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FURNITURE WORLD MAGAZINE • FOUNDED 1870

COVER: From Norwalk Furniture “Susie” has a bit more shape than a Parsons chair, and sports an elegantly upholstered cover with a buttoned dressmaker skirt. These chairs are right at home around a formal or casual dining table. For more information about Norwalk Furniture see pages 20-21 in this issue or visit www.norwalkfurniture.com.

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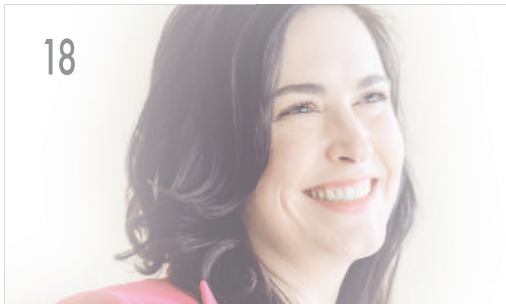
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Editor's Corner
The Ear Worm Opportunity

Earworms, at least as I experience them, aren't the worst thing as far as pathologies go, but they're not the best either. For those who haven't heard, earworms are melodies that just stick. They manifest in the same way that persistent, repetitive thoughts prevent folks from sleeping. They are also the reason I cover my ears and run from the room whenever I hear one; for example, almost any Beatles tune or a kitschy jingle designed, I imagine, to torment people like me. If I see you at the Vegas show, no humming please!

Only those that have "something special" about them get stuck. If you are interested, google the phenomenon. There's a body of scientific research about earworms and how they turn people's brains into MP3 players set on repeat.

Oddly enough, FS' 2023-24 forecast has had a similar effect on me. It's full of aesthetic themes and seasonal design shifts that are explained by Jaye Anna Mize at FS (the re-brand of Fashion Snoops) in this issue.

Mize says she isn't a fan of the word trend. Perhaps it's because trends aren't always supported by underlying social factors. Or, they don't have the same durability as full-fledged design movements. My point is that the FS 2023-24 forecast presents design themes in a way that isn't merely a reboot of cyclical style introductions.

Maybe I haven't been paying close attention over the past few trend cycles, but the current FS report seems special. It presents a unique opportunity for Furniture World readers to adapt their buying, marketing and displays in 2023. Giving form at retail to emerging trends by providing additional context might be game-changing in this uncertain economy. Now could be the perfect time for your shoppers to get behind an iconic design movement that resonates with their lives, perhaps even keeping them up at night like a tune they can't get out of their heads.

Good Retailing in 2023!

Russell Bienenstock
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GUEST PRODUCTIVITY RATIO

A Way to Turn Average Sales Performers Into Superstars

by David McMahon, PerformNOW Inc.

To compensate for the impact of declining traffic, retailers need to develop salespeople who can close more sales with fewer guests. Using guest productivity metrics is a proven way to do that.

Most retail furniture organizations are experiencing guest traffic decreases associated with double-digit percentage point drops in sales. However, those retailers who have continuously improved their systems and processes since 2021 are doing much better. That's why, especially in the current economic environment, it's important for home furnishings retailers to have a plan to make the most of every guest encounter. Maintaining face-to-face guest traffic is as critical now as it was during the housing recession in 2009.

Improving Sales Productivity

This article highlights effective methods to improve guest productivity with a focus on front-line employees. The folks who handle traffic in your operation—salespeople and designers—can make a huge difference in compensating for traffic declines. Here are three observations to keep in mind:

- *The sales performance of salespeople who have similar levels of experience and training varies widely, from marginal performers to high-earning sales superstars.*
- *Average salespeople can increase their performance if they are willing*

to change and can adapt to better systems and processes.

- *Well-executed and innovative organizational leaders and focused managers always get better results from their sales teams.*

Salespeople who are open to learning and implementing the practices of top salespeople generate more traffic and achieve higher close rates. The net result is greater customer face-to-face traffic, higher sales per guest, higher close rates and better overall sales. High-performing salespeople tend to be among the most successful writers

"Sales performance is a result, not a measure. That's why average-performing people need to have access to guiding operational metrics other than just sales performance."

