Hitting the bottle

by Gillian - Sunday, March 24, 2013


A new Tucson business is giving a whole new meaning to bottle recycling - by turning empty booze bottles into drinking glasses. By Samantha Cummings.

Photo courtesy of Bottle Rocket

Anita Goodrich’s competitive nature was her ticket into the art scene. When a friend asked her if she could cut a beer bottle 3 years ago, she couldn’t refuse the challenge. After perfecting the craft, Anita and her life partner, Stephanie Pederson, are now learning how to balance two other careers, raise a family and keep up with the demand of their booming business, Bottle Rocket glassware.

The sound of the knife etching a line into the empty Grey Goose vodka bottle is reminiscent of nails on a chalkboard. This is the first step Anita Goodrich takes when creating one of her signature rock glasses. In a recycling spin that brings things full circle, Bottle Rocket turns bottles that once contained beer, vodka and whiskey into drinks containers once more.

The couple knew their recycled bottle glasses would be a hit after selling the first batch in their friend’s store, Pop-Cycle, which houses the work of local artists using re-purposed materials. The boutique’s co-owner, DeeDee Koenen, is actually the same friend that challenged Goodrich in the first place.
Anita Goodrich and Stephanie Pederson with son Gavin
Photo by Samantha Cummings

“Instantaneously, they were sold like that,” Anita says, snapping her fingers.

Stephanie, a special education teacher at Secrist Middle School, contributes to the more artistic aspect of the business.

“I don’t want to know about the cutting too much. I don’t want to be outside in the middle of the summer. I’m like, I’ll make some lampshades,” she laughs.

So, while Stephanie leaves Anita to do the dirty work, she is busy brainstorming other ways to re-purpose the eye-catching bottles - like using them as lamps.

With a square-shaped Jack Daniel’s bottle as the base, Stephanie explains how she unleashes her creativity with the shades as she and Anita sip on a couple of imported beers at Time Market.

“I’ve been doing lampshades out of maps and out of books. I’ve done some out of T-shirt material, which is kind of fun. It hasn’t sold yet,” she laughs.
For the holidays, the couple created what they call chimneys – little candle tea lights made from the tops of Grey Goose bottles. When the candle is placed underneath, the smoke exits the neck of the bottle, creating a chimney-like effect.

“Actually, it’s the first thing I’ve done that Gavin really likes. Score, I made my son happy!” says Anita.

Gavin, who is six and a half years old (he is really enthusiastic on clarifying the ‘half’ part), attends Borton Elementary School. When he isn’t swimming or playing with his neighbors, he is quite the Bottle Rocket promoter. He even has his own slogan: “There are bottles! And glasses! And we make bells!”

Anita and Stephanie met 12 years ago at a coffee shop on the University of Arizona campus, where they both worked. Today, they’re combining each of their talents to take Bottle Rocket to the next level.

They have wine bottles to choose from for days, but the Grey Goose bottles seem to be a rare commodity.

“We can’t get enough people to drink Grey Goose,” Stephanie says jokingly.
Back at the couples quaint home, located between “A” Mountain and Tumamoc Hill, the perfect size for the family of three, a pile of bottles are patiently waiting to be given new life as they sit underneath a tree in the backyard.

Anita grabs the empty Grey Goose bottle from the Mecca of recycled bottles she has collected from local bars and restaurants, such as The Surly Wench, Mercado San Agustin, and Kingfisher.
To the right of the tree stands a massive blue tarp that shades Anita from the beaming rays of Arizona’s relentless sun as she stands at her homemade wooden work bench, which is covered with bottles next in line, glasses that didn’t make the cut, and others awaiting their finishing touches.

It’s safe to say that Bottle Rocket has taken over the entire backyard living space. Besides a sandbox that houses all of Gavin’s toy trucks and shovels, empty bottles have claimed the remaining territory.

It’s definitely organized chaos at it’s finest.

After scoring a perfect line around the circumference of the bottle with a diamond bit glass cutter, she places the bottle on a rotating sphere that spins as she simultaneously heats the line with the blue flame of a blow torch, creating a fracture. “The hope is that it doesn’t stray from your score line, so that it’s very clean,” says Anita.

With both hands, she grabs either end of the bottle and gently twists, anxious to see if the bottle decided
to cooperate. The bottle makes a popping sound and splits into two. Relieved to see a smooth edge, Anita lifts the bandana that hangs around her neck to cover her mouth and nose, and begins to grind the glass’ sharp edges.

Once all the edges are polished and smoothed, the process is complete.

It isn’t surprising that Anita is in charge of Bottle Rocket’s dirty work. When she isn’t getting dirty cutting glass, she’s doing anything from tiling a bathroom to building a deck as part of her home improvement business.

After the glass leaves Anita’s hands, it’s passed onto Stephanie, who etches a variety of designs onto the faces of the bare bottles. The glasses that undergo this process are usually the beer bottles that are stripped of their original paper labels or shot glasses made from champagne bottles.

Stephanie creates her stencils from vinyl with designs ranging from animals – such as an elephant, sparrow, stag, and an owl – to skulls and University of Arizona symbols. Next, she applies an etching cream on top of the stencil and lets it dry. Once the vinyl is removed, the etched design is complete.

Drinking glasses are their specialty, but the couple is constantly brainstorming new and ingenious ways to give these bottles a second chance at life. Metal balls are attached to the insides of vintage Sprite and Coke tops to create a bell. The round corks of Patron bottles are removed and replaced with wicks to create an oil lamp. And the spouts of wine bottles are cut and re-purposed as door pulls for kitchen cabinets.
There are more ideas in the works, and the couple plans to get on to [Etsy.com](http://Etsy.com). But they're still in such early stages, they don't even have a website. “We talk about getting a website. With our family and my day job of teaching, sometimes it’s hard to do the fair aspect because it’s so much investment and so much traveling. But, I think that we are trying to manage growth and creative exploration,” says Stephanie.

Currently, you can find Bottle Rocket favorites in Pop-Cycle on 4th Avenue; Adelante, located in Cave Creek; and several shops in California.

Anita and Stephanie down the last sips of their imported beer. Instead of throwing away the bottles, they are placed among the belongings the couple came with. “These are coming with us,” says Anita.


Video by Samantha Cummings

*Prices: rocks glass, $12; wine bottle glass, $22; beer glass, $6; Coke bottle, $6; shot glass, $8; bell, $10; Patron oil lamp, $16.95; 'chimney', $20.*

*Find Bottle Rocket at Pop-Cycle, 422 N. 4th Avenue, Tucson. Tel: 520-622-3297.*

*For special orders or requests, contact Anita at (520) 548-8757 or [bottlerocketaz@gmail.com](mailto:bottlerocketaz@gmail.com).*