



Expressions

IN WOODCRAFT



Page 8:
**Ohio Furniture
Manufacturers Prepare
for 2023 Market**

Page 16:
**Tips for Operating a
Successful Retail
Furniture Store**

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Booths: G-299-301, H-314-316
ohiohardwoodfurnituremarket.com

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Contents...

8 Ohio's Furniture Builders Look Ahead to Spring Furniture Market

16 Tips for Operating a Successful Retail Furniture Store

18 Spotlight on Featured Designs

30 The Design Factor: Have Ohio furniture builders closed the gap?

38 Index of Advertisers



8



16

FEATURED



ON THE COVER:

Held at two locations in the heart of the world's largest Amish community, the 2023 Ohio Hardwood Furniture Market promises to showcase more innovative styles and designs than ever, culminating in an entire home that is being built in the exhibit hall, and which will showcase designs from more than two dozen local furniture craftsmen —See page 8

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From The Publisher...

Quality never goes out of style. And when that's backed up with exciting new designs, colors and styles, well, you have a winning recipe!

There's excitement in the air in Ohio's Amish Country Furniture District as dozens of local craftsmen prepare to showcase their latest high-quality furniture offerings at the three-day Ohio Hardwood Furniture Market.

This year's event also promises to be exciting not only because of all the items on display, but also because the Hardwood Furniture Guild, which sponsors the show, has a very special addition for the show.

I won't let the cat out of the bag here, but invite you to read our annual roundup of the event, beginning on page 8.

Suffice it to say, there's never been a better time to make a trip to the OHFM.

Back to basics

We've talked a lot about current and predicted economic conditions lately, so in this issue we're taking a little bit of a step back from that, to discuss more

of the basics for success in retail. See page 16 for Bob Berryhill's take on this. Bob has decades of marketing experience, and offers some solid advice for retail furniture store owners.

The Design Gap

And finally...there's something happening in the quiet hills of Holmes and surrounding counties. We're not sure how exactly to pinpoint it, but the last several years have seen our local builders – who always have built very high-quality furniture – “take it up a notch” in terms of style and design. A quick glance through these pages will confirm that, but on page 30, we offer a brief discussion of the “Design factor,” and how Ohio's builders have closed the gap on their competitors.

But, again, the best evidence of that is definitely the upcoming Ohio Hardwood Furniture Market. I hope you'll make plans now to attend. While you're there, stop by our booth to say hello!

Ryan Kralik

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 **Streamlined Beauty**

bow madison collection

Showcase house built inside arena will feature 26 furniture products

Exciting addition announced for Ohio Hardwood Furniture Market

By Jerry Klingerman

It's show time!

As the snow melts and the daffodils and tulips make their way out of the ground, there are other sure signs of spring in Ohio's Amish Country Furniture District: The annual Ohio Hardwood Furniture Market (OHFM).

As we write this, dozens of builders across this — the largest hardwood furniture producing region

in the USA — are busy turning their latest ideas into stunning new designs to showcase in March.

The annual Market takes place March 28-30. As has been the case for several years now, the Market will take place in two locations, just a quick drive through the scenic countryside from each other: Harvest Ridge (at the Holmes County Fairgrounds) and the Mt. Hope Event Center.

The two-venue event allows builders to spread their wings, as it were, and use multiple booth

Continued on page 10



Buyers and builders alike enjoy interacting in the relaxed environment of the Ohio hardwood Furniture Market.

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Spring Show Approaches Continued from page 8

spaces to exhibit their newest pieces. Readers who are familiar with the event will be excited to learn that the show will be full — and there's an exciting new development. Read on...

As we've reported in the past, the OHFM is your best opportunity to see the best that this region has to offer, over the span of just a few days. It's really unlike any other trade show because here you get the opportunity not only to see what 's new, but also to actually talk to the person who built it. More than one furniture manufacturer will tell you that they've either made modifications or created entirely new pieces based directly on feedback they received at the show.

So, in addition to seeing what's new — or renewing valued business relationships you've built over the years — this is your chance to talk with builders and say, "What if..."

The OHFM is produced by the Hardwood Furniture Guild, a member-driven organization that advocates for and supports the local furniture manufacturing industry. In anticipation of the event, *Expressions In Woodcraft* had the opportunity to get some thoughts and information from the Guild's Executive Director, Kendrick Mullet. Read on to learn more about an exciting new development you're sure to want to experience. >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>



^^^ *Reclaimed wood, mostly featuring old barns from Ohio's rural countryside, shows no signs of slowing down since its introduction. Today, builders are accenting those designs with other species, such as this set shown here, that shows both live edge Maple and Walnut used in the tops for the case good shown in this bedroom set.*

(Below) Buckeye Rockers is a great example of a builder that continues to update existing product lines as well as introduce new models. While it has numerous models for the office/home office niche, the company also has innovative designs for home use as well.



