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and humidity requirements,” Marina added. In addition to conversations in-store, plant enthusiasts are invited to reach out on social media for help with care, and more plans for in-home consulting are in the works.

For beginners and plant collectors alike, Andrew recommends the lush *monstera adansonii*. “They’re easy plants to care for, you can put them in almost any window and they’ll thrive,” he said. “They’ve also got beautiful fenestrations on the leaves, even at the smallest size, and they’ll grow up to have even double fenestrations on the leaves.” A fitting choice, since the shop itself is named for beautiful botanical markings. “Variegata” references variegation, the appearance of dif-

ferently hued zones in plant leaves, often the basis for sought-after rare varieties.

“We hope that we can live up to this namesake by making Variegata a true destination in Astoria,” said Marina. The shop is on its way, with a newly installed plant swap wall — a place for visitors to take and leave cuttings for the community free of charge — and plans to install a soil potting station. Because some plants require a unique mix of speciality soils, this could cut the cost and waste of buying soils individually.

“We want this to be an urban jungle filled with all sorts of exotic plants. We hope that each customer will see something they have never seen before, learn something new about plants or their care, and take home something that will be special to them,” said Marina.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Interior of Variegata Exotic Plants, featuring a hammock swing. Interior of Variegata Exotic Plants in Astoria. Variegata carries more than one hundred species of plants. ‘Plants to Trade’ wall, where the community can take and leave clippings free of charge.

