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Spruce: Eco-Modernism in the Big Easy

By Miyoko Ohtake – February 2, 2009

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After Nomita Joshi-Gupta's home in New Orleans was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, she set out looking for eco-friendly products and services. But when she came up empty, she called her friend Cheryl Murphy, a historic preservationist whom she met in graduate school, and in December 2008, they opened Spruce, a green modern design store. "It's hard to find a product that is well designed and also has an aesthetic appeal in New Orleans," Joshi-Gupta says. "The whole idea was to create a showroom and somewhere we could both do design and sell eco-friendly products." We made a quick call to two business partners and design enthusiasts to find out why the Big Easy is a good place for modern design.

What do you hope to achieve through your store?

CM: The goal is to make sure that people know that they have design and building project choices that are eco-friendly. They can make environmentally conscious decisions without sacrificing style.

NJG: We are a carefully curated showroom of eco-friendly products and offer design services and installers to help you get to that goal. New Orleans has a huge trade and craft community. We want to be a resource for whoever walks into our door and is looking for someone to help get a project completed.

Why is New Orleans a good place to open a design store?

NJG: After Katrina everybody was feeling, in a strange way, revived. Everyone is looking to the future and wants to do right. A lot of people moved into town because they wanted to feel the energy of the city.

Is the city ready for modernism?

CM: There was quite an influx of young professionals after Katrina and a lot of them are interested in modern design. A lot of homeowners want to renovate their houses

so they are representative of today's lifestyle and society. That combined with the city's bohemian nature just lends itself to an appreciation of modernism. With homes that are traditional and historic on the outside you never know what you're going to find on the inside.

NJG: We also recently had the Prospect.1 show and it was inspiring to see people from New Orleans and all over see these exhibits that were very cutting edge and modern. It makes us all believe that we're getting off to a very progressive start.

Visit the store at 304 S. Diamond St. in New Orleans' warehouse district or shop online at sprucenola.com.

Lead image: Spruce coowners Cheryl Murphy and Nomita Joshi-Gupta in their showroom

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