

THE FOCUS IS ON DISPLAY AT ED'S TROPICAL AQUARIUM



Dan Anderson, Ed's field manager, shows chain's popular specially-priced starter set.

by IVAN H. BENIGSOHN

When it comes to selling dry stock at Ed's Tropical Aquarium, Inc., a Long Island-based chain operation, the name of the game is "display." And the game plan revolves largely around tanks. Dry or wet, tanks are employed extensively to merchandise everything from gravel to light bulbs to the tanks themselves.

Ed's Farmingdale (N.Y.) store, situated on Route 24, a major Long Island thoroughfare, typifies the chain's merchandising approach. Apart from the counter and customer traffic areas, almost all of the store's 2,500 square feet of space is given over to massive product display, most of which put tanks to effective and practical use.

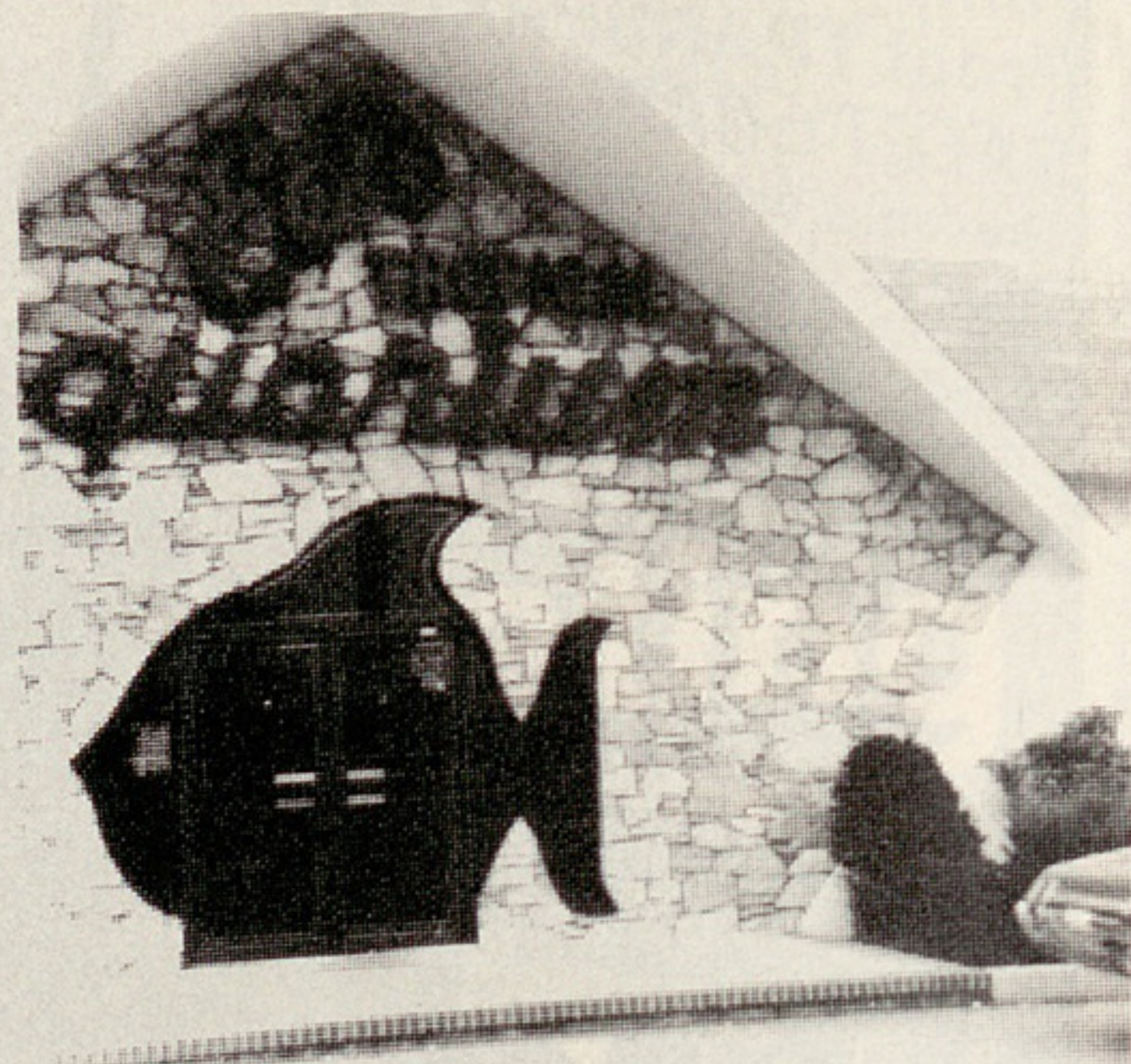
Entrance Displays

Tank displays are utilized in a number of diverse ways. Placed strategically close to the store's main entrance, for example, is a stacked display of empty 10-gallon tanks selling at prices in the \$4.00 range. Above the tanks is a colorful sign reading, "Best Buy Budget."

