



PHOTO BY SARA RUBIN

Accessory Sales Manager Mike Garcia, in a 1965 Impala in the Eye Candy Customs shop, founded his own car customizing business while in college.

Eye Candy rebirth

Custom auto shop rebuilds its brand, grows profits with new team, software.

By ANJALI FLUKER | Staff Writer

Much like the vehicles it works on, Eye Candy Customs is retooling its business.

After getting off to a strong start about four years ago, Eye Candy — a division of Orlando's Auto Specialists dealership — watched as the business grew a little too fast and became difficult to manage, says General Manager Charley Hossairati.

So about six months ago, the southwest Orlando vehicle customization shop invested \$100,000 for a software package to bet-

ter manage its finances. It also brought in new talent to help recharge the business.

And now the company's goal is to reach \$15,000 in weekly gross profits, up from its current \$5,000 per week, says Accessory Sales Manager Mike Garcia, 25, who joined the firm in late June after working for local shops. Garcia sold his own car modification business in 2005, which he founded while still a student at Clemson University in South Carolina.

Welcome back

Eye Candy originally was

launched in 2003 to serve folks buying cars from the Orlando's Auto Specialists, which include luxury and moderate Infinity, Mercedes Benz and Nissan models.

But the customization side of the business quickly began to generate customers of its own, says Hossairati. Although not everyone can afford to customize a car, he says Eye Candy draws in 60-70 percent of the dealership's customers.

And Eye Candy plans to go after even more. "We're going to do car shows and advertising," says Gar-

PLEASE SEE EYE CANDY, PAGE 18



PHOTO BY SARA RUBIN

Benji Nieves paints a 2007 Landcruiser at Eye Candy shop.

EYE CANDY: Custom shop's high-end customers include Magic's Howard and Ravens' draft pick Figurs

Continued from page 17

cia, "and make sure customers who may have felt jaded in the past will feel welcomed back."

The right time

Fortunately, the timing is right for car customizers to try to capture a new audience.

Consider: Several years ago, customizing an auto was done mainly by hardcore car enthusiasts.

But now, with popular TV shows such as Speed TV's *Unique Whips* and MTV's *Pimp My Ride* showcasing specially-tailored autos, the custom business has gone mainstream, says Imran Ahmad, marketing manager for Ultimate Audio in south Orlando, a competing custom shop whose customers range from CEOs to the Miami Heat's Dwyane Wade and Jason Williams.



Ahmad

"Now you've got Susie Soccer Mom who wants DVDs in the headrests and 22-inch rims," says Ahmad. "It's more the everyday, average consumers."

Further, Eye Candy is banking on word-of-mouth to gain high-end customers.

The shop completed \$10,000 worth of upgrades on a new Dodge Charger that Orlando Magic center Dwight Howard

Eye Candy Customs

Line of business: Customizing vehicles

Services available:

Wheels and tires, custom painting, custom reupholstering, DVD monitors, interior and exterior molding, custom airbrushing, custom grills

Parent company: Orlando's Auto Specialists Inc.

Address: 3145 N. John Young Parkway, Orlando, 32804

Top official: Hamid Hossairati, owner

Weekly gross profits: \$5,000

Contact: (407) 290-0777, <http://orlandosautospecialists.com/en/index.php>



bought for his cousin, Garcia says. The shop also just completed work for Baltimore Ravens NFL draft pick Yamon Figurs, and is working on a 2007 Escalade for the Atlanta Braves' Clayton McMillan.

Eye Candy's best-selling services range from chrome accessories for

'Now you've got Susie Soccer Mom who wants DVDs in the headrests and 22-inch rims.

It's more the everyday, average consumers.'

Imran Ahmad,
Marketing Manager,
Ultimate Audio

about \$150 to tinted windows and larger rims for luxury cars, which cost up to \$10,000 each.

Says Garcia, "We like to see a customer's car get dropped off here, spend a few days or even a week on it, to get it exactly way they want."

ANJALI FLUKER can be reached at (407) 241-2910 or via e-mail at afluker@bizjournals.com.

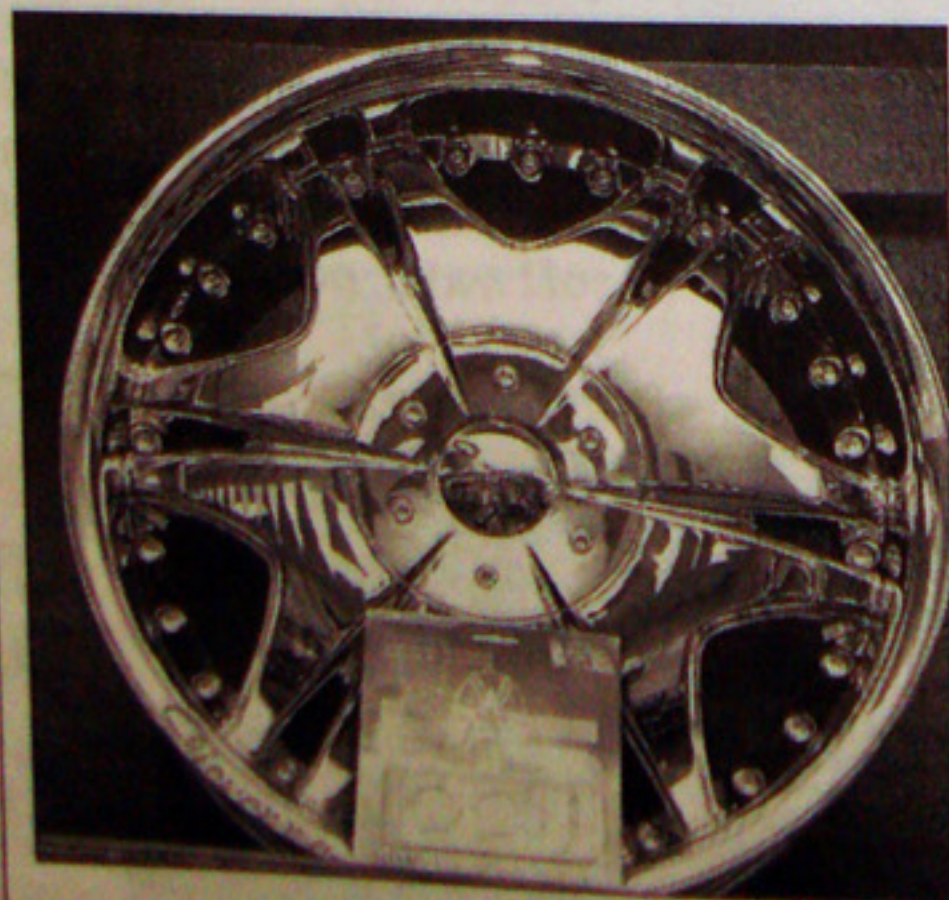


PHOTO BY SARA RUBIN

Custom rims go for up to \$10,000 each.