

TEXAS • NORTHEAST TARRANT

In Strawn, it's not the roses you'll want to stop and smell

STRAWN — It's easy to forget to wash off evidence that you have been in Ancient Art Soap Co. because the smells are so good.



**JON
McCONAL**

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TEXAS

Those scents tend to remain on one's nose after owners Becky Lenoir and Shanah Coe insist that customers smell their creations.

It's hard to imagine a place that makes herbal soaps by hand in this town west of Fort Worth.

And Lenoir, a Strawn native, still finds it hard to imagine that she is making soap.

"I had no idea of how it was done. Nor had I ever really been interested in it," said Lenoir.

Then Coe asked her to become her partner in the handmade soap firm.

"I accepted her offer and quit my job as a route driver for a coffee company," said Lenoir. "I haven't regretted it."

She's a tall, strong-looking person. She gave me a tour while waiting for Coe to return from lunch.

"We make our soap straight from scratch. We only use natural oils and herbs. No animal fats. No sir," she said.

We had stopped in front of a stack of the various soap bars they have concocted on their own. She picked out Oatmeal Spice, one of their best sellers.

"Smell this," she said.

I did. It was, well, nice.

"And you've got to smell this one," she said. "This is Vitality. It has tea tree in it."

It smelled like a curtain of raw mountain air.

"And here is Vera. That is named after my mother," she said. I smelled. She laughed.

"We have a sense of humor about our soaps when it comes to naming them," she said.

Vera did smell healthy.

"We love our soaps and are constantly smelling them. Now this one is Frolic in the Grass. It reminds me of the days here in Strawn when everybody was out mowing their lawns."

Coe returned. She's 38, a pleasant, enthusiastic person. She explained how she started making soap in what had been her beauty salon.

"I wanted to do something else so I began studying soap. I read every book I could on soap and soap-making. I studied it for two years, and then I began trying to make it," she said.

She made several discoveries about soap.

"Soaps have a personality," she said. "As a result, you have to be very precise in making them."

She talked about the natural ingredients used in their soaps.

"And we also use the famous waters from Mineral Wells in our soaps," she said.

As I smelled another bar, she gave her soap philosophy.

"We are moving so fast in this world. If we can take some time

out for ourselves and take a bath and use handmade soaps, it is such a wonderful cleansing experience," she said.

Then Vera Nall, for whom the Vera bar is named, entered the store.

"I feel honored to have a soap

named after me," she said. "But I personally like the oatmeal soap. ... It is wonderful."

Ancient Art Soap Co. is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

After I left, I bought some gas. When I paid the attendant, she

said, "You've got something on your nose."

I told her it was Vera.

"Oh," she said.

I left it there.

Jon McConal's Texas appears Monday, Thursday and Saturday.
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