This particular offer runs for seven days. But Ed's always keeps a "specially priced" tank set-up at the front door position, where it's the very first thing a customer sees upon entering.

At the store's second entrance, a display highlights a deluxe 15-gallon tank, also at discount prices; a 50-gallon Hi Line; a 50-gallon Wood-tone tank complete with reflector, cover and stand; and several 20-gallon long tanks. Some of the tanks function as displays for packages of multi-floss.

Not far from the front of the store, an eye-catching display features tanks facing in four different directions. One of the tanks con-



tains packages of "mood bulbs," another holds packs of colored gravel. Each tank has its appropriate sign. A third tank is stocked with Ed's own brand of tropical fish food — a "four-pack" of cellophane-wrapped cans which costs customers \$1.00 less than they would pay for the products individually. The fourth side of the display is devoted to an interesting arrangement of white-framed tanks.

Starter Set Specials

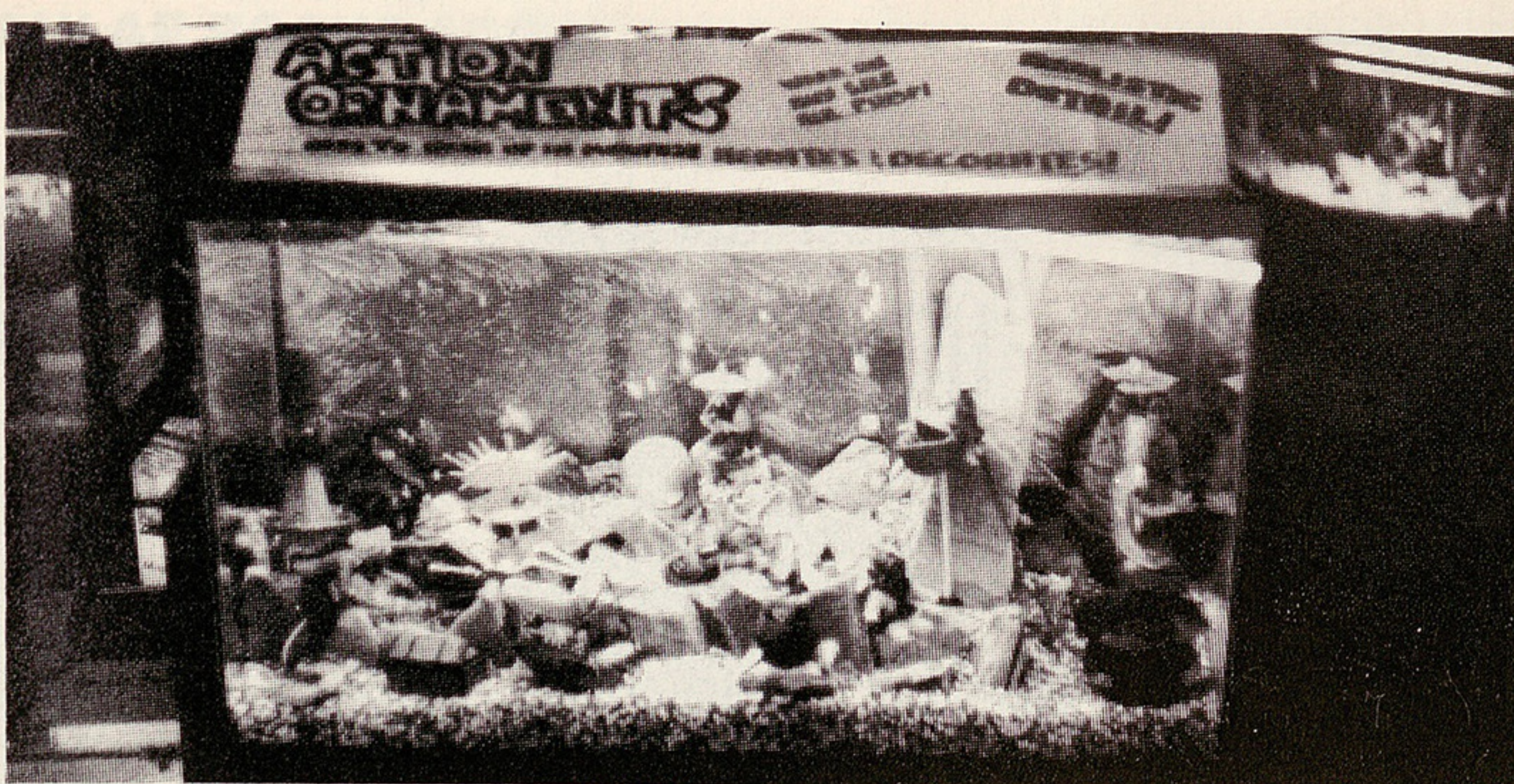
Tanks are also the focal point of Ed's starter set displays. Although store managers are given a great deal of merchandising latitude, every store in the chain must show 10, 20, and 29-gallon starter sets, each completely equipped. For instance, the 20-gallon deluxe unit consists of a tank stand, cover, fluorescent light, filter, heater, thermometer, and filter floss.

