

# Animal INSPIRATION

BY CHELLE ELLIS  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANA FINIMORE



Angi Cooper first introduces you to her cats -- Captain, a long-haired black cat and Frisco, a classic tabby. The artist's white cat, Tristan, doesn't allow an intrusion to stir him from his gentle nap in unknown parts of the Cooper home. Cooper's cat-loving history goes back to her childhood, with her first pet, a tabby simply named "Cat."

"I like tabbies. They're the sweetest. They're vocal, affectionate and real people cats," Cooper muses. Cats comprise a large part of the Olive Branch artist's paintings.

Cooper's own cats are just a few of the felines benefiting from her long devotion to domestic creatures. She volunteers at Mewtopia, a Memphis shelter for homeless, abused and abandoned cats. Her work there includes the risk of nurturing the desire to add more kitties to her already ample pride at home. So far she's managed to keep her head.

The walls of her home studio remind visitors they



are in an animal-friendly environment. Amid the paintings of cats and dogs hangs a mixed-media spirit nook of Jesus surrounded by clouds, domestic animals and scripture. It supports her belief in humans' responsibility to be good caretakers of God's creatures: "Sometimes we fail in that," Cooper reflects.

Cooper realized her artistic talent at an early age



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(Previous page) Cats are a favorite subject of artist Angi Cooper.

(Below) Angi Cooper works on a commissioned pet portrait, a families friendly poodle.

when she copied the cover of a Cinderella book. "I was about five or six and I freaked myself out. Then I showed it to my mom and she freaked out."

With her mother's encouragement, Cooper began painting, later cultivating her talent in high school and while earning a graphic design degree at Memphis State University.

Cooper's style today is boldly eclectic, offering no confinements of medium, and reflecting an overall abstract feeling. In addition to commissioned projects, she creates funky, gothic-style fabric dolls. Other creations include jewelry with a regional tongue-in-cheek message such as the "Saturday







"Night in Memphis" bracelet, with dangling charms of a booze jug, pistol and jailhouse complete with prisoner.

For the sentimental hobbyist or collector-of-all-things-neat, Cooper offers handmade journals and bookmarks, each designed with a specific type of personality in mind.

