

# Meet the Maker

Kathy Phillips, owner and CEO of Primitives By Kathy, shares her secrets to success

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What makes a company successful for 20 years? Primitives By Kathy owner and CEO Kathy Phillips can answer that. “Don’t be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. If you’re passionate about something — take the risk, don’t regret the chances that you didn’t take. You never lose — you either win or you learn.”

Celebrating 20 years as a wholesale manufacturer in the gift industry is an impressive accomplishment. Gift Shop sat down with the team at PBK to talk about the journey and what the future holds.



**GS: If you could go back in time, what advice would you give yourself just starting out in this business?**

**PBK:** One of my favorite quotes is “There is no elevator to success — you have to take the stairs.” That still holds true as we grow this business year after year. Make generosity a part of your growth strategy. I am more driven by the personal notes I receive from customers and employees than I am by the monetary wins. Knowing I am making a difference in the employee’s life or the success of a store for a shop owner is really what drives me. Focus on where you bring the most value — you cannot be most effective as a leader if you major in the minor things. Find people who you can trust, believe in your vision and hold your values and work as a team to move your company forward.

**GS: What consumer or lifestyle trends do you currently find influencing PBK designs?**

**PBK:** We’re loving copper mixed with various textures and complimentary colors. It is a way to add a luxe feel to collections with rustic elements and it acts as a neutral (like in our Hand Lettered metal word art) that can intermix with virtually any décor or style.

Of course, we’ve always been drawn to rustic and natural textures so the farmhouse-chic lifestyle trend is something we’re embracing and have been creating for some time. We think our new collection of Carved Wood Signs will fit in beautifully with this lifestyle trend — and of course our Hand-Lettered collection on slatted wood — including a Christmas color story including accents of galvanized tin and neutrals like gray and cream mixed with red.

The appreciation of artisan designs is translated through our new collection of Watercolor trinket trays (accented with metallic gold — it’s gorgeous!), Block Print Art by Robert Patierno and a Collection by Cathy Heck, along with expansions into new color stories in Hand Lettered, String Art and new Stitched Blocks. We’re creating the bridge between sentiment gifts and home décor and lifestyle products for our customers.



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**GS:** What new products are you launching this year?

**PBK:** We are so excited to be debuting over 1800 products at the start of 2017. These new additions include expansions of some of our customer favorite collections – like String Art, Hand-lettered, Christmas, Wanderlust, Beach and LOL-Made You Smile. We’re also introducing entirely new collections, mediums and artists – such as Block Print Collections, Socks, Carved Solid Wood Signs, Jewelry, Notebooks & Stationery and Travel Cups. These items round out our existing best-selling collections and tell a story through colors, materials and sentiment.

One of the biggest color stories you’ll see in 2017 through our collections is metallic copper. We’re mixing it with beautiful blush and gray in our Hand Lettered Collection and also mixing with distressed slatted wood as a luxe accent against the natural textures.

We’re celebrating the hand-done art through 2017 – with the addition of hand-carved block print artist Robert Patierno. The replicas of his hand-carved prints from a block of wood or linoleum are beautifully accented with copper on a warm cream background. We’re also introducing hand-stitched solid wood blocks – some small with magnets, others larger to display on a shelf – they combine hand-strung accents, on trend-icorns and colors with simple sentiment. There is so much we’re excited to introduce in 2017 – it’s a big year!

**GS:** Where would you like to see PBK in five years?

**PBK:** Of course we would love to continue to grow and offer more collections, artists and product types to our customers. There are so many new ideas and concepts at the ‘Idea Factory’ (the product development and creative building at PBK) and we cannot wait to bring these ideas to life.

The industry is constantly changing – and luckily at Primitives by Kathy we have a team who is nimble and is on the pulse or ahead of the market trends in product and in the retail industry.

Looking back, there has been a lot of shifting in the last 5 years – in the middle of a tech boom, where social media and instant access is everything – it has definitely had an impact on not only the way people shop, but how retailers market and reach their customers.

The shift in shopping preference is moving away from mass retailers, and towards a personal experience – especially with the millennial generation. This shift in shopper mindset is all about a unique experience created by carefully curated products and services at the places they shop. The trend of “shop local” isn’t going anywhere.

For Primitives by Kathy – it means we need to continue to serve and support our customers with “WOW” Customer Service, and provide an ever evolving product mix of unique collections that can be paired together in countless ways to create a unique in-store experience at POS for our retail customers.

Fast forward five years – the customer experience is going to shift to be even more personal, which means we need to be pushing the limits on design, service and product strategy. We need to fully understand our customers and their evolving worldviews – and learn their story beyond the point of sale to create experiences and products that resonate.

We’re so thankful for the opportunity to be a part of this unique industry and be a leader in home & gift. Thank you for an incredible 20-year journey so far – we look forward to what the next 20 will bring! *gs*