



Seaside Cottage and Boutique M

bags. Those who don't come to Even Sisters for a shopping spree come instead to visit the life-sized cow that welcomes customers into the store. Every holiday, the sisters bring the cow home, sand her down, and repaint her for Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter.

Nearby at **The West Wing**, you'll find a women's boutique owned by husband and wife Naz and A.K. Koyoumjian. Naz and A.K. affectionately named Rachel's after Naz's mother, who owns the shop across the street (the 31-year-old **Alex's Fashion Center**) with her husband, Alex.

Expect to see men perusing through apparel at Alex's, or J.P. Maxwell, while waiting for their wives or girlfriends to finish shopping in the women's section of the store (or at another boutique altogether).

ARTS AND CRAFTS

One door away from Even Sisters is **MJW Fine Art**, one of several galleries (**Graphics Gallery**, **Debra Huse Art Gallery**, **June's Fine Art Gallery**, **Sally Huss Gallery**, **Simon Fine Art Gallery**) sprinkled around Marine Avenue that lure art lovers inside through a window displaying canvases of all sizes, colors and themes.

But the two brightest, most colorful stores on Marine Avenue combine an art gallery with a gift shop.

Art for the Soul is sure to "put a giggle in your soul," says owner Valinda Martin. Celebrating its seven-year anniversary, Art for the Soul boasts everything from a \$1.25 pocket angel to a \$10,000 armoire. What used to be a hardware store in the early part of the 20th century (where Island residents flocked to buy building supplies for their homes) now houses an eclectic collection of bright hand-blown glassware, hand-crafted jewelry, martini glasses, dart boards and beyond. Martin describes her store as "message-y," since most items

display some sort of encouraging inscription, such as "love" or "live well, laugh often."

Across the street, at the base of the bridge, tucked away from the hustle and bustle of Marine Avenue, apron-clad Holly Wojahn paints wooden trays, shaded by her art gallery and gift shop, **Melange**. Melange houses Wojahn's fine art and a collection of hand-painted pillows, cans, pots, aprons, and gift items in dazzling bursts of yellow, orange, blue, purple, green, and pink. Shoppers often poke their heads in "out of curiosity," says Wojahn. What they'll find is that Melange offers something for everyone – whether it's a reproduction of one of Wojahn's original paintings, a custom gift, or one of her hand-painted pot people.

Eighteen years ago, sisters Stephanie Thomas and Kathy Wales went through a handful of business ventures and then one day, on a bike ride along the peninsula, Thomas told her sister she had dreamt of a bookstore the night before. "I had the same dream," Wales replied. The two went looking for building space that day. It wasn't until a year later that the pair found a perfect nook for their bookstore – Wojahn's first gift shop on Marine Avenue – dubbed the **Secret Room and Tea Garden**. Wojahn has moved on to Melange since, but her decade-old murals still sprawl across the walls of Thomas and Wales' bookstore – **Martha's Bookstore**, named after their deceased mother.

Martha's Bookstore is heard first, then seen. Soft piano and harp music invites customers to pass under a white, vine-laced arbor, past tables of books perched under umbrellas, and into the store, where Thomas greets them with: "Hello! Would you like some Marrakech Mint Iced Tea or Champagne?" The free refreshments are one of many of Martha's perks – the store also offers a wide selection of Ty's Beanie Babies, greeting cards, historical (and hard-to-find) Balboa Island books,