

# Yogi opens eco-friendly design and furniture shop



Michael Galcia (center) with Sabra Berman and her husband, Mill Valley council member Andrew Berman, at a recent launch party for Marin Outdoor Living, located in Greenbrae. photo by Ken Friedman

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Editor

While Marin is known for many things — activism, jaw-dropping mortgages and fitness gurus to name a few — it's perhaps the area's lush green landscape that has put it on the map as a desired locale and hot property spot.

From the hikers that scale the peaks of Mount Tamalpais to the garden groups that create sumptuous magazine-spread-worthy sanctuaries, it's the county in the shadow of a glorious mountain, an earth-savvy community, that's always on the lookout for something new, innovative and eco-friendly.

It was with that notion that Mill Valley resident Michael Galcia opened a new store, Marin Outdoor Living, located in Greenbrae, earlier this month.

Galcia, 32, a longtime beach

## Spirit of MILL VALLEY

nut, yogi and promoter of "green living," returned to Marin three years ago after a 10-year stint in Costa Rica, where he worked at a yoga institute, ran a bed-and-breakfast and made his living off real estate ventures.

The dream to bring an earth-friendly design and retail store to Marin began when Galcia realized that, despite the area's ever-growing interest in gardening and fondness for outdoor living, there weren't any stores that catered directly to green-focused products.

"I'd been a part of this yoga institute in Costa Rica and I was looking to make a change in my life, but I wanted to keep working in a healthy place," said

Galcia. "Where else could I do that but Marin?"

At first, Galcia, who has a master's in international marketing from UC Berkeley, considered opening a yoga studio.

When he found the Bay Area had become saturated with yoga studios while he was living abroad he quickly switched gears.

With the help of friend and designer Karen Goldberg, Galcia, who is also a yoga instructor at the Yoga Studio in Mill Valley and is active with the Rainforest Action Network, put together a plan to create Marin Outdoor Living.

The two set out to find a collection of luxury outdoor furnishings that were "high on style, durability, function and greenness."

Galcia said while his interest in the market was prompted

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by his desire to live in a green world, which is defined as life-style intended to ensure that human impact on the environment is as minimal (or as positive) as possible, it was also a product of research that showed the growing market for landscaping and home furnishings.

"According to recent Gallup surveys, professional landscaping can add up to 14 percent value on homes, and Money magazine has reported that landscaping can return a value that is 100 to 200 percent higher than other home improvements," said Galcia.

"I'm a healthy, conscious Marinite with a dog and an interest in design and being green," said Galcia. "We just went from there."

The store, a 4,000-square-foot site at 2100 Redwood Highway, features vibrantly hued umbrellas, sleek hardwood and brushed steel furniture, pottery by Half Moon Bay artist

Mary Collins, luxury Dimension One spas and Ecosmart fireplaces.

Galcia said while the store has been open less than two weeks, the spas and fireplaces were already gaining a fan base and that orders for the fireplaces poured in after the store's opening bash.

The Ecosmart fireplaces are an Australian import that have won awards for their environmentally friendly, sleek design and been featured in home and living magazines such as Dwell and Domain. They're open, function without a flue and are fueled by denatured ethanol, a renewable energy source that burns clean without any of the mess of an old-fashioned wood burner or the monthly expense of a gas fireplace.

"They have a 'zen-y' look," said Galcia. "But people like them because they're natural and you can put them inside or outside."

The showroom also features a 20-foot Dimension One spa,

conserved energy and implemented sound environmental practices that prevent pollution.

It has been a great success, making the to-do list of organizations throughout the county.

"It's a whole theme; outdoor landscaping and design are a big business," said Galcia. "My life in Costa Rica and work in real estate ventures has brought me here and to the products at the store. It's about thinking green, using natural products. It's a reflection of Marin."

Ultimately, being green is more than just a design trend, according to Galcia.

"It's economically and environmentally smart," said Galcia. "It's more than just trying to care for Mother Nature, it's about preserving her too. We know that — we're living in that preserve here in Marin County. Everyone should go green as much as they can."

Michael Galcia's store Marin Outdoor Living is located at 2100 Redwood Highway.



which potential buyers are free to try out.

"I don't think there is anywhere else where people will find our high-end green approach and more than the usual \$300 green, industrial umbrella," said Galcia. "I've really tried to create a museum-like showroom that displays the goods."

That quest for unique products leaves Galcia with the hope that Marin Outdoor Living will soon become a one-stop shopping spot for homeowners, designers and developers and support Marin's active green cultures and furniture needs.

The green theme seems a perfect fit in the county, which has recognized more than 100 green businesses since 2002.

The Green Business program, a voluntary partnership among business leaders, government agencies and nonprofit organizations, allows businesses that have demonstrated conscientious compliance with applicable environmental regulations,