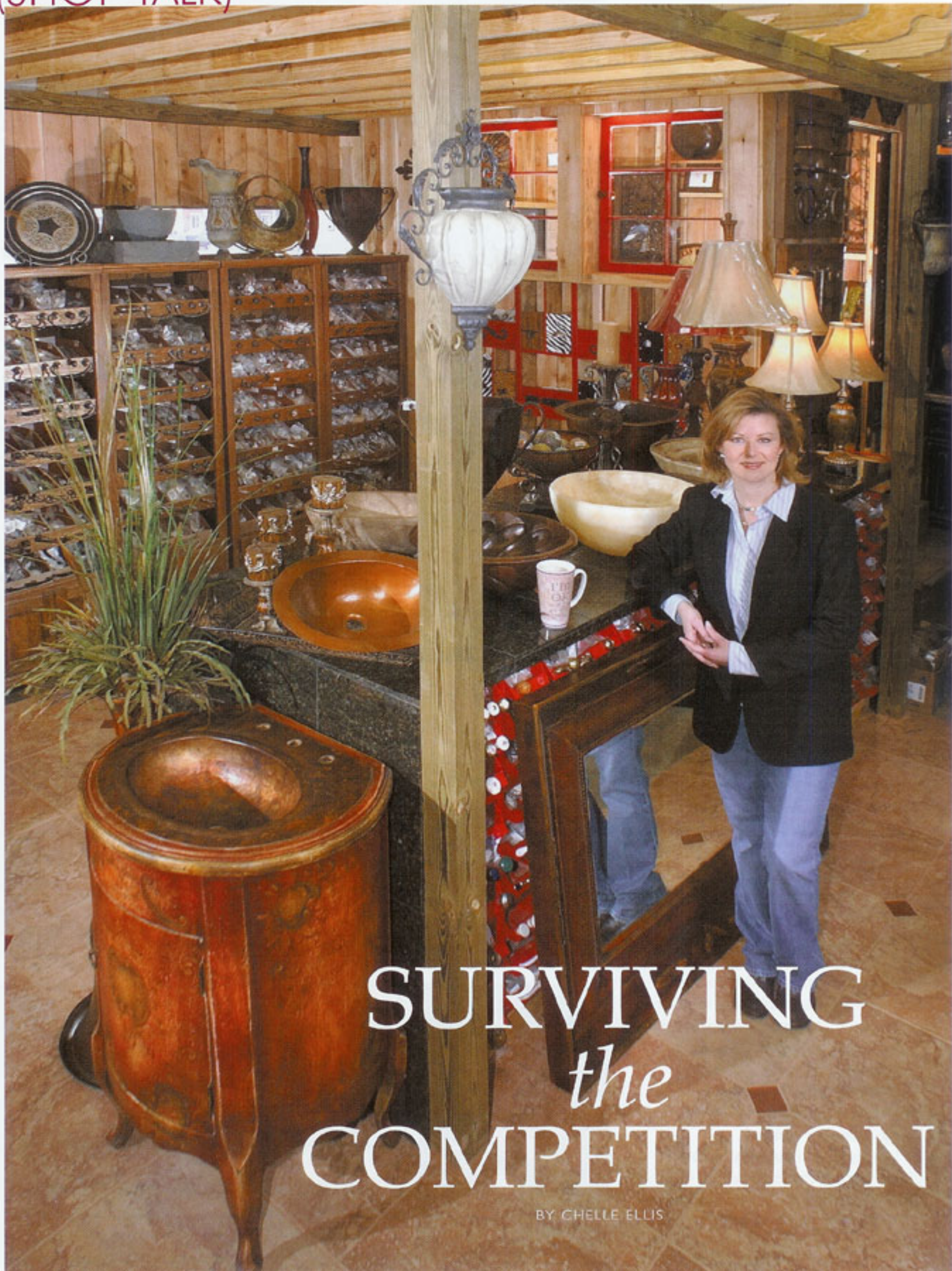
Perhaps the most intriguing form of her work is in Cooper's acrylic pet portraits, where she captures the personality of her subject in color and form. A cat named Major, who loves bowtie pasta and is the king of the hill in his house, is the subject of one commission. To illustrate Major's expectations of royal treatment, she added a purple hue to his coat. He is regally placed against a background of his beloved bowtie pasta.

When dealing with local patrons, Cooper meets and photographs the pet; she interviews the owner to determine the animal's traits. She incorporates the pet's personality into the image, relying on impressionist styling rather than painting a photograph-like image. "This way it makes it more interesting to me as an artist, too," she adds.

Cooper's work can be found in the Memphis area at Maggie's Pharm in Overton Square and Then and Again on Main Street, or through her website: [www.angiart.com](http://www.angiart.com). \*

Puppies, kittens, jewelry and handmade books are all products of Cooper's creative pursuits.





SURVIVING  
*the*  
COMPETITION

BY CHELLE ELLIS



**S**outhaven Supply has been in business nearly thirty years. Nestled in Southaven's Historic Main Street District, the hardware store is known for its courteous and immediate assistance to all who shop there.

Kerry Loosier began working in the business at the age of 14, learning the trade from her father, store founder Butch Morehead. Back then, the store was known as Olive Branch Building Supply since that was where it was originally located. Selling hardware and offering electrical wiring services until 1980, it moved to Southaven and changed its name.

"We were across the street," Loosier says, "then moved to our current location and have been here ever since." The address is 8560 Hwy. 51 North.

Through the years, there have been many changes made in the inventory; plumbing and electrical supplies, as well as a knife center, have been added. Southaven Supply has expanded to include softer elements of home décor, naming it "Jewelry for Your Home." The staff is trained and prepared to help customers design any room from beginning to end, offering advice every step of the way.

