

PRESS-REGISTER

Home shop to unmask a 'diamond in the rough'

Birmingham's Tim Burt is renovating a former downtown carriage house to bring his Parkside Home & Garden Shop to Mobile

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By KAIJA WILKINSON

Business Reporter

With original artwork and a line of \$500 designer lamps that are popular with celebrities like Madonna, Parkside Home & Garden Shop is not your typical lawn and feed store.

Owner Tim Burt, who opened his first store in Birmingham's Avondale neighborhood seven years ago, hopes to replicate in Mobile the success he has enjoyed in the Magic City.

That shop, he said, has annual revenue in excess of \$1 million.

In Birmingham, the product mix is about half furniture and half home decor and gifts. The mix in Mobile will be about 70 percent home accessories and gifts and 30 percent furniture, he said.

Burt, who honed his home decor savvy as a designer and buyer for Pier 1 Imports, noted that not all his merchandise is pricey: He also has lamps that retail for less than \$50 and gifts for less than \$20, he said.

Demolition has just started on the former carriage house built during the 1800s at the corner of South Conception and Conti streets.

"There's a lot of traffic downtown during the day with the financial fields, government offices and also the cruise line," Burt said. "With the cruise ship people, they're on vacation, ready to spend money and will want to take a candle or little piece of artwork home to remember their trip by."

Burt said he bought the building a couple of years ago, but construction has been slow to start, partly because of Hurricane Katrina.

"We took on a little bit of water and had to go back to the drawing board with plans to make sure we did what we needed to do," he said. "Plus, it's been hard to find contractors, so the timing has been slow."

However, demolition has begun, and Burt said he expects the \$375,000 renovation to start by the end of the year. The shop should open in Mobile by summer 2007.

Elizabeth Sanders, executive director of the Downtown Mobile Alliance, said Parkside will fill a retail void downtown.

"Even the neighborhoods that surround downtown are so underserved in terms of retail offerings, particularly in terms of home furnishings and pick-up items," Sanders said.

The retail space will cover about 2,100 square feet on the ground floor.

Like Burt's Avondale Parkside, the building will include loft space on top. Mobile's will have two lofts, each about 1,200 square feet, he said. Burt said he likely will live in one loft and sell the other.

Birmingham architecture firm Cohen Carnaggio Reynolds did the renovation plans. Burt and lead architect Michael Hallisey describe the building as an ugly duckling ready to morph into a swan.

Said Hallisey: "It's a beautiful building, but you'd never know it to look at it now. From what I understand it's one of the oldest masonry structures built in downtown Mobile."

Several ill-conceived renovations have masked the building's character, Burt said, but the latest one will uncover it.

"Its bones have been covered up," he said. "It has arched, 22-foot openings that are held up by fluted cast-iron columns, and they're still there, and they're gorgeous.

"It's like a diamond in the rough."

[/cut/p33.10/cParkside Home & Garden Shop](#)Top: Demolition has just started on this building at 51 S. Conception St. at Conti Street, which will house the Parkside Home & Garden Shop, a Birmingham-based upscale home decor retailer. Bottom: The 1800s building will look much different once renovations are complete, as this rendering shows. Shop owner Tim Burt said previous renovations and additions hid the building's "great bones." Parkside is expected to open in summer 2007.