Continued on page 12



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Spring Show Approaches

Continued from page 10

EXP: Lead times have been one of the top questions/concerns in recent years. When initial COVID lockdowns were lifted in this area, manufacturers returned to their shops to find orders streaming in at a pace never before seen. What are your members reporting about current lead times?

Mullet: A majority of our builders' lead times are beginning to return to normal lead times (6-12 weeks).

EXP: There's a lot of talk right now about recession, inflation and other economic challenges. Are builders reporting any slowdown in orders, or other signs of troubling economic times ahead?

Mullet: Ohio's hardwood furniture builders continue to see steady orders, as consumers continue to want domestically built, quality furniture. Lead times are stabilizing now because builders are able to operate at max productivity. During the last few years of supply chain issues, combined with an influx of new orders, lead times grew longer than expected. This led to many shops putting systems and processes in place to increase capacity and efficiency. Now that incoming orders are steadying out, builders' lead times are decreasing.

EXP: If you were talking to someone who had never attended an OHFM, how would you explain it, and what would you tell them about why they should attend?

Mullet: The upcoming Ohio Hardwood Furniture Market has more exhibitors and more booths than ever before! Mt. Hope and Harvest Ridge locations are sold out, with a waiting list of builders. We are excited to introduce the Showcase House, located

inside the Mt. Hope Event Center, which is an actual house with each room featuring the best designs from our builders. The house is being designed by S. Flynn Design + Build, a local design firm.

EXP: This sounds exciting! How did you choose the furniture that is on display inside the Showcase House?

Mullet: We held a contest among all the members of the Hardwood Furniture Guild. They had an opportunity to submit one entry each into any of the 26 different categories we needed to furnish the house. With only one entry allowed per builder, each submission was their best design in their respective category. We had a total of 323 entries! We had a panel of nine judges go through the submissions, voting for the best of the best, without knowledge of

who the builders were.

EXP: Who chose the wood and color options on the winning pieces?

Mullet: The Showcase House is being presented by M.L. Campbell, Autumn Mills and AcromaPro, all trademarks of Sherwin Williams. The design team from S.Flynn Design + Build worked with Sherwin Williams' Director of Global Color and Design, Lauren West, to feature the incoming color trends for this next year. In addition to showcasing the amazing capabilities of our local builders, the Showcase House will also serve to educate and inspire retail stores.

EXP: How many people do you anticipate at the upcoming OHFM? How many retailers does that represent (some stores bring multiple employees)?

Mullet: The Market is open to any qualified re-

"We are excited to introduce the Showcase House, located inside the Mt. Hope Event Center, which is an actual house with each room featuring the best designs from our builders."

Continued on page 14

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Spring Show Approaches

Continued from page 12

tailer. We are expecting over 1,000 buyers to attend this year's Market. Registration is now open; please register to attend at OHFM2023.com.

EXP: We've often discussed the fact that attending the OHFM is an opportunity to meet directly with the actual builders, and give them input. Do you think that's a valuable opportunity?

Mullet: Absolutely! Buyers will interact with the actual builders, many of whom are lifetime craftsmen. Our builders are always willing to listen to buyers' feedback on what is selling well and what trends they are seeing. Similarly, buyers can also learn by asking our builders what sells well for them, and gain valuable input on what styles and colors to put on their showroom floor.

EXP: Ohio's Amish Country is one of the "comfort food" capitals of the USA. Will attendees have an opportunity to experience that at the show? In other words, are meals being served?]

Mullet: Yes! Both Mt. Hope and Harvest Ridge will have home-cooked food available for all attendees. We partner with the "Amish Special Needs Fund," a local non-profit that provides financial support to Amish families with children who have special needs. The Hardwood Furniture Guild covers all the food and other costs. At both locations we have a donation box, where 100% of the donations given for your food go directly to their organization.

EXP: Can attendees buy items right off the floor? Do manufacturers offer discounts for orders taken at the show?

Mullet: Most builders offer generous discounts if you buy their booth displays during the show. In addition, many builders will offer discounts for orders placed at the Market, if they are floor models for the retailer's showroom.

