

DIRGE

Where Science Meets Strange: The Evolution Store of NYC

By [Ash Astaroth](#) - Mar 25, 2016

My kinship with the Strange and Unusual is conspicuous, so [The Evolution Store](#) located in SoHo was one of the primary suggestions my friends had for me when I moved to New York. I sat down with Julianna Stevens, CEO of The Evolution Store in their industrial era New York/SoHo store basement which was filled with preserved bugs, skeletons, and taxidermy to talk about The Evolution Store.



Dirge Magazine: How did The Evolution Store start?

Julianna Stevens: The store was actually founded by my father, Bill Stevens, in 1993. He was in the retouching industry for many years, in the advertising industry, and he decided to get out of that at a certain point. He had always been into natural history and collecting and so he decided to open the store, basically with five boxes of his own personal collection on display. It's just kind of grown from there. People were very responsive. I don't know exactly what year the website launched but it certainly wasn't 1993.



Is all of your merchandise available online or do you have store exclusives?

We have a lot more in the store than we have online. We recently relaunched our website. Right now our product selection on the web is just a little thin, but we are adding new stuff every week. If people are not seeing on the web what they've seen in the store or what they are looking for, they can just call or email us and we'll send pictures back and forth until we figure out what they need.

How is your merchandise curated or selected?

We maintain a network of probably a couple hundred different, individual suppliers, most of whom are small family businesses like us. We've cultivated these relationships over the past twenty years and we're always bringing in new people while other people are phasing out, so it's a constant rotation of different people we work with.

We get stuff sometimes from individual collectors who are off-loading their collections. We also travel to trade shows a couple of times a year and that's a big deal for us because that's where a lot of the vendors congregate to sell their stuff from all over the world.



Why do you think that a scientific or museum atmosphere often resonates with people who perhaps identify as being a little strange and unusual?

We can't totally take credit for the original concept of the store because it's based on the cabinet of curiosities from the fifteen or sixteen hundreds, and these are things that people have been interested in collecting for centuries. I think that it's sort of a natural impulse people have and those were the first museums.



There wasn't a network of museums like there is today, so the cabinets of curiosity people maintained were things people would go and visit all around the world. If you say that's weird then I guess; I just think some people are more in touch with their innate natural human curiosity about the world, and the aesthetic of the store reflects that.

What are your favorite pieces in the store?

It's a little hard because we're always getting new stuff in so my favorite changes probably every week, but right now I'm particularly fond of our two-headed calf.

The taxidermy one or the skeleton?

The one and the same, they're actually from the same animal. The taxidermy mount is the skin of that animal and the skeleton is the skeleton of that animal, or animals I guess! technically. It's such an interesting story of how it came to us.

We got a phone call out of the blue one day from a rancher in Montana who had one of his Angus (that's why it's all black) cows give birth to a two-headed calf. The calf was stillborn and the mother died, and he said he had it on ice. He was accepting bids, basically, and we had to outbid several other buyers to get the animal. We were negotiating against Ripley's Believe It or Not and that was kind of exciting.

We actually had to have one of our people, who was going to be in the area on vacation, drive out to the middle of nowhere to this ranch to pick up this frozen carcass and put it in the back of his truck. He drove it out to the taxidermist who then skinned the animal and started the taxidermy process. Then she had to ship the flesh and bones over to another guy who was going to do the skeletal articulation. Surprisingly, this is not the first two-headed calf we've had, it's maybe the third...

They're fairly common?

From what I understand it's one in every hundred thousand births. This one is pretty cool, because it's in such good condition, and it's all black, and we've really put a lot of care into the mounting and preparation of it. I don't think we've ever had the pair, the mount and the skeletal articulation, and we're trying to sell them as a pair and I think that's pretty unique.

Bill Stevens says in one of the promotional videos for The Evolution store, "Our employees are as unusual as our product. Most have an art or science background and are some of the most creative people you will find." Julianna echoed this sentiment while we chatted in the basement. "We've always hired weird people and we always will." Between the offsite warehouse and entomology studio in Brooklyn and the store itself, The Evolution Store is both a family-owned business and employer of people with atypical talents and interests. Add them to your dark community culture support shopping list.