Sales-Building Ornaments

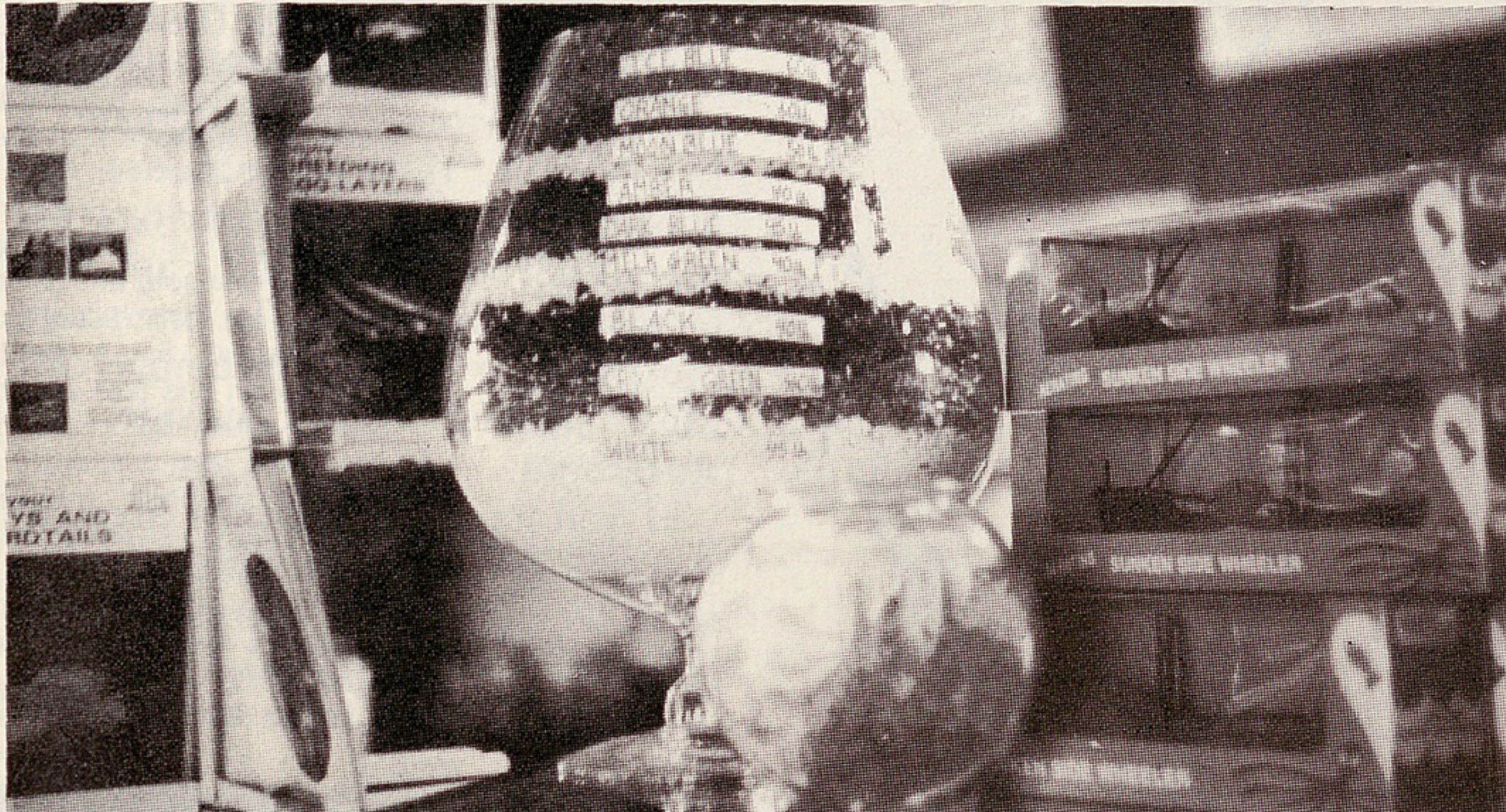
One of Ed's most inventive and successful displays is a 29-gallon water-filled and brightly-lit tank containing about 15 working ornaments, including a diver, fisherman, treasure chest, underwater monster, shipwreck, and skeleton. Conveniently located right on top of the tank are the same items in packaged form. Customers see the ornaments in action within the tank, then simply make their selection from the display above the tank.