EXP: Have you identified any rising trends in manufacturing, such as wood species, furniture styles or finish colors? If so, what are they?

Mullet: Our builders are excited to display their new styles. Many are working with designers to develop furniture to fit the coming trends. Buyers will have a chance to see new styles and colors at the upcoming Ohio Hardwood Furniture Market. Register at OHFM2023.com

EXP: The executive director role is new for the Hardwood Furniture Guild. Can you tell us a bit about what your role and what

you're doing?

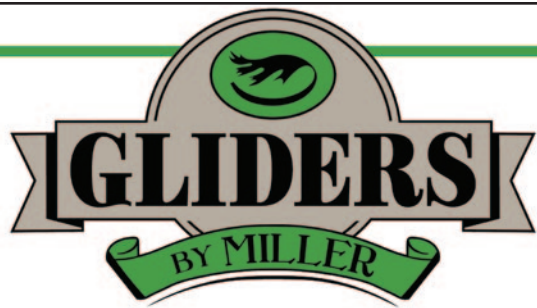
Mullet: The Hardwood Furniture Guild is run by 15 volunteer board members from our community. My role as the director is to work for them and for each of our 200+ members. We don't focus on any specific individual business or person but rather the community of hardwood builders. Our mission is to promote, market and educate retail stores from across the US and Canada about the value and capabilities of our amazing furniture builders right here in Ohio! The biggest event we host is the annual Ohio Hardwood Furniture Market, on March 28-30, where retail stores come to connect, build relationships and buy furniture from our builders. Our website, OhioHardwoodFurniture-Market.com is a great resource to learn more about what we do, and connect with our members.

—EXP—

**2023 Ohio Hardwood
Furniture Market Details**
Tuesday, March 28, 4 p.m. – 7 p.m.
Wednesday, March 29, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Thursday, March 30, 8 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Harvest Ridge:
8880 OH-39, Millersburg, OH 44654
Mt. Hope Event Center:
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Information/Registration:
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How to Run a Successful Retail Furniture Store

By Bob Berryhill

I am going to depart a little from my normal Digital Media articles, although (and I have to say this), a digital medial strategy should be a primary function, along with your store location, in the operation of a successful store. If you think about it, a retail furniture store should be among the most successful businesses out there. After all, everyone needs furniture in their home. Although, I remember in my college years my dorm was filled with peach crates used as end tables and cinder blocks with 2x4's for shelving to hold my stereo.

Let's face it, we all know of furniture stores that have quietly gone out of business. We have seen this happen more than naught over the years. We also see families

or retired couples holding on for dear life to make their store work. For some owners, this is a part-time or hobby store to make side money, while others have dedicated their whole life savings, their blood, sweat and tears to make ends meet. This article speaks to everyone, no matter where they're at with their store and goals.

So, just what does it take to make a furniture store work better than others?

There is not a magic wand, or a wonder program that you can buy that applies to all stores. Each store is unique because of its location, demographics of the area, and the people who run the business. I know of a beautiful store where the owner spent a large sum of

Continued on page 24



While customers can eventually make buying choices for a variety of reason, most notably the service they receive, it's important to remember that in today's wired — or rather, wireless — world, virtually every major buying decision begins online. The first place to put your best foot forward is on your website and Social Media channels.

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<<<What could be more relaxing than spending the evening in the #194 Sleighback model by **Gliders By Miller**? One of their smaller chairs, it features upholstered arms and all-foam cushions, which give it a firmer back. Its available in Oak, Br Maple, Hickory, Cherry, and QSWO. — *See ad on page 15*



Conquer lead times with the Richland Quick Ship set! This attractive group from **Finishing Designs** features a unique base on the table, and comfortable curved slats in the chairs. It is available in Sap Cherry with S-43131 Tanbark stain. Contact us for details! — *See ad on page 33*



^^^The Small Lennox Collection from **Hillside Chair** is a great solution for smaller spaces where you still want an attractive set. The chair has a Special Comfort Profile, and features the same two-tone finish as the table — OCS 119 and Mindful gray, on Brown Maple. — *See ad on page 35*

Country Comfort presents the Fairmont Chair. The curved Double-X design combines style with comfort; it's both pleasing to the eye and comfortable. Shown here in Brown Maple with OCS #119, it's an excellent option for those customers who want a splash of elegance without giving up comfort. — *See ad on page 31*



Bold. Strong. Traditional. The Dawson Creek Double Pedestal Table and Bench from **Hermies Table Shop** is part of their new Sawmarks Furniture Collection. This set features a mortise-and-tenon style base and bench, reminiscent of construction techniques from days gone by. It's a beautiful set with a timeless look that's sure to satisfy for years to come. — **See ad on page 38**



