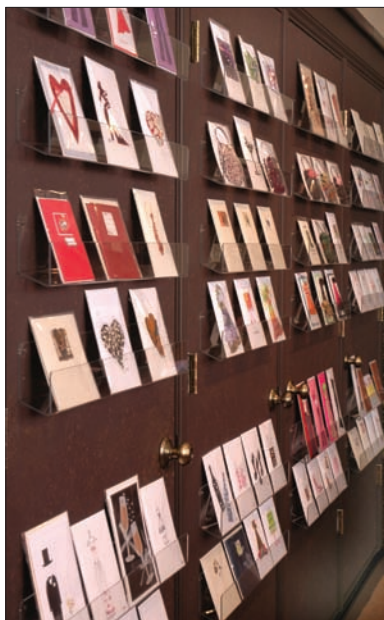
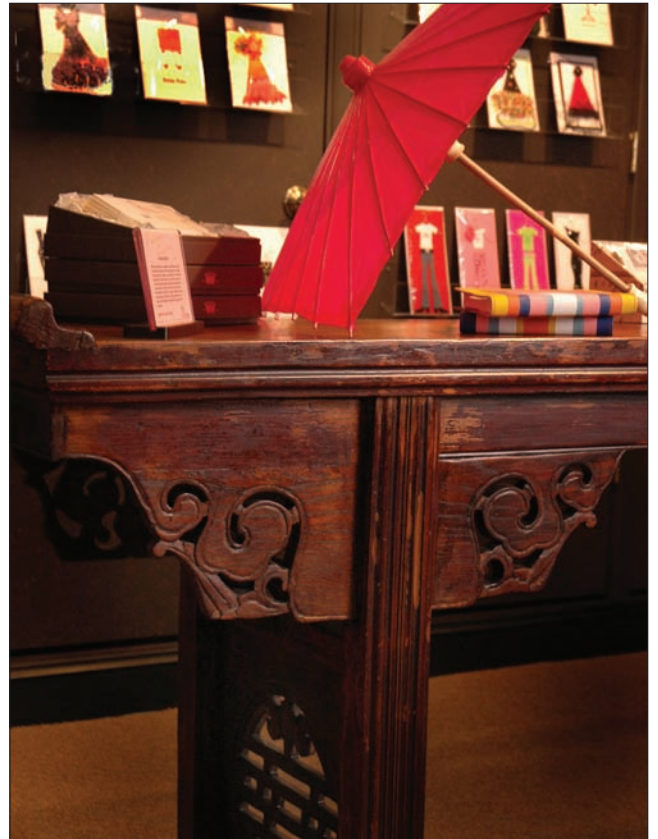


# A Personal Touch

A fusion of business savvy and a passion for paper attracts a fascinated clientele

By Regina Molaro  
Special to Stationery Trends



Top row, left to right: A personality- and antiquity-filled space makes an ideal stage for displaying exquisite stationery; Asian details are timely and timeless. Bottom row, left to right: Greeting cards are displayed like the tiny works of art they are; compelling vignettes romance already-gorgeous product. *Photos courtesy of Timothy Seed Photography.*

It's the artistic collection, unique experience and distinctive personal touch that lure TT Patton's clientele, a group of paper and gift enthusiasts that includes women, men and even children. After all, where else but TT Patton can you select a card, write a handwritten note and have the shop's owner offer to add the postage amount in and personally mail your card?

In 2005, Theresa T. Patton opened up TT Patton in downtown Barrington, Ill. It showcases an assortment of elegant writing papers, artistic greeting cards, custom invitations and stationery, unique journals and fine writing instruments. This interesting merchandise mix is displayed on ancient Asian furnishings, juxtaposed with unusual artifacts to create a compelling visual and shopping experience.

Although TT Patton only encompasses a 600-square-foot space, the shop makes quite a statement regardless. TT Patton's ambiance is intimate, relaxing and personal. Cozy chairs and stools are scattered about the space. This engaging setting is ideal



Theresa with her "husband, best friend and biggest promoter of TT Patton," Attorney Jesse M. Patton, Jr. They've been married almost 19 years.

for the writing workshops, book signings, book clubs and similar events that keep customers engaged and connected.

All these elements come together to create an environment where it's not unusual for customers who drop by in search of one item to end up spending 30 minutes or more at the shop. Here, clients become more like friends, and they often sit around talking with one another or with Patton. In short, this is certainly not your average stationer — some shoppers even linger for tea and lunch. Clients range from young writers just learning how to use fountain pens to seasoned journalists and corporate purchasing departments.

### What's in Store?

The collection is culled from around the world, with papers ranging from personalized stationery hand-engraved in Italy to cards letterpressed in Texas. Other items include Murano glass letter openers, leather journals with hand-cut papers from the Amalfi Coast and fine writing instruments from all over Europe. Chic greeting cards designed by artists are also part of the mix, as is a selection of books that address timely (yet classic) hobbies like journaling and memoir writing.

Nearly every item in TT Patton relates to the art of writing, and Patton prides herself on offering merchandise that's unavailable in most area retail shops or even the country. She also carries pricepoints for all budgets. Personalized stationery retails from \$1 to \$40 per card. Journals start at \$10 and soar to \$400; pens are priced from \$7 to \$700.

