

RETAILER PROFILE

At A Glance

Founded: 1977

Owner: Doris Houghland

Location: 1235 Pearl St.,
Boulder, Colo.

Size: 17,000 square feet

Phone: 303-449-5847

Web: www.peppercorn.com

PEPPERCORN

40 Years of Delight

THE INDEPENDENTLY OWNED STORE REFLECTS
THE NATURE OF ITS BOULDER LOCATION

• By Katie Martin •



▲ Janice Manville

If there ever was a wonderland for foodies, Peppercorn in Boulder, Colo., just might be the Disney World. In the 40 years since Doris Houghland first opened her cooking school and small gourmet store, Peppercorn has grown into 17,000 square feet chock full of beautiful imports, top-of-the-line kitchen electrics, impossible-to-find kitchen gadgets, gourmet and imported foods as well as a gift shop.

The space encompasses two storefronts and one upstairs to accommodate the coffee/tea department that feeds into the book department, which goes into cookware. Working back to the front of the store is dinnerware and the food section. Through the archway into the second storefront is more dinnerware, tabletop and linens then upstairs is gifts, personal care, bed linens and bath care.

Right inside the front door is the coffee and tea department. “[Customers] are very into their teas and matchas,” says Janice Manville, general manager. “Our tea department has grown more than the coffee department. I feel it’s more that people around here have a tendency to drink more tea than they do coffee.” The store stocks a lot of local tea brands, but also the traditional like Harney & Sons and Earl Grey as well as Tao of Tea. Regular tea kettles and press pots also are good sellers in the tea category.

For coffee, the store has begun to move away from beans in bins. It has streamlined its selection of Silver Canyon (a local Boulder roaster) coffee beans down to about eight different varieties in bins, and offers a broad selection of packaged coffee from a variety of companies. As Boulder is home to several popular coffee companies, Peppercorn carries a large local selection of coffee varieties.

HARD-TO-FIND FOOD

Local also plays a large role in the food department, with several Colorado companies represented and chocolate forming a big portion of the category. However, the store also sells a large selection of gourmet products from jams and jellies to vinegars and olive oils to salts, especially dark salts, and pepper to a variety of chocolate. “We have food that is mostly not in grocery stores,” Manville says. “It’s mostly European food, a lot of classics like Kinder Eggs.”

In Peppercorn, the popularity of food ebbs and flows, Manville notes, with some years food playing a larger role in the

company’s sales; on average, food makes up between 8 and 12 percent of store sales. The winter holidays have always been a sales driver. “What people want for stocking stuffers are a big part of what sells a lot,” she adds.

COOKBOOKS, COOKWARE & GADGETS

Perhaps because it began as a cooking school, which has since closed, Peppercorn’s cookbook section is larger than some bookshops, although the books are not restricted to one section. “We have cookbooks everywhere,” says Manville. “Lots of the displays have cookbooks. That’s kind of [Doris’] thing, she puts cookbooks among the displays.” Not only are cookbooks good merchandising items, but adding them to displays allows the covers to be easily seen. “With cookbooks, it’s so important to see the covers,” she adds. “When you see the beauty of the cover, you have more of a tendency to stop and buy.”

The category the store is most known for is cookware, although it may take up less square footage in the store than it has in the past, and comes behind dinnerware in sales. “This department is really the consistent sales department,” Manville says. “[Customers] still feel like Peppercorn is a cookware store.” Le Creuset is a perennial good seller, but Cuisinart, All-Clad, Swiss Diamond are the three mainstays customers are always looking for. In baking ware, silicone has become so popular that it has its own little section in the store by the cookware department.

Peppercorn also offers an “a crazy amount of gadgets,” Manville laughs. “I look at these sometimes and go, ‘What is that for?’” The store offers everything from a walnut opener to grilling spoons and popcorn accessories. Some of the most popular gadgets include a pot holder in the shape of a pot leaf (remember, the store is in Boulder, Colo.), egg timers, peelers and clips. “Things that clip onto your pot and your utensils, those are really big,” she adds. The largest seller in the department is Oxo. While gadgets may not be the largest selling department, it is one of the top reasons that customers visit the store.

DINNERWARE

Dinnerware, which takes up the most space and has the largest percentage of sales, continues to be a big draw for the store, and the store offers a variety of companies and patterns, with Fiestaware remaining a popular seller. Gray continues to be a popular color. “It’s still very gray. Millennials gear to white and grays right now, they aren’t big on colors,” Manville notes. *The Gourmet Retailer* visited the store in late October, right when Peppercorn began displaying its Christmas wares, so red was a popular color on display. However, Manville notes that “red will be really big no matter what.”