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“For Dennis in the previous example,
his guest failure rate is: 15 unsold guests without follow-up / 25 total
guests greeted = 60%.”

year after year. That’s because they have found ways of working with guests (prospects and customers) that consistently produce results. Here are some commonalities of top writers:

1. Top salespeople make their guests comfortable. Their welcome greeting is refined, genuine and accepted by the majority of the people they encounter.

2. They help their guests solve challenges by asking the right questions, listening and understanding. Almost everyone who visits a furniture store is truly in the market to buy. The specific questions top writers ask directly move shoppers toward appropriate solutions. They use sketches, get information about shoppers’ budgets, how their rooms currently look and how their lifestyles will determine how a room is used. They also ask about style preferences and purchase timelines.

3. These salespeople present options that are appropriate for each guest. Only by gaining a thorough understanding of a shopper’s situation do they earn the right to present options.

4. When a guest accepts options presented by the salesperson, and the sale is closed, top performers explain the next steps. These can

be to enter an order ticket or reserve inventory, schedule a delivery, submit a review, complete payment and go over any order status follow-up.

5. If a guest is not ready to move forward, a top salesperson presents a different set of follow-up steps, such as scheduling an appointment to review other options, a home visit, or finalizing pricing.

6. The best salespeople follow up appropriately with those who buy and those who do not. They do what they say they are going to do. This attribute creates positive word of mouth and generates be-back traffic leading to higher close rates and bigger tickets.

7. They touch base with past customers routinely.

8. They focus on learning and improving because, just like a business owner, they realize that it is through their efforts that they earn their living. In other words: “They sharpen their swords when not using them.”

9. They keep score by knowing, without asking or being told by a manager, where they are in terms of sales for the month.

10. Top salespeople are motivated by monetary rewards,

recognition or helping people. Whatever the reason, they ARE motivated. It’s hard to teach this behavior.

Using Guest Productivity Ratio

Many top salespeople seem like they were born with selling skills in their blood. That said, average salespeople with good attitudes can become better when provided with proper training in leadership, systems and processes. Sales performance is a result, not a measure. That’s why average-performing people need access to guiding operational metrics other than sales performance. These can include sales per guest, average sale, close rate, be-back percent and one other—guest productivity ratio, which measures the degree to which a guest was served properly. Here’s the formula:

Guest productivity ratio = (# of guests that purchase + # of guests that do not purchase with agreed-upon follow-up) / # of guests greeted.

Average Performer Example

If a salesperson, let’s call him Dennis, sells seven customers in a week and follows up with an additional three, he has 10 productive interactions for the week. However, if he also greets 15 other guests who receive no follow up, his guest productivity rate is poor,

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equaling seven guests sold + three guests with follow-up / 25 total guests greeted = 40%.

Another helpful metric is the guest failure ratio.

Guest failure ratio = # of guests without purchases or agreed-upon follow-up / # of guests greeted.

For Dennis in the previous example, his guest failure rate is: 15 unsold

guests without follow-up / 25 total guests greeted = 60%.

Assuming Dennis has an average sale of \$2,000, his metrics expressed in dollars are:

His weekly sales
 $= 7 \times \$2,000 = \$14,000$

His weekly potential sales
 $= 3 \times \$2,000 = \$6,000$

His weekly lost sales
 $= 15 \times \$2,000 = \$30,000$

These numbers are typical for an average salesperson in the furniture industry.

Elevating Your Sales Game

So how can you use this information to help your average producers become more effective and possibly achieve results closer to top writers? Answering this question is the pathway to gold.

With guest ratios in mind, some ways average salespeople can elevate their game are:

Selling Approach: Require associates to use and practice your organization's selling approach, which specifies how guests should be greeted, sold and followed-up with. Only the very best managers require their entire sales force to do this day in and day out. Almost anyone can create or copy a selling approach. Execution separates the best from the rest.

Innovative Systems: Use innovative systems to enhance and propel your selling approach. Whether your organization has just a few or hundreds of people interacting with guests, technology has proven to add value by ensuring close touch with prospects and customers. Without technology, it is impossible to ensure that all non-sold guests receive a timely follow-up message. It is also impossible to ensure that customers get sent relevant and timely thank you, order status, delivery scheduling, accident protection and past purchase follow-up reminders. Consider using data-integrated CRM automation to automatically send messages from salespeople to their guests.

