

# Warehouse wonderland

*Home Style* selects Caren McSherry of The Gourmet Warehouse in Vancouver as Canada's most innovative retailer for 2016/17



Keeping up with Caren McSherry is next to impossible. She never stops. In addition to running one of the country's most successful gourmet kitchen shops, this retail dynamo has penned seven cookbooks and is a talented chef who trained at the Cordon Bleu in England and the Culinary Institute of America. She is the founder of Caren's Cooking School, and a TV/radio personality who also writes a weekly magazine column. To add to this impressive list of accomplishments you can now add "Global Innovator Award winner"! Caren has been selected as this year's recipient of the prestigious *gia* award in recognition of her many contributions to the culinary industry and her vision as a retailer.

It all started in 1978 when Caren, a well-known local bon vivant, launched Vancouver's most prominent cooking school, featuring guests such as Julia Child and Jacques Pepin. The school's popularity encouraged her to create a unique retail store selling both gourmet food and high end kitchenware.

Caren started out small but she had big dreams for her warehouse-style merchandising concept. In 1998, those dreams were realized when she moved the store into a massive, 18,000-square-foot space that covered an entire block, with soaring 50-foot ceilings.

Her mission from the start has been to lead the Canadian marketplace in the discovery and celebration of food and housewares from around the globe. Through simple, tasteful merchandising, a huge selection of gourmet foods, ingredients, kitchenware, small appliances and tableware is presented in a large warehouse atmosphere that encourages browsing – often for hours.



The Gourmet Warehouse spans an entire city block and is filled with items that Caren (shown previous page) sources from around the world.

The store is divided into two distinctive shopping zones. One is dedicated to housewares, food prep and entertaining while the other offers gourmet specialty food and pantry staples. Together, they provide comfortable, one stop shopping for food lovers, home cooks and professional chefs.

Wooden pallets and crates are used to showcase products and sampling food stations encourage customers to try and taste different products. Flat screen TVs are positioned throughout the store and are tuned to the Food Network or cooking shows.

Though the focus is on quality products, Caren is known for making gourmet affordable. Food and housewares are cross merchandised in an environment that is not at all intimidating.

Music is always playing, cooking demos are conducted regularly and knife sharpening workshops are provided on a monthly basis.

All displays, both in-store and the multiple window displays, are changed





monthly to keep it fresh. And during the holiday season, the centre of the store is transformed into a food emporium that is a gift-giving paradise for all foodies.

The Gourmet Warehouse is very active on social media, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, in addition to

Wooden crates and pallets provide a simple merchandising solution and allow a wide range of items to be displayed on the store floor.

traditional advertising and a weekly newsletter. As well, Caren hosts *Cooking 101*, a weekly program on Global TV News. Each week, different chefs and local celebrities are featured.

As if she's not busy enough, Caren McSherry is also a local philanthropist who believes in giving back to her community. She pioneered a charity initiative called The Chocolate Challenge which has supported inner city children

for the past five years.

The 58 employees who work at The Gourmet Warehouse share the ideals of their founder and her passion.

"We seek employees who have a passion for specialty housewares and gourmet food," says Caren. "Our staff includes several red seal chefs, baking specialists and wine experts. This type of hiring provides our customers with expert knowledge about product use and application."

Ongoing mentorship is provided through daily product knowledge sessions that encompass each department (food, cookware, tools, knives and baking). As well, profit sharing for all staff members creates an incentive to provide exceptional customer service and fosters employee loyalty.

As if she wasn't already wearing enough hats, Caren has successfully built her own trademarked brand, cote d'azur that now includes 375 SKUs.

She wrote her first cookbook *Vancouver Cooks* in 1990 and has since published five more best sellers. Her seventh cookbook *Starters, Salads and Sexy*







*Sides*, will be released in October with a huge launch party planned at the store.

Between her columns, her TV appearances, her school, her cookbooks, and her vibrant -in-store personality, Caren McSherry has earned a well-deserved reputation as one of the foremost culinary experts in the Vancouver area. She was recently inducted into the B.C. Restaurant Hall of Fame and has been

featured in Business Vancouver's Top 25 Performing Businesses in B.C. And she has managed to balance this busy professional life with raising her two children, Christina and Jason (now adults).

Over the years, she has taught more than 40,000 students to cook but even more people have been inspired by her incredible retail vision with The Gourmet Warehouse. ~

## International retail award program honours the best of the best

The *gia* program was created in 2000 by the IHA and International Home + Housewares Show to foster innovation and excellence in housewares retailing around the world. (*Home Style* has been the Canadian sponsor from the start.) The competition is structured on a national and global level to honour housewares retailers for excellence in:

- Overall mission statement and vision;
- Store design and layout;
- Visual merchandising;
- Marketing and promotions;
- Customer service and staff training;
- Innovation.

Each national *gia* winner is invited to the International Home + Housewares Show in Chicago where the global jury will select up to five *gia* Global Honorees, the winners of the Martin M. Peger Award and the *gia* Digital Commerce Award.

The 2016-2017 national winners are:

Argentina - Jumbo  
Australia - LUC. Design  
Brazil - Doural Home & Design  
**Canada - The Gourmet Warehouse**  
China - Tayohya Corporation  
Colombia - Fabricas Unidas  
Denmark - Skagerak Denmark  
Eastern Europe - Potten & Pannen Staněk  
KitchenAid Concept Store & Gourmet Academy (Czech Republic)  
France - Culinarian  
Germany - One Kitchen  
Greece - Parousiasi  
India - The Home Sukh  
Ireland - Stakelums  
Italy - Stile Event Store  
Japan - The Loft Co. Ltd  
Middle East - Homes R US (United Arab Emirates)  
Netherlands - Kooklust 121  
New Zealand - Green with Envy  
Philippines - Rustan's Supercenters

Poland - Dajar sp. z.o.o  
Portugal - KROST  
Russia - Dreamhouse  
Spain - Culinarium  
Turkey - Bernardo  
UK - Borough Kitchen  
Uruguay - Amo Cocinar  
USA - Toque Blanche  
USA/Internet - Amazon.com

The winners are honored at a gala awards dinner on Saturday evening during the Chicago show, where the five *gia* Global Honorees will be announced. Other highlights include a *gia* showcase in the Hall of Global Innovation, in Lakeside Center Lobby, where visuals of the national *gia* winners' award-winning store design and branding ideas, examples of exquisite visual merchandising and innovative displays are presented. Banners for the winning retailers can be seen in the Grand Concourse walkway at McCormick Place.