

## Naples couple and owners of Calusa Gallery have framed it all



Carolina Hidalgo

Robert Pascente and Kelly Thorsen work in the back room of their Naples frame shop and gallery, Calusa Gallery, on Oct. 1, 2015. (Carolina Hidalgo/Staff)

By John Osborne

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If something can be framed, Robert Pascente and his fiancé, Kelly Thorsen, co-owners of Calusa Gallery on Vanderbilt Beach Road in Naples, have probably framed it.

Pascente, a former commercial graphic designer in Chicago who along with Thorsen took over Calusa Gallery in 2007, said he never knows what sort of interesting item might walk through his door on any given day.

"Right now, I've got a 48x60 art nouveau advertising print that's probably from the 1920s or 1930s," said Pascente, whose business also sells original artwork in addition to providing custom-framing for clients throughout Southwest Florida. "It's for Lillet — a brand of alcohol — that was an actual advertising poster used in Europe, and it's a really graphic, bright-colored poster of a woman wearing a long gown."

While Pascente and Thorsen handle plenty of more traditional items — such as golfing hole-in-one shadowbox displays — they also come across plenty of unusual things in their daily work.

"I once framed a pipe from the mid-1800s, with a leather mouthpiece and a ceramic stove that had a hand-painted caricature of an old man on it," said Pascente. "That was probably one of the stranger things I've framed, but it's anything that can go into a frame, I've probably framed it at one point or another."

Thorsen, another Chicago native, said working so closely with her business and romantic partner comes complete with its own set of joys and challenges.

"The nice thing is that we get each other so well that I think we can play off each other's strengths and weaknesses," she said. "We both definitely have a different design sense — one isn't better than the other — which provides a nice balance for our customers. They get both of our viewpoints, so they receive a nice, diverse set of ideas to choose from."

Still, it isn't always butterflies and fairy dust, Thorsen added with a laugh.



"We've been together 12 or 13 years now, and we've been down here running this business for nine years, so working so closely can get stressful at times, since we both know how to get under each other's skin," she said. "At the same time, it's really great working together, too."

Thorsen said taking over the business at the beginning of the Great Recession hardly registered on the couple's radar, since the first-time business owners didn't have any expectations.

"Since we weren't in business before the economy took a major downturn, we didn't have anything to compare it to," she said. "We knew we were down from what we saw in the previous owner's books, but that just made us work harder to always be at the top of our game. So I think it actually worked to our advantage to come in with no previous experience or different perspective."

Both Pascente and Thorson said one of the great things about running a business in Southwest Florida is the gradual disappearance of the dreaded summer lull.

"Since Day One, we've slowly been getting busier year after year," Thorsen said. "Especially in the summers, which is a great thing since it provides us with year-round business."

Pascente agreed.

"The area is growing so much that there is less and less of a drop-off each summer," he said. "It's definitely seasonal, but the tourists in Naples are also homeowners, not just people who come down for a week or two here or there, so that certainly helps."

Winter, spring, summer or fall, client Kevin Steffanni, owner of Kevin Steffanni Design Group in Estero, said he never hesitates to put his faith in Calusa Gallery when it comes to providing custom-framework on any of his decorating projects.

"There are other frame companies out there, but what I like about working with Kelly and Rob is that a lot of times I'll bring special pieces for my projects that they immediately know what to do with," he said. "Whether it's an antique print, something nautical-related or an antique map, they have the knowledge and expertise to provide a beautiful frame, no matter what it is. Sometimes my clients even want to seek out framing on their own, and I never hesitate to send them to Calusa Gallery because I know they'll have a wonderful experience."

Calusa Gallery is located at 2460 Vanderbilt Beach Road, North Naples.

For more information, call 239-534-3888 or see [www.calusagallery.com](http://www.calusagallery.com).