Merchandising with Wet Tanks

Ed's also gets lots of merchandising — and selling — mileage out of their wet tank displays. Field manager Dan Anderson points out that the Farmingdale store alone has about 100 mini-tank (10-gallon) set-ups. "We try to inspire our



Twenty-nine gallon tank, containing about 15 ornaments in action, is a real sales-builder in all the stores.



Attention-grabbing three-gallon brandy snifter is filled with layers of colored gravel. Tapes denoting appropriate color and price are affixed to outside of glass in line with each layer.

customers by showing them exactly how the tank will look in their own homes," he states. As such, each tank includes a filtering device, fluorescent light, and colorful plants, gravel, and ornaments.

The action ornaments have the most eye appeal, draw the most enthusiastic response from prospective customers, and often lead to sales of the entire set, Anderson notes.

Although Ed's utilizes wet tank displays of 29, 55, 75, and even 125-gallon sizes, it is the 10-gallon unit that receives the most emphasis. The chain, in fact, refers to the model as the "everything tank."

According to Anderson, the 10-gallon unit is the perfect size for the tropical fish hobbyist, beginner and advanced. It is not too large and can be easily accommodated in most homes. And it is not too expensive to stock with fish, he adds.

The 10-gallon tank accounts for about 40% of sales.

Gravel-Filled Brandy Snifter

Ed's innovative merchandising

approach is designed primarily to generate and boost vital impulse sales. And, while tanks play a major role in achieving this objective, they are not the only devices relied on by the chain.

Colored gravel, for instance, is an important, big volume item at the Long Island chain. Although it is displayed widely both in tanks and on tanks in many of the store's high traffic areas, the most unique gravel display utilizes a three-gallon brandy snifter.

Located on the counter near a cash register, the snifter is filled to the brim with several layers of colored gravel. On the outside of the snifter, in line with each layer, are strips of tape denoting the colors and their respective prices. The display has proved to be an effective attention-getter and impulse sales-builder.

Fish Bowls Move Well

Another effective sales-booster is a three-tier fish bowl display placed just behind the front entrance tank

set-up. The bowls each contain fish gravel, and plants.

Anderson says that thousands of the bowls are sold throughout the chain. Perhaps equally important, the bowls get people interested in tropical fish as a hobby. About ten percent of the bowl buyers come back for aquariums, he maintains.

Ed's easel-backed display with a bold headline reading, "Don't get your wires crossed" is also landing a lot of impulse sales for Switch-master multi-outlet control plugs.

Artificial colored plants are also solid volume producers, due in no small part to their being displayed in green styrofoam directly under the tanks in a number of store areas.

Additional Methods

Creative displays are not the only techniques relied on by the chain to raise sales. Other methods include: suggested selling, trade-ins and store manager meetings.

A case in point: when selling new tanks, Ed's sales personnel will always suggest the purchase of a hinged-glass cover. Stores carry cover sizes from 16 to 48 inches, with 20 inches the most popular size.

When a reflector with two incandescent white bulbs is sold, it's always recommended that the customer also buy two colored bulbs for a pleasant change in tank appearance.

Trade-ins are also an important part of Ed's merchandising pattern. Recently the chain ran a trade-in deal for any reflector turned in, regardless of size or condition. The offer was advertised in local newspapers and pulled extremely well.

Merchandising creativity is looked for and encouraged in the chain's store managers. Indeed, at monthly meetings of store managers an exchange of merchandising ideas invariably takes place.

Bottom Line

Is all this merchandising activity worth while? Ed's management seems to think so. And, with the bottom line showing dry stock sales running about 12 percent ahead of last year, who's going to argue?

In addition to its Lynbrook and Farmingdale stores, Ed's has two other stores on Long Island, one in Yonkers and two in New Jersey.