

There's a pair of stores, one in Balboa Island, the other in Laguna Beach that are unlike anything you'll visit in coastal Orange County.

Both called Art for the Soul, they are the embodiment of Valinda Martin's rebirth.

Soulful Journey



PHOTOS BY TED O'LEEN

Valinda Martin says she chooses to sell colorful, decorative things that have meaning and depth at her Art for the Soul stores.

Fifteen years ago, a Labor Day boating accident broke Martin's back and left her legs paralyzed. At the time, she had a career as a women's clothing rep based in Los Angeles.

"I had to learn how to relive my life, start over with everything," she says. "I found myself really attracted to colorful, whimsical and inspirational things that had meaning, things that had actual words."

Martin moved to Orange County and filled her home with these things, but had to search far for them. "Nothing in the area fulfilled my need for this kind of work," she says.

So Martin opened her first store on Marine Avenue in Balboa Island 10 years ago and gave it a name that clearly reflected its contents. Five years later, she debuted a second location on Forest Avenue in Laguna Beach.

Martin chooses every single thing she sells. "I like things that have depth. They have to feel dimensional in my head and dimensional in my heart."

Her stores are filled with art, décor, furniture and jewelry so colorful that she says they either draw people or stop visitors at the door.

"When people say, 'You have too much color,' I wonder, 'Are you so vanilla that you're so stuck and can't expand your thinking?'" she says, laughing.

Martin says she chooses the artists, artisans and jewelers not just based on how their work looks and sells, but on how they treat others. "I have to make

sure the energy is good about them... I don't want to have ickiness in my stores," she says.

Having celebrated significant calendar milestones for her stores, she isn't looking back at what could have been. The boutiques have been Martin's journal, a chronicle of her life after a setback.

"I'm just taking a different path," she says, "and I'm just choosing to do it colorfully."

Art for the Soul, 272 Forest Ave., Laguna Beach, (949) 497-8700; 210 Marine Ave., Balboa Island, (949) 675-1791; art4thesoul.com