The opposing curved slats on the Overton Chair from **Horseshoe Bend Chair** provide a nice visual as opposed to more traditional design. Other style cues include tapered legs, a slight curve in the top and a contoured seat. At home with any table! — **See ad on page 34**



New from **Barkman Furniture** is the Franklin Sofa Counter Table! Shown with coordinating side chairs, this exciting new piece adds function and character to any modern living space. Featuring a built-in power station and attractive rub-through finish, this set is sure to be a wonderful gathering place in any home. Shown in Red Oak top, Brown Maple base in OCS-122 Cocoa 10 Sheen (top) and OCS-342 Country White w/OCS-122 Cocoa Rub Thru 10 Sheen (base) — **See ad on page 4**



Fast on the heels of the latest designs coming out of Ohio are the Oneida Chair (left) and Rosella Chair) from **Wengerd Wood Products**. The base speaks Mid-Century Modern, while the seats offer cushioning for excellent comfort. These stylish models pair well with any forward-thinking table design, or could even find applications in office situations. Sharp! — **See ad on page 3**



^^^The #146, 7-Bottle Barrel Hutch from **Rustic Barrel Design** is the perfect complement to your Man Cave, rec room or anywhere you want to combine style with a rustic look. Shown with optional lighting kit. —**See ad on page 15**



Looking for an occasional/end table that does it all? Check out the “More-about” from **Superior Woodcrafts**! It sits on a 350-degree swivel base w/stop, and includes numerous options, including drawers, magazine racks and more. This model would be an excellent choice for doctor and dentist offices. It’s easy to see why this is a very good seller! — **See ad on page 29**



^^^The ECO6032FP Fireplace unit from **Ashery Oak** is a good seller, and it’s easy to see why. A TV stand that includes a heat-generating fireplace unit, plenty of storage and lots of room for cable box, DVR, etc. Contact us for our latest lead times and availability. — **See ad on page 35**





<<<**Hidden Hollow Wood and Upholstery** offers a full line of wood and upholstered furniture in a number of designs, including its latest offering, the Jasper Arm Chair. Gently curved arms provide an inviting look to this classically-inspired design that is easily at home in living, dining or office applications.

— See ad on page 11



^^^ Taking solid cues from the always-popular Mid-Century Modern era, the Taunton Dresser and Mirror from **Buss Road Woodcraft** is not only stylish, but, with 10 drawers, also offers lots of storage. The angled mirror is an attractive choice for those who want style as well as function. Shown here in Sap Cherry with Copper stain. — See ad on page 4



^^^ Talk about outdoor comfort! The Reclining Day bed from **Siesta Outdoors** offers a thick cushion (with numerous fabric choices) as well as a number of reclining positions — all built on an all-weather Poly lumber frame! Available in twin, full and queen sizes, and all of our products fold for easy storage as well. — See ad on page 9



^^^ The Talesian table by **Outdoor Retreat** is quickly becoming a top seller. With the top finished in Antique Mahogany, and accented by an off-white base and antique Mahogany trim, it's easy to see why! The legs are bold, with a slight taper and tenon that ties them together. Sharp! —

See ad on page 33



^^^The uniquely angled headboard is the focal point for the Cavallo Collection from **Troy Lane Woodcraft**. Shown in Rough Sawn Brown Maple, this set also features inset drawers on the case goods and, when paired with the vintage-style hardware, produces just the right Rustic look. — See ad on page 2



Offering a unique, stylish approach to the swivel glider is the #LSG46 from **Buckeye Rocker**. The high back and contoured solid wood arms are designed for maximum comfort, and when combined with Oak and the ever-popular OCS 113 Michael's finish, and L110 soft gray leather, you get a piece that combines modern style with comfort. — **See ad on page 7**



<<< Shown in Oak with #132 Sand finish, the Cordele Chair from **Dining Solutions by Farmstead Acres Wood** offers an exciting new design with stylish, clean lines that would pair well with any complementary modern-style table. The cushioned seat offers excellent comfort as well. — **See ad on page 39**



>>>The newest addition to the lineup from **BLU Furniture** (formerly 77 Woodcraft) is the exciting new Modesto Entertainment Center. The open design creates a clean look, but also has plenty of room for everything you want to put in or store in an entertainment center. Shown here in Brown Maple with FC-42000 Almond. — **See ad on page 7**



