

Mad for Monograms

Let Monica Smith make your initials sing. BY ALLISON BARNES



She started stitching a few letters on hand towels, but a couple of curly characters hanging from the bath rack just wasn't enough to satisfy Monica Smith's interest in initials.

She tackled T-shirts and then canvas tote bags, tagging her items with the ultra-feminine label "The Pink Monogram."

Fetching Footwear Monica looked up and all around for something else to monogram and then looked down and found her answer. "I decided it would be neat if I put a monogram on shoes," explains Monica. She pictured a shoe that busy

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Initial Investment

"I was a mom who monogrammed and embroidered before I was a businesswoman," Monica explains of her hobby turned career. Although she'd never sewn before, she caught the itch to embroider after finding out that her second child would be a girl.

Smocking dresses for her daughter soon turned to personalizing clothing for herself. People noticed the designs, which Monica often sported to her sons' baseball games, and requests followed. Can you monogram these sheets? How about this hair barrette? A yoga bag? The answer is yes!



LEFT: Monica Smith customizes anything that stays still long enough. **ABOVE:** Makeup bags, hair elastics, and colorful soaps are popular gifts.

moms like herself could slide into and wear from a PTA meeting to the grocery store and then to a soccer game. It had to be a shoe that marries function with the glamour that's essential to a Southern woman's style.

For two years, she ran her company from the basement of her home—filling Internet orders as they arrived. The popularity of this business really hit when she

PHOTOGRAPHS: GARY CLARK



LEFT AND FAR LEFT:

The seven-year-old company offers a variety of monogram-ready items.

BELOW: Customers choose from more than 400 mix-and-match design options for their shoes.

came back from a buyer's market and had to make hundreds of shoes for sample packs to go to stores. Realizing that fonts were her frontline, she left her 20-year teaching career to run her business full-time, opening up her store called The Pink Monogram.

A Sure (Alpha)Bet "I live and walk the product," says Monica from her quaint showroom on Sevier Street. Each year the company sells about 15,000 pairs of footwear, with clogs starting at \$140 and sandals at \$150. The in-store design studio houses 13 embroidery machines, pumping out creative combinations. Pink

leather uppers pair with green polka-dot soles. A navy suede clog wears a sunflower-yellow bumblebee, while a zebra-print, faux-fur sandal looks fierce. If you can't make it to the store, you can "build" your shoe on the Web site.

The woman-powered company offers more than 5,000 types of personalized paraphernalia, from the traditional mugs, plastic and glass cups, towels, and tote bags to the more inventive book bags, ponchos, belt buckles, car mats, and peel-and-stick cell phone monograms. More than 1,000 stores, including many Greenville boutiques, carry Monica's monogrammed merchandise.

For the Love of Letters

Monica's affection for the alphabet doesn't stop at things she can wear. For instance, her Ford Mustang bears her telltale "MSR."

"I'm 47 years old, I've got long hair, and I drive a red Mustang," Monica declares, looking in the rearview mirror to adjust her monogrammed sunglasses. "Am I marching to anybody else's drummer?"

Next, she's figuring out a way to make an "M" large enough to personalize her boat. ●

THE PINK MONOGRAM: 12 Sevier Street, Greenville, SC 29605; www.thepinkmonogram.com; (864) 271-3587. Visit the Web site to find a retail shop close to you.