▲ **Peppercorn** relies on the eye of owner Doris Houghland to merchandise the displays attractively and ensure all products are shown in the best light.

She also adds that an advantage Peppercorn has over larger department stores is that it carries all different colors in dinnerware. Whereas department stores may decide on the colors of the season and only carry lines in that color, Peppercorn carries a wide variety of color options in addition to the color of the season.

The store also sells a lot of Asian-inspired dinnerware patterns. “We sell a lot of Asian dishes, I mean a lot of Asian dishes,” Manville notes. She credits the store’s location in Boulder for the popularity. “I feel like there is a lot of heavy influence in Boulder with Buddhism because it’s very new agey. And, I feel like people are drawn to the simpler patterns that is more in Asian ware.”

In addition to Asian dinnerware, Peppercorn also offers a variety of Mediterranean dinnerware from Italy and Spain.

TABLETOP

One of the top destination departments for Peppercorn is linens as linens make it easy for consumers to change up the look of their dinnerware as well as making a good gift. “If you have standard dinnerware, you can spend a little bit more money and spruce up your whole look,” Manville says. The staff in the linens department also are really good at putting together a look based on a customer’s dinnerware, she notes. The whole department acts as a visualization of what you can do in your home with the combination of dinnerware with linens.

In tabletop, Peppercorn offers “everything from French to high-end leather to lower-end everyday stuff,” Manville says. The store also sells a full complement of barware, including glassware. A popular glass selection is the state collection from Cat Studio. “We have glasses for every

state. People will go, ‘Oh, I got married here, so I have to get that glass. Or I went to college there, so I’ll get that glass.’ It’s phenomenal,” she adds.

IMPULSE ACCESSORIES

The store sells a few small electrics, but has greatly reduced inventory because it can’t compete on price with the big box stores. Now, those extra sales are coming from the impulse purchases from the accessories department upstairs. “I don’t think people come up here for a destination, this stuff is kind of stumbled on,” Manville says. “There’s a lot of impulse up here versus downstairs, which is more of a destination.”

Socks, which have been a big seller for a lot of stores, are starting to slow down for Peppercorn. “I don’t think they are as big as they were last year, but they’re still really big,” Manville says. “Coloring books are another thing that was really big two years ago, but there’s not that rush that everybody wants them now.” Peppercorn is making a big push into men’s ties after seeing them at the New York show.

To round out offerings, the store also has departments for candles, natural baby products and pets.

ONLINE PRESENCE

Peppercorn recently revamped its website to be mobile friendly. The store’s website does very little e-commerce, mostly gift cards and sells a few options from dinnerware and knives. Web sales are not very big because Peppercorn can’t ship for free like Amazon.

However, Peppercorn does have a store through Amazon. It is competition for the physical store, but it reaches consumers that store can’t draw from and sells

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a lot in categories that the store itself can't compete. "We're literally competing with them, but it's all the same company, so it doesn't really matter," Manville says.

The Amazon store, which started about four years ago, has a more curated selection with a focus solely on housewares like pots and pans, gadgets and coffee accessories. It also is where Peppercorn sells most of its small electrics. The Amazon store also sells a lot of package deals by combining several commonly purchased items together. A lot of the ideas for what the Amazon store will sell come from the International Home + Housewares show in Chicago; Peppercorn the store often attends Dallas and Las Vegas or New York shows for inspiration. The Amazon store sells out of a 3,500-square-foot warehouse in Boulder; Peppercorn has virtually no storage at the store; everything that comes in has to go straight to the sales floor.

WHAT'S NEXT

For future trends, Manville sees categories that are a draw for men as opportunities for growth. More men are

cooking so things that are attractive to men are going to grow like barbecue and grilling tools, sous vide and knives. "Knives are really good because when guys cook I think they want a really good knife. I don't think women care as much, but guys really care about knives," she says.

Peppercorn does good business with Shun and Kershaw. "They by far outsell the other knives outside of paring knives. This is a very foodie town, and a lot of the chefs buy a lot of Shun." As for blades, cooks are looking for the santoku, which allows food to slide off easily. "It's especially good if you're doing something like tuna or anything that has a tendency to stick. I use a 6- to 8-inch santoku knife because they are really good for chopping really fast."

Peppercorn has grown incrementally over the years, but its location on Pearl Street puts it right in the heart of Boulder's shopping district. In the summer, about 60 percent of the customers are tourists, but that drops down to about 30 percent in the winter. "We love Pearl Street. There is no other place in town we would be. This is Boulder, this is where we have to be." **TGR**