

vitality

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Baltimore Edition

Smart Woman m a g a z i n e

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because smart is beautiful



*living
art fully*

**Connecting one
heart at a time**

SANDRA MAGSAMEN HAS CREATED
A WORLD-CLASS BUSINESS

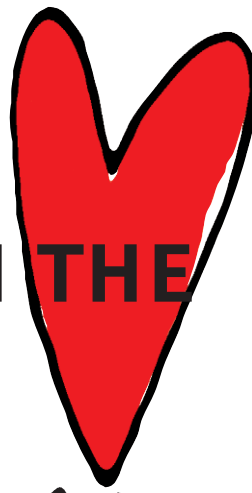
**The Summer Living
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living LIFE
 art fully THROUGH THE
 HEART OF
 Sandra Magsamen



by Sabina Dana Plasse
 Photos by Erica Fromherz

Sandra Magsamen is a woman who embodies the very meaning of vitality guiding us all to “see with our heart” as we journey through life making connections to one another. For over 15 years she has showered us with her signature ceramics and images bearing the emotive phrases “This life is not a dress rehearsal” or “A day without laughter is a day wasted.” Magsamen’s tiles are given for many reasons and occasions such as a husband who gave his wife a tile as a birthing gift to commemorate the birth of their child. They are also given as life long keepsakes. A woman dying of breast cancer asked her mother to give her friends and her sisters a plaque, which illustrated the last words she wanted to say to them. The stories and situations are endless.



Magsamen has developed countless gift items through which many people make their own personal connections including stationery, home décor pieces and much more under the guise of her trademark “Messages from the Heart” which is sold across the country and internationally from gift stores and department stores to catalogs as well as craft shows. One of her best-selling books *When I Want to Grow Up I Want to be Me*, created for her daughter Hannah, has graced the pages of Oprah Winfrey’s *O Magazine* finding a home in the hearts of women of all ages. Likewise, Magsamen’s *The Gift* was the inspiration behind the holiday theme for the windows at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City this past Christmas. On top of which proceeds from *The Gift* benefit the VH-1 Save the Music foundation providing musical instruments for school children across the nation. Most recently, Magsamen was featured in the April 2004 issue of *Woman’s Day* magazine revealing her incredible style and artistic sensibility that adorns every part of her home. In this particular issue she is prepping her abode for Easter and the

welcoming of spring. No matter the medium, Magsamen manages to illustrate her simple message of communicating important feelings through art and words- an expression found in every aspect and accomplishment of her life.

Born to be an artist, Magsamen found visual language to be her chosen means of communication from a very early age. She recalls, “I understood the world visually more than I did anything else. It was a way for me to process and communicate through art.” Her passion to communicate visually led her to art school and eventually to becoming an art therapist. Working with Alzheimer’s patients and assisting people to communicate would ultimately be the basis for which Magsamen developed her art as she observed the creativity people used to connect with one another.

“I didn’t plan on starting a business. I started making these verses to share with my newborn daughter Hannah. I wanted to share the simple truths of the messages I was writing down; what one person needed to share with another,” tells Magsamen. “These are things that universally we all want to share. My sisters wanted to buy them and then their friends, then their friends and before I knew it this business just grew. I was busy.” With her husband Mark, also an artist and at the time teaching at various nursing homes, they decided to test the market with her business, eventually called Table Tiles Inc. Participating in local craft shows proved to be very promising which led to bigger

arenas. “We did the Buyers Market of American Crafts, and it was the year they did it in Atlantic City. For three days we went there and took orders from the minute we walked in and until the show closed ... It never even occurred to me how I was going to make this stuff,” recalls Magsamen.

It wasn’t long before Magsmen’s home-based business began to take over her house and she and her husband left their jobs to commit themselves to the ceramics business full time. Buying a house in the country of Glen Arm, Maryland and renting the near by “Bee Farm,” Magsamen employed 15 people to serve more than over 3,000 accounts selling to galleries and stores everywhere. The demand began to exceed her production capabilities and Magsamen sought licensing opportuni-



ties. “I began with Silvestri and that led to books, stationary, calendars and scrap booking,” she tells. “We brought the studio back to the house, and installed kilns in the basement. We do a lot of work for non-profit, and still have about 100 galleries that we make work for because they want it handmade.”

With the burden of self-production lifted, Magsamen has had the opportunity to create and produce other products which all still originate from her initial philosophies. “People are believing my work because it is true. These are not Sandraisms. These are the simple truths that all of us share,” explains Magsamen. She continues, “I have been so supported, embraced and propelled by the people that I have come in contact with because they believe and want to share these messages. These are the messages that are important of our time not commercialism and capitalism. People want to be close and they want to connect.”

