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PETRA M. GEIGER

Petra Geiger founded Beehive Co-op in 2004 to provide emerging designers like herself with a viable market for their unique handcrafted products. A graphic designer by training, Geiger had struggled to find an appropriate outlet for her own handmade handbags and stationery line prior to founding Beehive, and imagined that there were many talented and ambitious designers who faced the same predicament when trying to enter a fiercely competitive retail marketplace.

With visions of antique malls swirling in her head, Geiger designed the first co-op in Atlanta as a supportive, artistic retail environment that nurtures professional designers and provides consumers the one-of-a-kind items they are seeking. "I started Beehive because I saw a need for a new entrepreneurial model, one rooted in community and collaboration," said Geiger. "I also felt a real desire among people I talked to for an alternative to the prevailing mall culture."

Geiger, 40, grew up in a family that was equal parts entrepreneurial and artistic, and she learned how to sew and craft at an early age from her mother. She received a bachelor of arts degree in Mass Communication from Tulane University and a bachelor of fine arts in graphic design from the acclaimed California College of Arts & Crafts. She worked as a graphic designer in San Francisco for five years and later served as director of corporate graphic image for Geiger International, the influential commercial furniture design company founded by her father and later acquired by Herman Miller.

In 2000, Geiger and her husband, Todd Relaford, launched Beehive Industries with a line of original stationery. Geiger and Relaford relocated their family to Atlanta in 2001 and quickly added a handmade line of handbags and other new products to the mix, which they started selling at local markets. They soon met other designers who shared their frustration at the lack of viable retail opportunities and the idea for Beehive Co-op was born. After three highly successful years for the Atlanta location, In January 2007, Geiger announced planned expansion into major U.S. markets through a Beehive franchise program.

Petra lives in Croton on Hudson, New York with Relaford and their two children, Lucy and Kaspar. She will be opening a Beehive Co-op in Mt. Kisco, New York in Fall 2008.