

**Teresa Hernandez of Pura Vida Wordly Art
words: Mandi English**



Teresa Hernandez is a true asset to the artist community in Charlotte and has been for quite some time. She has been a resident of our fair city for over thirteen years. She took a measured approach to deciding where to open her first store, Pura Vida Worldly Art. She found a home in the Plaza-Midwood neighborhood coveted for its independent vibe. After months of researching locations, she found the area a good match in terms of clientele and environment as her multicultural store's home. Knowing that the people in this area are diverse, artistic, spirited and roundly loyal to local business, she set up shop near the corner

of Central and Thomas Avenues.

Teresa told me she opened the store with one main goal in mind: to support artists local and worldwide. She notes with passion the bravery of artisans in cities all over the world, where there is little opportunity for financial success. To support themselves, many must walk several miles every day to sell their wares, often making only a pittance before trudging all the way back home. That knowledge became a seed in Teresa's mind and wanting to help similarly disadvantaged artisans, she found that the idea for Pura Vida blossomed. She began looking into the Fair Trade Federation, a company that approves artists and weeds out sweatshop products to make sure the art is true to their stated roots. This dedication to genuine art by genuine artisans is a cause that is dear to Teresa's heart. She tells me that she checks to make sure each product she carries is authentic to its country and is of a good quality.

Pura Vida spent a few good years firmly planted in Plaza-Midwood, offering local music along with her collection of eclectic, worldly art. She also began carrying quality, fair trade coffee and soon added more art from artists in Charlotte and surrounding areas. One of my favorite events to attend at her establishment is the "Day of the Dead" celebration, a holiday from Mexico, her country of origin. This is just one more element of her efforts to stay true to her cultural roots. Teresa has also worked to stay true to her newest community, recently moving from the one artist community in Plaza-Midwood to a new home in NoDa. She is now an essential member of the arts district and supports many community events, including frequenting local restaurants and businesses and attending as many art openings as she can fit into her busy schedule.

When asked how she feels about the changing face of NoDa and the loss of many of the galleries, she responds that the changes are just a product of the environment and even though there are less actual galleries in the neighborhood, so many of the new places opening are still hanging paintings on the walls. An example is the space shared by Custom and Espada, who took over the Center of the Earth gallery. This group features a monthly artist exhibition complete with an opening reception. She feels blessed that the current stores and businesses attract a steady clientele and that the new restaurants and shops continue to draw more people from all walks of life. This is good for her because the next endeavor for this connected and involved businesswoman is the reshaping of her back room where she is creating a gallery area for paintings and photography.

Also among the myriad contributions Teresa makes to the community is sharing her business savvy with students in the area. This advice she also shares with me: she humbly declares above all that you must be passionate about what you are doing, you have to love it, and you must be committed. "It's passion," she says, "that can give you the momentum to continue when things are difficult and can serve as a reminder of why you started your business. Understand who your customers are and stay connected to them. Keep them abreast of what you are doing. Loyal customers can be your biggest advocates. Be loyal to your vision but adapt to market circumstances. Keep your pulse on changes in customer needs be they socially or economically driven. Get to know your community. Engage with it and give back to it. There's an intrinsic reward in that but you'll also realize in doing so that you're shaping your community and city."

To find more information, visit www.PuraVidaArt.com. She is always searching for new artisans and crafters and you could be the next featured work in Pura Vida. So walk in, look around, and breathe in the artistry. Kids of all ages are welcome and Pura Vida is a space with wonderful energy that will make your heart smile.

Pura Vida is at 202-A. N. Davidson St., Charlotte, NC 28205. Call them at 704.335.8587. Go visit the one and only Teresa.