take their time and the light inside is really wonderful. If I'm out of the shop, I'll usually find some excuse to hit the road to collect something for the shelves – maybe some local honey.

Do you have any advice for shoppers on choosing and using handcrafted objects? Nothing is too good to be used – enjoy it. If it's a special hand-blown drinking glass, put some gin and tonic in it. If it's a beautiful candle, admire it, then burn it!

Shop slowly and thoughtfully, and invest in quality. Buy with the long term in mind; a lot of goods could last a lifetime and be something for your kids to treasure. Ask lots of questions when buying too – don't be shy, get fussy and get educated.

How much of your stock heads home with you – is your place the best-dressed in town? Well, my fiancée – textile artist Emma Fitts – and I are in the middle of renovating, so our house is currently full of ladders and paint tins. But I can't wait to fill it with all the lovely things I've found. I like to know my products well, which is a great excuse to own everything in the shop. ♡ francesnation.co.nz