Systems Processes: Implement pro-

"How can you use this information to help your average producers become more effective and possibly achieve results closer to top writers? Answering this question is the pathway to gold."



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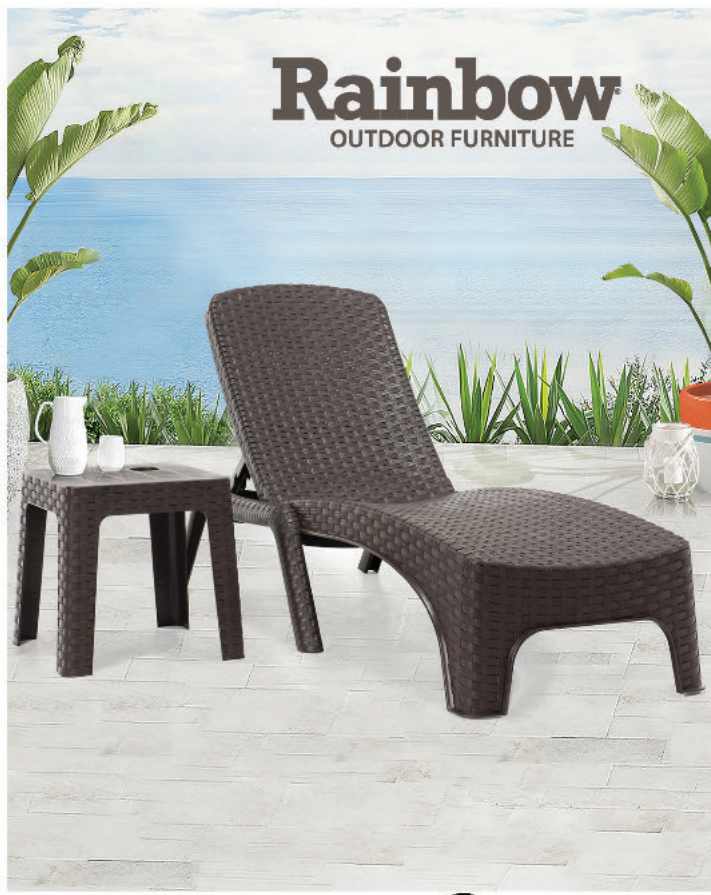
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"This time he sells seven

new customers over the period of a week and has three additional guests who return to purchase on their second visit. That's 10 productive sales interactions for the week."

cesses around your systems. When using automation, salespeople need to be aware of the messages that are being sent out on their behalf. Processes need to be in place for personalized follow-ups of value. For example, if a guest does not buy right away, but there is agreed-upon follow-up, the process could look like this:

- Salesperson enters customer data into the system, for example, full customer name, email, mobile number, photo or scan of a sketch, other images, address, quote, notes on the potential project, reasons not purchasing and guest lifestyle information. The more data entered, the better the chance to provide relevant and successful follow-up.
- An automated thank you is sent via

email and or text.

- The salesperson gets an automated reminder to contact the prospect with a value proposition within three days.
- The salesperson suggests a booking date and time to revisit with the guest using a digital calendar.
- Calendar automation confirms the appointment and keeps track of it for both the guest and the salesperson.
- The prospect returns to the store and makes a purchase.
- The sales manager routinely reviews follow-ups completed, not completed, appointments made and the results.

Inspect What You Expect

If you like the idea of using the guest

productivity ratio, you must measure it every day, every week, and every month. To use it effectively, your sales force will need to live by it. If you feel that you cannot sustain this level of tracking, it will be unlikely to work for you. However, those who use it properly perform better than their competitors with the guests that they engage.

Top Performer Example

Using guest productivity ratio, "XYZ Furniture" achieves systematic follow-up resulting in additional be-back traffic, a higher close rate and higher average sale. Using the same weekly example from the average salesperson named Dennis in the previous example, here is what could happen:

Dennis ups his game. This time he sells seven new customers over the

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GUEST PRODUCTIVITY RATIO

period of a week and three additional guests who returned to purchase on their second visit. That's 10 productive sales interactions for the week.

He has agreed to follow-up with an additional five guests and has 13 unsold guests who do not receive any follow-up.