For Magsamen success would be nothing without the people in her life. It is her belief that people need to know how important they are to one another and that everyone has a unique way of

expressing this love and kindness. As she reveals, “On September 11th the world really did change, not one person I know did not stop and say where is my mother, sister ... Is everybody okay? In that one second everybody found what is important in our life.” She adds, “When you see with your heart it becomes much clearer ... My work is so popular because people see they can make a difference and that they can make the world a better place. In a world where you don’t think you have any impact anymore where things are only happening to you, you can begin to see that these simple gestures make a difference, it’s pretty powerful.”

The many people who surround Magsamen often celebrate in her achievements. From the busload of family and friends who traveled to New York

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City to see her windows at Saks Fifth Avenue to one of her cherished mentors Hiltgunt “Margaret” Zassenhaus. Zassenhaus, her family’s general practitioner, who would receive all five sisters, helped 100s of Jewish intellectuals escape Nazi occupation. Her book *Walls: Resisting the Third Reich--One Woman’s Story* is an account of her life receiving many award nominations. “She was always very clear from the time we were kids that actions matter and you have to be proud, stand behind your words and stand up for what you believe,” reveals Magsamen. She continues, “She was really explicit that you could make a difference in your life. The only time you don’t make a difference is when you don’t try.”

It is not surprising to know that extremely influential and purposeful people exist in all corners of Magsamen’s life. Her own heritage and family is full of accomplishments as well as significant people. From her 96-year-old grandmother who has made and given out “Granny Slippers” for at least 45 years to her own twin sister Susan whose work with children led to the creation of her company

Curiosity Kits. Starting her business at about the same time as Magsamen, Susan’s Curiosity Kits allow children to discover the arts, culture and sciences in meaningful and productive ways. Recently, she has sold her company and is exploring new opportunities but like her twin she is extremely philanthropic and shares the same philosophies about life. Both collect folk art and are extremely supportive of one another in the endeavors they both pursue.

However, the most fascinating relatives in Magsamen’s life history happens to be her great-grandfather and, of course, his brother who invented the Ouija board. “I’m not sure if they were artistic or not, but they also had a toy company –novelty toys. They were fun guys,” tells



Magsamen with a hearty laugh. “The Ouija board was a game of romance. It was a parlor game where a man and woman touched a heart shape planchette (a slidable three-legged device), and they would ask each other questions while someone was overseeing them. Their knees could touch under the table and their hands would touch on the planchette.” She adds, “It wasn’t until the guys went off to war and the age of spiritualism at the turn of the century 1907-1909 did people began placing great powers to the Ouija board, and mother’s would ask if their sons would come home alive.”

Uncovering the stories of people’s plights and circumstances is perhaps the greatest inspiration to Magsamen’s creativity and invention. Such as, the woman who drove 50 miles every time she would take her kids swimming and ended up raising \$100,000 from collecting recycling to build a pool in her town, or former Baltimore Oriole’s baseball player Eddie Murray who had a neighbor who made him a pie every time he hit a homerun. “That is a message from the heart,” explains Magsamen. “A woman who knew she was diagnosed with cancer realized she would not see her daughter pass the milestones in her life and grow up. She wrote her daughter letters for all of the milestones she knew her daughter would go through. Even though she knew she wouldn’t be here her message continued on ... There are so many small graces and little gestures of kindness we do everyday. I think it is attributed to the human spirit how each one of us can give and can make a

difference in our own small way. That is what the messages do that I create, but mine are universal messages we all want to share with our sister, mother and neighbor. I happen to write them on clay, but we all do it in our own unique ways too.”

Her work has always been at the forefront, but now the woman behind the message is coming forward. After the debut of her window display in New York City, Magsamen took a moment to take stock and reflect. She feels very committed to her constant evolution and continuing in new directions. “This year has really been a lot of challenges for me because I know how to make art, I know how to write messages and I know how to share. I have become very good at running the business as well as growing it. I struggled and made a million mistakes

and everybody should do that because I learned the most from my mistakes.” She reveals further, “I never cared that nobody knew it was me. I sign my name illegibly on all the pieces. I did an excellent job of marketing my work but not myself. What I have learned over the years is that I share in a way that imparts inspiration

to others. Now, I am going through this process of letting people know who I am. Who is the heart woman? People will know it is me, Sandra Magsamen.”

From speaking engagements to a new monthly column for *Scrap Booking Retailer*, which Magsamen believes is a wonderful American art form, she is beginning the next phase of her life in business and personal growth. She still continues her work for non-profits such as one of her greatest loves the American Visionary Art Museum as well as many other unique endeavors including her recent installation of a 20-foot sculpture for the Hearing and Speech Agency in Baltimore. Magsamen will continue to develop new products and ideas – (look out ladies because you may be able to take a Magsamen on the road!) as well as guiding new artists. She has worked incredibly hard at what she does and could not be more pleased of her accomplishments reflecting, “Ghandi said you must be the change in which you see in the world. It’s a pretty powerful thing and it’s true. You can start a chain of events that goes on and on when you act with one bit of love and kindness. That’s the beauty. Your unique individuality brings joy and beauty to the world; how you use that has huge impact.” SW