New from **Y&M Chair!** The Wren collection is highlighted by chairs that forego a traditional back in favor of a curvy X shape that flows from the legs all the way through the back. A padded seat offers excellent comfort for leisurely meals with family and friends. This is a fresh, clean design with hints of Mid-Century Modern that your customers are sure to love! Combine it with the matching table for a truly unique look. — **See ad on page 7**



Looking for “something different?” Take a look at the Hampton side and arm chair from **Hickory Lane Woodworking**. The top of the back is straight, while two large, curved lumbar back adds some flair. Then, with Dark Knight stain on the seat, and Driftwood stain everywhere else, you have a truly attractive color combination with an upscale look. — **See ad on page 34**

>>>Nothing says quality like a sturdy ladderback chair! The Columbus Chair from **Artisan Chairs** is a classic combination of old-world style, with modern comfort. Introduced in 2021 this model has already become a very good seller; In fact it's one of the most successful new designs they've ever introduced. Shown in Wormy, Ruffsawn Brown Maple with FC42000 Almond stain and #10 sheen, this model goes with most any table. — **See ad on page 11**



^^^ **Troyer Woodcraft** present an exciting new option for those who want a hide-a-bed, but also want something stylish as well. The Reclaimed Hide-A-Bed is made of reclaimed wood, and folds up into a small space, making it perfect for apartments, condos or perhaps a guest room that doubles as a home office. Contact them for details on finish options. — **See ad on page 17**

>>> New from **Ebony Woodworking** is this exciting solid-top table with Rough Sawn Character Walnut and bread-board ends! Sitting on a metal base, this eye-catching piece measures 40x84 and is sure to grab customers' attention on your floor. — **See ad on page 25**



^^^The Glen Canyon Collection from **Meadow Wood Furniture** features an eye-catching combination of Barn Floor/Brown Maple. The traditional styling includes a high headboard, with the set also showcasing a roomy nine-drawer dresser and mirror combo. An excellent choice for a cabin, vacation home or anywhere you want a rustic-style look. — **See ad on page 13**

Furniture Marketing

Continued from page 16

money building a beautiful building, with phenomenal landscaping on a high visibility road, but who struggles to make ends meet. He is not in the store running it daily, but he does have great salespeople. The problem is the town, as it does not have the demographic that buys heirloom-quality furniture.

There is no single formula that applies to all furniture businesses across the board. However, some basic rules that can overcome a lot of hurdles do apply. Personally, I will drive 100 miles to visit a store that I enjoy being in and shopping. I believe a lot of others will do the same. But the store must give a reason for a person to do this! It comes down to a couple of principles such as offering value and outstanding customer service.

I don't know if many of you know the story of John W. Nordstrom, who developed a highly successful department store in the northwest Pacific region. Nordstroms now has 377 stores in 40 states and Canada. John Nordstrom had a simple philosophy that made him successful: Provide exceptional service, selection, quality and value.

To offer value, you must know and understand the community in which your store is located. You must understand the needs, desires and aspirations of those who live in the area. That understanding should guide and inform your merchandising, advertising and pricing.

To offer value, you also need to understand the product you are selling. Value never goes out of style whether times are tough or whether there is a boom. People will always need furniture. Some make do with what they have, while others change rooms full of furniture every couple of years. Offering value will bring those who otherwise would make do with old broken furniture into the store.

Now once they are in the store, keep them there by

offering outstanding customer service, which is also part of offering value. What customers experience in your store counts for as much as what they buy. More often than not, experience will win out over price. That is, if a person has an excellent experience with you or your staff, they won't mind paying a little more.

Hire people who reflect your values and treat the customer with the same respect you want them to extend to each customer. When I first started working at a small store in a small town in West Texas at the age of 14, the old man who owned the store taught me a lesson that I have always held true. He said: "The average person has 100 people at their funeral." What he taught me was that if I upset one person, it has a potential effect on a 100 people. While there are times that you will not be able to fully satisfy someone, a successful store makes sure they go the extra mile to satisfy legitimate customer concerns or issues.

Advertise to Your Market

If the public does not know about you, they cannot become customers. All advertising is not expensive. There are many ways of getting the word out. As I've discussed in previous articles, choose one that suits your budget and market; ways to properly advertise your store based on your abilities.

One of the fundamentals of advertising is: Know your market. Target your advertising to your customer's needs. Emphasize your strengths and never misrepresent them.