Using an average sale of \$2,000 for new guests and \$2,500 for be-backs, here are his results:

His weekly sales from new guests
 $= 7 \times \$2,000 = \$14,000$

His weekly sales from returning guests
 $= 3 \times \$2,500 = \$7,500$

His weekly total sales = \$21,500

His weekly potential sales
 $= 5 \times \$2,000 = \$10,000$

His weekly lost sales = $13 \times \$2,000 = \$26,000$

His guest productivity rate is: 10

guests sold + 5 guests with follow-up / 28 total guests greeted = 53.6%.

His guest failure rate is: 13 unsold guests without follow-up / 28 total guests greeted = 46.4%. This is a sizeable improvement; however, top businesses are setting the bar much higher, reaching for greater than 65% guest productivity and less than 35% guest failure rates.

Coincidentally, this second example is in line with how million-dollar writers in retail furniture store operations typically perform. They generate more returning traffic using follow-up systems and processes.

Conclusion

To reduce the impact of declining traffic, retailers need to find and develop salespeople who can close more sales with fewer guests. This can

be accomplished by using innovative metrics, technologies and follow-up processes. Success also depends on having a management team that champions innovation, leads people and holds them accountable.

About David McMahon: *Furniture World contributing editor David McMahon is the founder of PerformNOW Inc., which has three main products that help home furnishings businesses improve and innovate: These are: PerformNOW CRM (Contact Management systems and processes), Performance Groups (Owners, Sales managers, Operations) and Furniture business consulting.*

See all of David McMahon's articles at www.furninfo.com/Authors/David_McMahon/6. David McMahon can be reached with questions about this or other retail operations topics at david@performnow.com.



"This second example is in-line with how million-dollar writers in retail furniture store operations typically perform. They generate more returning traffic using follow-up systems and processes."

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A Surprising Design Forecast

INTERVIEW WITH JAYE ANNA MIZE AT FS (FASHION SNOOPS)

Stay tuned for changes in home furnishing design aesthetics, customer moods and purchasing preferences that will roll out in 2023-24.

It's been over a year since Furniture World spoke with Jaye Anna Mize about consumer behavior, culture, lifestyles and future home furnishings trends. She is Vice President of Home Interiors and Lifestyle at FS (Fashion Snoops), a leading global trend agency and consumer behavior think tank. FS works with retailers and brands in the fashion, beauty and home furnishings industries serving clients that range from luxury to mass market.

We asked her to share insights and buying suggestions based on FS' Fall-Winter 2023-24 forecast, launched on www.fashionsnoops.com.

Throughout this article, Mize references the terms Design Aesthetics, Cultural Aesthetics and Seasonal Design Shifts. The distinctions are based on FS's seasonal forecast that begins by defining key Cultural Sentiments that address core consumer movements affecting design. From there, FS determines how those movements interact through color and design priorities from a cross-market application, calling them Design Aesthetics. The Seasonal Design Shifts Mize talks about are forecasts for emerging home furnishings over a designated time frame.

what home furnishings shoppers will be looking for over the next few years, Mize said, "The fun part is that retail showrooms are going to be more maximalist with a mix-and-match approach to the way rooms are put together. Consumers will be receptive to a variety of eclectic style choices running through their rooms and homes.

"We will see more traditional-inspired furnishings in a multitude of flavors from Venetian to Russian—think Catherine the Great! Quality over quantity will become even more important. This is a conversation we started two years ago, which will hit furniture hard in the next year with the Nuance Design Shift coming to the forefront. There will be more ornate designs, opulent curves, scalloped architecture, gilded window sets and Victorian-era decorating.

"Now consumers are in traveling mode, bringing hardcore travels — their Italian, Grecian and French flairs — inside along with beautiful earthen palettes."

A Traditional Resurgence

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Jaye Anna Mize
VP, Creative Home Interiors and Design at FS

"We will see more traditional-inspired furnishings in a multitude of flavors from Venetian to Russian—think Catherine the Great!"

"We're seeing a resurgence of Italian, French and English architectural influences, partly due to revenge travel. It reflects a desire for home furnishings shoppers to incorporate escapism in American homes more than ever.

"Millennials and even some sectors of Gen Z are really getting excited about traditional, although for younger Gen Zs this interest can be from a second-hand-sustainable perspective."