They start the process of remodeling bathrooms and kitchens by choosing cabinets and countertops since those items can be confining in color and style choices.


"Then we go to the floors because those options are wide open – hardwood, ceramic, stained concrete or cork – and, last, your paint colors can be literally anything," Loosier explains.

Old World styling with oil-rubbed bronze is currently popular; people are also seeking furniture-style vanities and copper sinks with varied patinas. But a very different contemporary style with modern colors and glass tile is on the horizon: "All styles tend to recycle, where something that was popular 30 years ago is suddenly popular again," Loosier says.

Southaven Supply, one of DeSoto County's last locally owned and operated choices for building supplies, has weathered the influx of major chain hardware stores into the area. Others have closed their doors in response to the competition.

A customer visiting Loosier's office asks for advice about a paint he could use on the back of his aquarium. Loosier offers several solutions, some of which might send him to another store, but she's careful in her counsel, letting him know all the risks of painting on glass. Personal service and helpful attitudes are a plus for virtually any retail enterprise.

Loosier believes strongly in the Golden Rule, in treating people right, and perhaps that's the secret of Southaven Supply's long success. "I put God first and the rest will take care of itself," she explains. □



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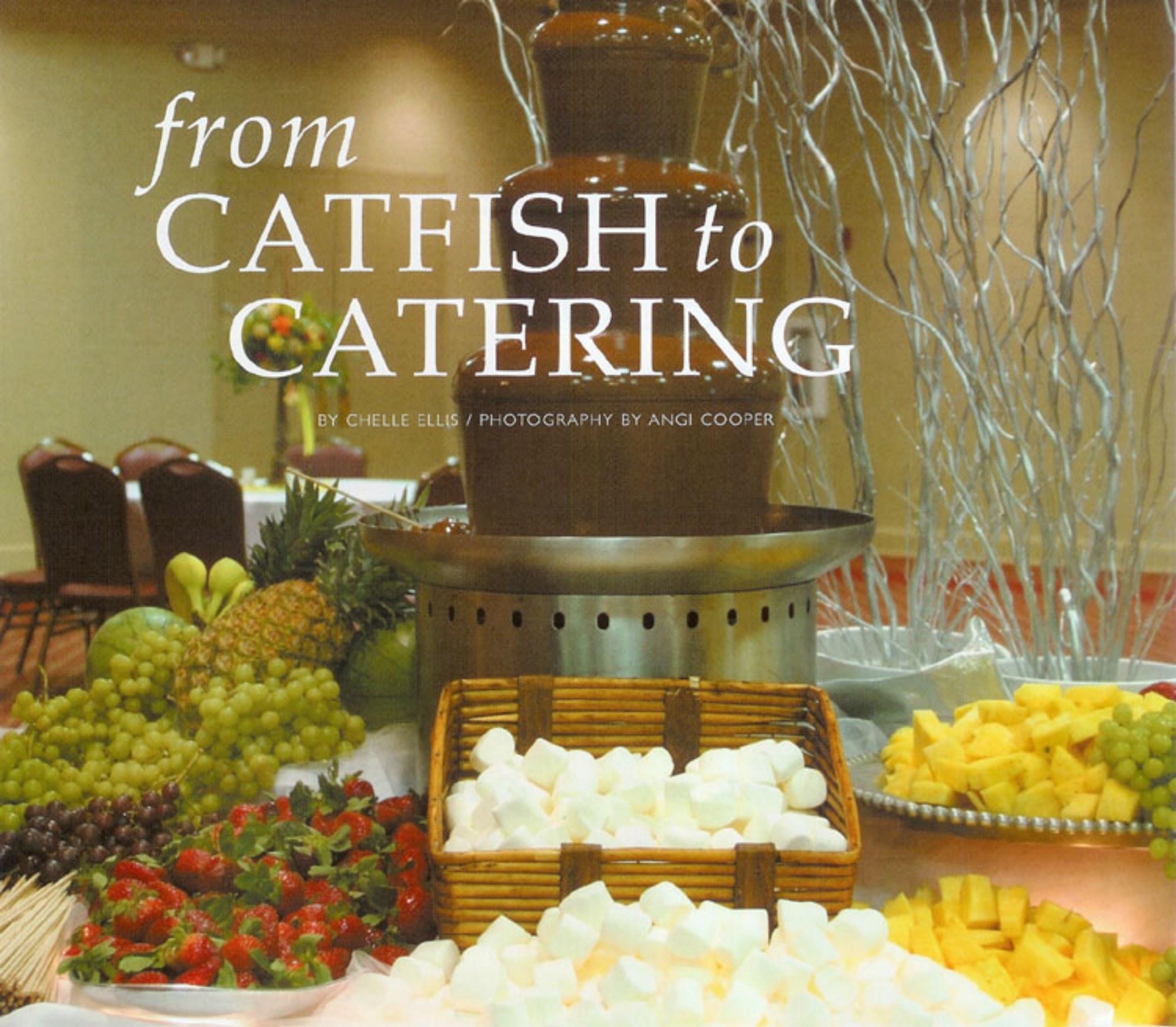
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# from CATFISH to CATERING