In your advertising, let the potential customer know if you are offering a free service or some method to draw them in. Discounts can also bring in customers. Offering something for free, such as "free sales tax" or free delivery can bring in additional traffic. Think about ways of making this possible and the trade-offs.

Make your advertising more concentrated. If the demographics of your area permit, and if you are advertis-

Continued on page 26



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MODERN LIVING

Furniture Marketing

Continued from page 24

ing within a 100-mile radius, bring it down to 50 miles and advertise more intensively within that area.

While advertising will bring people to your furniture store, you need to have quality-built, high-selling furniture on display to back it up. If you don't, think about liquidating the older pieces at a discount and talk to builders to find out what their best sellers are. (REMEMBER: the builder has a strong interest in your success. Without you, the store, he does not sell the furniture he is making). Continuously add new collections to your floor to keep it exciting. If you keep old, tired floor models, you are doing yourself a disservice. Tip: Putting a new set on your floor also can give you a good reason to reach out to your existing customer base — your best lead source — and try to get them back in the store.

Offering high-quality furniture and other home décor will earn you respect and a reputation for reliability and creativity. Customers want something that is unique, but more importantly something they can visualize being in their home.

Always monitor customer comments or complaints about the furniture you carry, as returns and complaints will give you a good idea of what the customer does not want.

Offer choices...Remember the walls of your store are also showroom area. By featuring unique accessories that complement your furniture displays you can create an exciting floor display with different arrangements and vignettes. Also remember to create a well-defined path around the store to keep customers engaged.

Offer Competitive Pricing

When you offer competitive pricing, you offer value to make it worthwhile for a customer to shop at your store. With an ever-increasing sector of the population making their purchases online, give your customer a reason to buy from you. I have heard over and over stories about people coming into a store, sitting on a couch, or table, or lying on a bed, then pulling their phone out to take a picture of the piece...and never returning. The lesson here is this: Brick and mortar stores are not your only competition. E-Commerce stores are gaining increased market share and sometimes offering lower prices. I am not saying you need to match an E-

Comm's pricing, but you can get close. What E-Commerce sites cannot do is offer the in-person customer service that you offer. (Don't forget that your bricks-and-mortar competitors also now have an online presence.)

Know your market

This cannot be stressed enough. When you run a retail furniture store, you should offer prices in keeping with your location and the demographics you are targeting. Offering too low or too high a price will make you less competitive.

By offering a specialized service, such as personalized attention to the customer, in-home design service, or customization, you can justify your prices. Before you do that, however, you should always make sure that there is a need for any such service within your target market. Show respect for your customers by offering real value. Simply offering a low price is not enough, and selling only on price is not a good marketing plan.

Have a Trained Sales Team

Having a trained sales team lets you convey confidence in your products and company. Your sales team should have strong knowledge about the products and understand the different price points. They should always know where your advertised items are located and the price you are offering.

The sales team should be able to engage customers in a dialogue to ascertain their needs and preferences, so good listening skills are especially important. They should not be overbearing or overselling...we all know the type. You are not selling used cars; you are selling finely crafted furniture!

Any customer will appreciate a salesperson who goes out of his or her way to help them, to know them on a human scale, and to know their needs. This approach can also help in establishing long-term relationships and garner customer loyalty. Customer loyalty always translates into future sales and referrals to others.

Note: Appearances do matter and reflect your company, which is why your sales team should always be appropriately groomed. They should present an approachable and pleasant face to the world. A well-groomed, personable staff tells your customers that you respect them.

Continued on page 28

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Furniture Marketing

Continued from page 26

Offer Outstanding Customer Service

It is inevitable that there will be customer complaints. While each of us strive to do what is right, there are certain times where a circumstance is out of our control. However, one item that bothers me the most is hearing complaints that stem from bad customer service. This is fully within the store owner's control. This should never happen. Remember the saying earlier about John Nordstrom? PROVIDE EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE. Make sure that your furniture store offers your customers an experience that goes beyond their expectations.

Build relationships with your customers to create an environment of trust and loyalty. This will only generate more sales for you. Have your entire workforce including delivery, warehouse and office staff understand the principles of good customer service to prevent losing the sales that your sales team worked so hard to get.

Your entire team needs to make sure to communicate clearly and answer any questions promptly. Never over-promise, whether you are the salesperson or the delivery person. While that strategy might work in the short term, making promises you cannot keep will only make customers unhappy.

One especially important principle of good customer service comes from the owner down: Treat your entire workforce with courtesy and respect, thereby setting a tone for how things are done around your store.

