

THE GOODS

edited by
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PORTFOLIO: Back 40 Mercantile, Old Greenwich, Conn.

BORN OF THE NOSTALGIA OF general stores of old, where shopkeepers knew your name, and everything from animal feed to kitchen essentials to clothing could be purchased in a one-stop shop, Back 40 Mercantile (Old Greenwich, Conn.) brings a contemporary twist to the traditional concept.

Co-owners Leslie King and Katrina Bischoff, along with their husbands, conceived the idea for Back 40 after making the jump from corporate life in Manhattan to

organic farming in upstate Connecticut.

“People in the community knew us as organic farmers that cared about sustainability and the organic food movement,” King says. By incorporating their environmental values, she explains, the design resonates their mission.

The recycled barn wood drop ceiling is a gentle reminder of the Back 40 heritage, but skirting the line between an old general store concept and a modern design involved some self-editing. “It was a deli-

cate balance,” says Kathleen Jordan, principal, Gensler (San Francisco). “We wanted to have some element of this ‘reclaimed’ nature, bringing in their corporate vision of sustainability and ‘good for the Earth,’ but we had to tread that line – we didn’t want to go too much in one direction.”

Crafted primarily by local artisans, each product in the shop is hand-selected by the owners, who have met most of their vendors. Paper tags clamped next to each product denote where the item was made,

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who made it and why they love it.

Custom-made cabinetry allows several product departments to coexist in the 1120-square-foot space without feeling crowded. Each cabinet door can pull out and recess into the cabinetry, for display flexibility during events or trunk shows. Vertical storage was embraced as a simple space-saver. Hard-to-grab products are accessible using a library ladder system installed to the store's perimeter, reaching to the ceiling.

The approachable design speaks to its affluent clientele. "[The owners] could very easily bring Manhattan-chic to Old Greenwich, but that's not what they're about," Jordan says. "They're providing [products] based on the values of that community, and that's why it resonates." – *Kaileigh Peyton*