



A CANADIAN STORE COMBINES CUTTING-EDGE TECH WITH DOWN-HOME SERVICE

# NORTHERN LIGHT

BY EILEEN McCLELLAND

**W**hen the Malbranck family decided to expand their Diamond Gallery boutique, they shopped for property in Winnipeg and wound up just two doors down from their original, leased location. But it made a world of difference. They bought the lot, hired architect (and customer) Michael Banman, tore down the existing structure, and designed a new 12,000-square-foot building to house their boutique as well as other specialty shops. The key to their success, they say, is combining cutting-edge style with old-fashioned service. Visiting the Diamond Gallery is all about feeling at home, says third-generation jeweler Lisa Malbranck — a feeling achieved in part by the dark roast coffee and branded chocolate offered to guests, the pleasant scent in the air, and the comfy customer lounge.





**TRY THIS:** Offer hot apple cider in December.

# 5 cool things

## 1 a three-person show: everyone meets an owner

Lisa Malbranck, a graduate gemologist, has worked on and off in her parents' store for 15 years, since she was 13. She pursued a degree in recreation studies, but as she was about to graduate, realized the family business was her true calling. Her co-workers are her parents, Anita and Allan, who founded the business in 1992. The Malbrancks specialize in design, gemology and appraisal and believe it's important for an owner to work personally with each client. Having no staff at all has turned out to be the best business model. Both Allan and Lisa design, then send their sketches to carefully selected off-site jewelers. "We would rather limit our hours of operation and be able to offer that family connection and service than have staff and extend our hours," Lisa says.

## 2 cutting-edge showroom: energy efficiency

The building was designed to exceed industry standards for environmental efficiency in heating and cooling, lighting and plumbing. Most unusual is the fact it is geothermally heated and cooled with the help of two underground wells on the property and heat pumps. (Geothermal energy originates from the heat retained within the Earth's core, from radioactive decay of minerals and from solar energy absorbed at the surface.) Another benefit is a consistent air flow. The extra costs of installing the geothermal system building-wide will be recouped within 12 years since the system represents 100 percent savings in natural gas costs.

The lighting lineup includes ceramic metal halide, energy-efficient fluorescents and LED showcase lighting.

The building also is equipped with low-flow toilets.



■ Anita, Allan and Lisa Malbranck are the owners and only employees, so every customer is helped by an owner.

## → strong promo

Diamond Gallery's ads are consistent in their branding and feature original designs.



**ONLINE EXTRA**  
FOR PREVIOUS COOL STORES  
AND TO COMMENT:  
[instoremag.com/coolstore](http://instoremag.com/coolstore)

## fun facts



**THE DIAMOND GALLERY** is one of six jewelers in Canada to be recommended on the Platinum Guild's website, as a result of mystery-shopping by the guild.



### ALLAN AND ANITA MALBRANCK

were among 10 Canadian jewelers invited to tour the Ekati Diamond Mine in the Canadian Arctic in 2003.

**ALLAN MALBRANCK** is one of two Certified Appraisal Professionals in Western Canada.



## 3 store layout: let there be light

Half of the showroom is lined with windows, flooding the high-ceilinged, black and white space with the strong prairie light characteristic of western Canada, and showing diamonds to advantage. "It creates an open environment. It's very contemporary and modern, with clean lines," Lisa says. "There's not a lot of color to distract you from looking at the jewelry." Not everything was brand new. They were able to reuse the showcases from the old store, updating them with new displays, many of them black. Another big change was the flow of the showcase layout. There are no dead-ends.



**TRY THIS:** Instant referrals

**THE MALBRANCKS DISPLAY THANK-YOU CARDS**, along with wedding photos, in scrapbooks on top of showcases and have scanned them in on their website. "People who are planning weddings like flipping through wedding pictures," Lisa explains.

**“hearsay**

Facebook testimonial from Danielle Lelievre Aessie

**f** *Allan, Anita and Lisa offer a family feel to the business*

*.... When you walk in, you feel like you're family, even if you haven't been there for a while. There is no judgment, no discrimination based on your budget, and the flexibility offered to try and suit your budget and taste is bar none. You guys are simply the best. Oh, and by the way, I need to drop in soon! I miss the Gallery!!!!*

**no silver here: gold and platinum rule**

Most of what the Malbrancks showcase in their store are their own designs, although they carry a sampling of other carefully chosen brands. They work exclusively in gold and platinum, and don't carry silver. Diamonds over 40 points are branded as Diamond Gallery stones and laser inscribed. Some come from Canada; all are conflict-free. "A lot of people are blown away by the number of interesting designs in our showcases compared to what a lot of stores in Winnipeg would show," Lisa says.

**a free service: lifetime refinishing**

The Malbrancks have information on about 10,000 customers in their client-log books. It's added each time a client fills out a card for the Diamond Gallery's complimentary lifetime jewelry refinishing. "Having them come in regularly for cleaning and polishing, we get to know them over the years," Lisa says. The Malbrancks also use log-book details to follow up for anniversaries and add wish-list information as customers provide it.



**FIVE QUESTIONS WITH**

**Lisa Malbranck**



**WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO HAVE A GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMILY?**

I give my parents a lot of credit because I couldn't imagine working alongside your husband or wife for 18 years and still being married. It does take work and communication and compromise, like a marriage; it's the same with good business partners.

**HOW DID OPENING A NEW LOCATION IN THE MIDST OF A RECESSION AFFECT YOU?**

We weren't really aware of what was going to happen. We opened here in July of 2009 and we are doing very well and it's hard to say how to attribute the growing success of our business except that it's a mix of all of the different elements we've put together.

**WHAT TYPE OF ADVERTISING DO YOU PREFER?**

We ask every person who comes into the store how they've heard of us. We have

learned from this that our biggest form of advertising is our own clients. We also advertise in glossy, local magazines.

**HOW HAS YOUR YOUTH PLAYED A ROLE IN THE STORE?**

I am particular about the music mix in our store. Our target market is couples who are 25 to 40, and I want to make sure our music fits that age range. Even with Christmas music, we use remixes and stuff that's upbeat and interesting.

**WHAT'S ON YOUR PLAYLIST?**

- Esthero (*Anywayz*)
- Beth Orton (*Thinking about Tomorrow*)
- Great Lake Swimmers (*Everything Is Moving So Fast*)
- Nouvelle Vague (*Heart of Glass*)
- Billie Holiday (*Easy Living*)
- Feist and Postal Service (*Mushaboom*)
- Phoenix (*Fences*)
- Charles Trenet (*Verlaine*)
- Adele (*Daydreamer*)
- Sarrah Harmer (*Lodestar*)
- The Dining Rooms (*Ceremony*)