

# Treasures

## from Museum Stores

**M**useum Stores are a treasure trove of unique and innovative gifts, apparel and home décor and a destination for savvy shoppers. Gwen Benner serves as President of the Museum Store Association, representing more than 1600 of the top museum stores and for ten years she has managed the retail operations at the Milwaukee Art Museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Gwen recently shared her insights with Shop America.

**SA:** Why do museums operate stores?

**GB:** A museum's store is more than just a convenient place to buy "stuff." The store's income supports the museum's mission by helping to fund current and future exhibitions and programs.

**SA:** How is a museum store different from other retail or souvenir shops?

**GB:** The merchandise relates to the museum and its collections, and provides further education at home, a souvenir of the visit, or a unique gift item. Museum store employees are informed, knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the museum's mission, its customers and merchandise.

**SA:** Are all museum stores basically the same?

**GB:** Absolutely not! In fact, museum stores are some of the most unique places one can shop. Each museum has a unique collection and the items in the store reflect the uniqueness of each collection.

**SA:** What do you look for when choosing a product?

**GB:** Our buyers always look for products that have relevance, uniqueness, value and purpose. Like our customers, we're also concerned about the environment, product safety and fair trade issues.

**SA:** How often do museum stores change their merchandise?

**GB:** There are some items that will always be available, such as a reproduction of a famous painting, but there will be changes in merchandise to support new exhibitions or programs, changing fashion or technology, seasonal items, or customer preferences.



**Matinee Purse Wallet.**

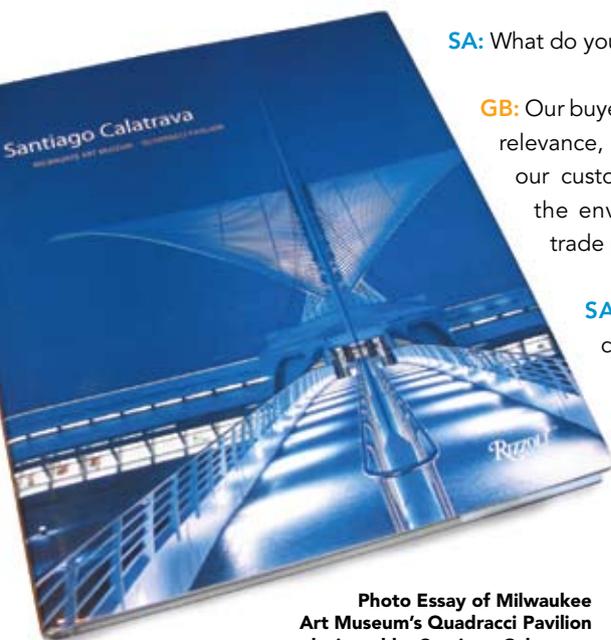
**SA:** What trends are you seeing in museum stores?

**GB:** There are two main trends right now. The first is an ongoing evolution of technology in both what we sell and how we sell. Product lines now include CDs, DVDs and more electronic items. More sophisticated Point-of-Sale systems make it easier to manage inventory, capture information for marketing purposes, create gift registries and better serve our guests. Most stores now offer online shopping on the museum's website and use email to target customers.

Going "Green" is the second important trend. We all want to be more respectful of the environment. It's not just the materials in the merchandise, but how it's shipped, packaged and presented.

**SA:** What are the biggest benefits of shopping in Museum Stores?

**GB:** Museum stores are full of valuable treasures just waiting to be discovered. And a purchase not only enhances and extends a guest's visit to the museum, but adds to the financial viability of the museum's future.



**Photo Essay of Milwaukee Art Museum's Quadracci Pavilion designed by Santiago Calatrava.**