Conclude With a Satisfying Delivery

One overlooked and important team member that's often overlooked is your delivery team. Stellar delivery service is as important to your business as any other aspect — maybe more so. Remember that your delivery

team members are the first people to see how the furniture looks in the home and the last contact point that the customer will have with your business. Your delivery staff should function as ambassadors for your store. Providing excellent service on the front end means little if the back-end experience is negative.

Your delivery staff should be presentable and polite. Determine the day and time of delivery and confirm with the customer and make sure you are on time, if something comes up, the delivery person should immediately communicate this to the customer. No one likes waiting around the house for hours for a delivery to show up. Clear communication is essential to customer satisfaction and reduces complaints and problems.

The delivery staff should know how to handle the furniture appropriately and carry tools to take care of

minor problems, including touch-up pens. If the delivery staff is to set up the furniture, make sure that they understand they are to do so properly and do not take short cuts.

While all of this may not be an immediate cure for your store's sales, it can

help you achieve success over the years.

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Bob Berryhill is VP of Sales at Infinite Digital Solutions/Infinite Furniture. You can reach him at: 137 W. Jackson Street, Millersburg, Ohio 44654 bob@infinitedigitalsolutions.com www.infinitedigitalsolutions.com

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The Design Factor: Have Ohio furniture builders closed the gap?

If you approach the Amish-built furniture industry from a bit of a historical point, you'd probably be surprised to see how much has changed in the last 20 years.

First, there is the business model itself. That goes back a bit further, but deserves mention.

When Baby Boomers flush with cash and free time first discovered the high-quality furniture being built in Ohio's Amish Country, they were most often dealing with a builder who used a direct-to-consumer model.

That is, folks would cruise up and down the back roads of Holmes and Wayne counties and look for simple signs that basically said, "furniture made here."

But that model (even though it had been around a long time) really didn't make it past the 1990s.

Before long, orders came in so fast that most shops switched from selling directly to consumers, to supplying local retail furniture stores. That freed up a lot of time for the builders, and let them do what they do best: build furniture. Simply put, they let the retailers do the leg work of selecting items, wood species, hardware, stain, etc.

In those early days, choices also were a bit limited. Sure, custom work has always been available, but mostly those Boomers chose from a few design, wood and stain choices — and they were thrilled to do so, because the quality was far superior to anything else on the market (and still is!).

Fast forward to the mid-2000s, and the direct-to-consumer model was mostly long gone, but at that time the styles, wood species, etc. still hadn't changed a whole lot. The choices still were mostly Oak and Cherry, in a handful of very "traditional" designs and colors.

But slowly, steadily, over the years builders began to innovate their offerings across the board. What was the catalyst? It's hard to say, really, but it's difficult to overlook the effect that 9/11 had. In a nutshell, the market was jolted, it shrank and perhaps there was more competition for the customers who were in the market. As we all know, competition either makes a business stronger or exposes weaknesses that often ultimately

lead to its demise.

Perhaps in response to the smaller buyer's pool, manufacturers began to introduce new designs, new stain colors and even new wood species into the market.

First, it was "Brown Maple" wood, which is sometimes referred to as "poor man's Cherry." Now, that might not be fair, but if you sit the two items next to each other and ask the average consumer to identify which is which, odds are pretty high they won't be able to tell the difference. They will, however, be able to tell the difference in price, as Brown Maple historically costs about 30 percent less than Cherry. Brown Maple was an immediate hit, and even with price spikes in wood supply now and then, remains an extremely popular choice for customers who want the classy look and very smooth feel of Cherry, but might not be able to stomach the price tag.

Then came other species, such as Elm. Up to that point, around 2007 or so, a lot of builders considered Elm "too hard to work with." Apparently, that wasn't quite the case! Elm could aptly be described as "Quartersawn White Oak on steroids" due to the intricate grain pattern. When used in combination with other colors and wood species, Elm hit the showrooms with a frenzy, and is still a popular choice.

And then, of course, there are The Rustics. It's difficult to explain how explosive this trend has become. Reclaimed wood (mostly barn wood) and #2 grades of other woods came into the market slowly at first, and then in a wave; a huge wave that honestly shows no signs of retreating. Suddenly, wood that would never have been used to produce fine-quality furniture just a few years earlier was in high demand.

Maybe someone could have predicted the rise of rustics/reclaimed. As warehouses and other spaces in cities began receiving makeovers into stylish (read: expensive) lofts and condos in the downtown/urban districts of East Coast cities, it might have been a natural conclusion that people would want their furniture to show the same "character" as they trendy living spaces. However it

Continued on page 32



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The Design Factor

Continued from page 30

happened, once introduced, reclaimed and rustic styles became popular almost instantly.