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## Quick Q&A: Theresa T. Patton

- Q. There are some things that are timeless — a little black dress or perfect martini come to mind. What epitomizes “timeless” for you when it comes to stationery?
- A. Simple. Personalized stationery. Your full name or your monogram engraved or letterpressed on ivory or white sheets or note cards.
- Q. With new stationery designers cropping up daily, how do you recognize the talented entrepreneurs among the hobbyists?
- A. The quality of the material. There’s nothing like fine paper and quality printing processes.
- Q. What are your three top-selling vendors?
- A. Pineider, LAMY and Graphic Image. There are many close seconds such as Caran d’Ache, Bell’Invito, Visconti, Noodler’s Ink and beyond.
- Q. What have you learned about running a stationery business in the last year that’s surprised you?
- A. I am surprised at the number of men that enjoy stationery. I thought men would love the pen lines, but after a search for fine stationery on gray paper or with a brown masculine image, they purchase and order custom paper as well.
- Q. If you were a stationery product, what would you be?
- A. I would be either a letter opener or a wax seal. I like the excitement of opening a letter. And I like to finish my thoughts with a wax seal.



Theresa T. Patton

beautiful paper to capture their thoughts,” Patton said. Yet it’s more than a love of paper and pen that’s behind her success; rather it’s a mix of business intelligence, marketing savvy and brand awareness.

Of course, creativity certainly plays a role in identifying workshop topics, planning events and hosting them, but unsurprisingly Patton has an impressive chunk of marketing and business experience. She worked as an electrical engineer at Motorola before earning her MBA from Northwestern. In another role Patton headed a health care start-up, and she led the marketing and sales teams for the pharmaceutical products division at Abbott Labs. Her work experience coupled with her personal passion laid the groundwork for TT Patton.

## You’re Invited

TT Patton’s engaging events breathe life into the shop, creating a unique experience that is more than just a retail destination. “I do events mostly related to writing,” Patton explained. “That’s what I enjoy and it makes the shop a little different. This is my experience in retail marketing and I really like it. I run special promotions on a random basis and I don’t do the same thing twice.”

Last year, Patton organized five writing workshops that ran from four to six weeks. Each was led by a local writer and featured a different topic. This year she will host a one-day writing workshop almost every month. “I recently held topics related to blogging, determining what’s next in life and, soon, filling in the blanks of your past,” Patton revealed. “I’ll also host three, one-week writing summer camps for students 9 to 12.”

Since Patton is always introducing new events — much like reading a good book — clients remain interested in the next chapter. Right now, for example, she’s in the process of transforming a storage room



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on the lower level into a writing room. The first set of events will be a writing summer camp for the store's younger customers, aimed to lay the groundwork for a lifetime of writing and journaling.

The events have made a positive impact on Patton's relationships with her clients — and brought in ones that may not have otherwise shopped at TT Patton. "I create opportunities that I know will appeal to (clients). People are complex and not one-dimensional. The more you can combine their interests, the more they look to you for solutions," she emphasized.

### Day-to-Day Details

Like a fine paper, it's the subtle nuances at TT Patton that truly set it apart. In addition to a welcoming atmosphere and impeccable service, amenities include calligraphy and fine writing services. Patton also assembles wedding pieces complete with stamping and mailing services for busy brides-to-be.

With such a focus on the details, it's not surprising to learn that the business has prospered. Since its first year in business, sales have doubled and Patton's expenses have actually decreased due to a strategic advertising and marketing plan. In addition, the shop's mailing list has soared from a few people to more than 3,000.

Currently Patton is the only full-time person there, and she also has a "swing shifter." Even with a staff of two, Patton still receives accolades from her clients. A teen client, raised in the digital age, once described TT Patton as the "coolest store ever."

Although Patton truly appreciates the art of writing and personal expression, she also embraces technology. The shop has its own Facebook page, and Patton also uses Twitter. "It's a fast way to promote a product, sale or event," Patton noted. "It's amazing how fast a message can go around the world."

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She commented that her business has grown thanks to her posts. “I enjoy the comments and calls that I get that begin with, ‘I found you on the Internet.’”

In terms of promoting events, Patton sends direct mail to clients and creates signage for the shop. Patton lists all her events on the store’s Facebook page, sends e-blasts and also tweets an announcement. Patton notes that several newspapers have picked up the events as stories, and have some e-based companies such as Sales Check.

“I’ve even promoted my workshops to teachers, offering them new ideas for their students.”

For the moment, TT Patton remains a sole location. “I would love another shop, but for now, I want to build an interesting space for my community in Barrington,” finished Patton. S

*Regina Molaro is a freelance writer who covers the art, fashion, home and beauty categories. She can be reached at reginacooper30@yahoo.com.*



Top row, left to right: An Aaron Potts NYC card display featured gowns made of stationery; TT Patton’s windows were dressed appropriately for the occasion. Middle row, left to right: The writing room for kids is currently a colorful work in progress; A young writer poses in front of her favorite spot; The proud winner of an essay-writing contest. Bottom row, left to right: A glimpse of a creative writing workshop called Spilled Ink (photo courtesy of Buzz Orr/Staff Photographer/Barrington Courier); Young women celebrate at a writing birthday party; That event’s goodie bags and gifts. All other photos courtesy of TT Patton.