BY CHELLE ELLIS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGI COOPER

**J**ohn Woods started his culinary career as the owner of a catfish restaurant in Horn Lake, Mississippi. His business has evolved into First Choice Catering, which is causing quite a "stir" as it celebrates its eighth anniversary in April.

Catering began as a small, side business for Woods when customers asked him to cater small events and private parties in their homes. It turned into a big business for him practically overnight in 1997 when The Smithsonian Institution contracted him to feed more than 20,000 people during a 10-day event.

For the next five years, he catered that recurring

event. In 1999, he simultaneously fed another 6,000 people at a Fourth of July celebration at the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa, Canada.

In his conference room, Woods proudly points to a framed newspaper article of the Canadian meal: "That's probably some kind of a record for a catering company, to do the two largest events in North America on the same day."

The business today occupies five suites of a commercial building and employs 100 people, a far cry from the original staff of two. But harder work is ahead of Woods as bigger plans are in the works. In



addition to opening three restaurants – one in Tunica and two in DeSoto County – he is emphasizing weddings, bringing that side of his business to a new level to offer a “one-stop-shop” for wedding receptions.

Weddings are better planned when the bride starts with a good caterer who can help select a proper venue and competent wedding-service professionals they work with regularly. Food is one of the most important elements of planning; guests tend to remember the reception food more than anything else about the nuptials.

Today’s brides are on tighter budgets, hoping to plan a formal event without spending a lot of money. Woods strives to reduce the stress of planning, customizing a menu to fit the budget.

This will surely be a busy year for Woods. He contends there is no culinary challenge he won’t accept and prides himself in making each of his events unique.

“No two days are ever alike or stagnant,” Woods claims with an obvious enthusiasm. He has met unusual demands many times before, finding himself



(Above) First Choice Catering’s event tables combine tasteful arrangement with tasty food offerings.

(Left) John Woods has built a successful catering business based on creative innovations like chocolate fountains.



designing menus to reflect the cuisine of countries like Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Tibet and Bermuda.

Woods strives to exceed his clients’ expectations and to keep everything simple, yet elegant, especially in the presentation: “I’ve blended presentation with quality because people eat with their eyes,” he explains.

This is borne out in recent catering trends, which have progressed from simple meatballs and finger foods to upscale hors d’oeuvres and thematic stations featuring, for example, elaborate chocolate fountains for dipping fruit. People pay attention to food-related television shows and magazines and are more savvy about food.

Don’t be surprised to find a merging of innovation and elegance at a First Choice Catering event. Woods admits to using Alfredo sauce and even barbecue sauce in his fountains for dipping meatballs and shrimp at a cattlemen’s barbecue. Creative thinking sets some caterers apart from the crowd. ♦