Again, it might be important to note that we're now about 30 years removed from those days of Amish-built furniture being "discovered," and it definitely was a different demographic that was attracted to these newer styles and looks.

But still, 15 years ago, even if you could have predicted people repurposing wood, no one would have considered using "character" grades of wood to make furniture — at least not on their own. It definitely would have taken a custom order to begin that process. That conversation might have gone something like this:

"Wait...let me get this straight...you mean they want to see the knots, streaks and imperfections?!"

The answer was, "Yes, they do."

And they still do.

Rustic/reclaimed furniture has found what appears to be a permanent home in the marketplace. The trend might slow, but now that consumers know it's available, someone's going to want it (just as some consumers still want "Honey Oak"). The numbers might dwindle, but fade away completely? Doubtful.

One other thing worth noting, and the core subject of this article is simply: Styles and designs.

Although never reported in these pages, there has been a long-time consensus that Ohio builds the best quality furniture, but Indiana is ahead of us in styles and designs. Many people attributed the design gap to the fact that Indiana's furniture-producing district was close to the Chicago area. It stands to reason that, being so close to a major metro market, designers and retail store owners would have an influence on what the builders offered.

Whether that's an accurate assumption or not is irrelevant because again, conventional wisdom always was that Ohio held the edge on quality, while Indiana excelled at design.

BUT...

That was then.

Word within the industry is that Ohio furniture manufacturers have finally leveled the playing field with their Indiana cousins in terms of design.

According to *Expressions In Woodcraft* Owner/Publisher Ryan Kralik, Ohio's furniture manufacturers have finally closed the design gap, and are introducing de-

signs and styles of furniture that rival that of the Indiana folks. That's big news.

Historically, it was easy to spot a piece that came out of Indiana, because it had more of a "forward" look. That is, it was something new and different-looking. So, it's definitely intriguing to learn that Ohio is now on par with Indiana in terms of design.

We reached out to a handful of retailers to get their reactions, and while most were willing to talk about the design factor, most also were reluctant to go on record (this is not uncommon when dealing with Amish-owned businesses).

When asked if he disagreed or disagreed with the fact that Ohio designs are now equal to or better than Indiana's, one retailer said, "I totally agree. I would say within the last couple years they (Ohio builders) have really stepped it up," He commented that was true especially with outdoor furniture — something we previously had not considered — with small innovations on design turning the tide.

Several people we spoke with agreed that big changes have occurred in just the last two years or so, but, interestingly, no one could really pinpoint any particular event or circumstance that caused Ohio builders to take things to the next level.

Another retailer commented, "For me, I would say there have been more improvements (in design) in the last two years or so than, say, the last 10." When asked what he felt was the catalyst he said, "I don't know really, except to say that this is a very competitive business," and that Ohio's manufacturers "seem to be following the latest trends," perhaps more than they used to.

More than one retailer we spoke mentioned the "Showcase House" at the upcoming Ohio Hardwood Furniture Market. The Showcase House, which is a complete home being constructed inside the Mt. Hope Event Center, will feature furniture in 26 categories. Perhaps that will be the best opportunity to see just how extensively Ohio's furniture manufacturers have innovated and updated their designs.

What does all this mean to the overall market for Amish-built, American-made furniture? That's difficult to say, but, just as Ohio slowly-but-surely completely transformed itself in the last 15 years, it's likely that buyers and retailers also will note the upgrades. Time will tell.

—Jerry Klingerman, Editor



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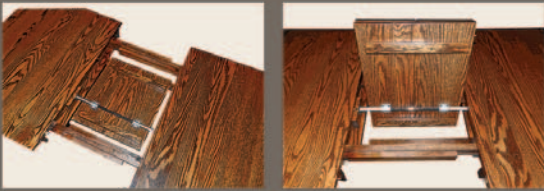
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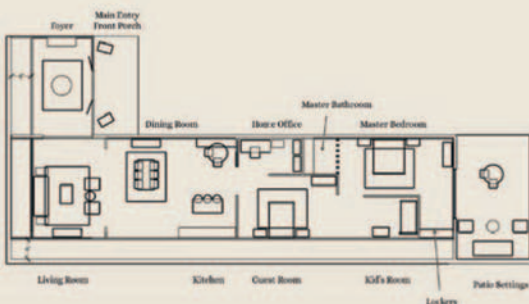
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