Nuance Seasonal Design Shift

Old-World Venetian and golden era home furnishings are re-purposing and reformulating the design landscape. FS' latest report says that Nuance's origins

stem "from the desire to create meaningful moments, travel continues to inspire heirloom-like pieces, encouraging the mix of old and new forms."

Mize observed that except for a shabby chic period in the '90s, a romantic home furnishings moment hasn't emerged in quite some time. "During the pandemic, we had the Cottagecore aesthetic. Now consumers are in traveling mode, bringing hardcore travels—their Italian, Grecian and French flairs—inside along with beautiful earthen palettes. I wouldn't necessarily call it maximalism which seems too kitsch. It's more refined with a focus on craftsmanship and often a connection with a maker. This new traditional design features burl wood, scalloped edges, carvings, large-scale

botanicals and textured velvets. These are coming back alongside more washed linens and jacquards. We are seeing nested and conversational seating arrangements as well. Unique plays on old-world Scandinavian fireplaces and mantelscapes have popped up everywhere." Takeaways from this shift in consumer preferences include what FS identifies as Old-World Charm, Mix of Old and New, Italian Romance, Large Scale Botanicals and Timeless Serenity.

"Better quality case pieces have trended modernist over the past few seasons. For '23 and '24," Mize said, "retailers should prepare for a more romantic era of traditional with softer plays on waves and arches. Especially here in the U.S., people will look for items that connect

Source: Veronika Breuer (Photographer)

SCALLOPED EDGES

Nuance



CONTRASTING PRINTS



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Source: Simon Upton (Photographer)



Source: Cereal Magazine



Source: Julien Sebban
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them with their roots. Get ready for a resurgence of antiquity themes, sometimes with an added touch of whimsy. Small details, cozy and nook-focused furnishings as well as secondhand and 'found' furniture has become popular. People want to incorporate maker craft furnishings and artisanal finds in their homes.

"Furniture World readers should also be on the lookout for the continued integration of velvet into a multitude of different areas. It's a very bold look."

Diffuse Seasonal Design Shift

According to Mize, Traditional is one slice of the pie. "Another," she explained, "is Diffuse, a softened focus on traditional that FS calls Contemporary Farmhouse, an elevated farmhouse look. Included

are natural combinations with tons of reclaimed woods and brown marble coming to the forefront, often paired with brushed brass for a fresh look. Clay, amber glass and really fun new artisanal interpretations of recycled waste are part of this aesthetic. Oak is a key element in Contemporary Farmhouse design, but with a much softer look than some of the whiter oak finishes people are more familiar with." FS' takeaways include: Returning to the Foundations of Life, Daily Rituals, Farmhouse Reimagined, Conscious Craftsmanship and Authentic Creation.

"Mize noted that "From a detail perspective, Diffuse designs have deeper ribbings, lots of playful inlays and paneling. It's a slightly different twist on Farmhouse that expands its appeal to urban settings, as well as suburban and second homes."

Euphoric Seasonal Design Shift

FS describes Euphoric as taking "us on a journey through exciting yet uncharted territories. As consumers desire innovations that allow a momentary escape from our physical reality, futuristic forms create fluid transitions into a metaverse full of unique immersive spaces." That's quite a mouthful and a new way to look

"Diffuse, a softened focus on traditional that FS calls Contemporary Farmhouse, is an elevated farmhouse look."

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"Soft browns and earthier greens

are coming to the forefront. Sky blue will become popular in Spring 2023. Color prints and patterns will be important at retail."

past more traditional design to a more digitally inspired future.

"The youngest furniture shoppers," observed Mize, "are looking for metaverse and tech-integrated furnishings. Alphas and younger Gen Zs have developed a preference for items in the real world that mimic their decorating choices in gaming platforms like The Sims or Fortnite. It's a small beginning to an enormous shift toward what we call Euphoric Design.

"At the recent High Point Market," she continued, "Nathan Anthony showed furniture designs that fit perfectly within this metaverse-inspired aesthetic. There

were funky bases, legs that had more depth and a lot of interesting fabrications reminiscent of clouds, incorporating rolling curve shapes. Also, huge iridescent, opulent shines are really important to this shift."

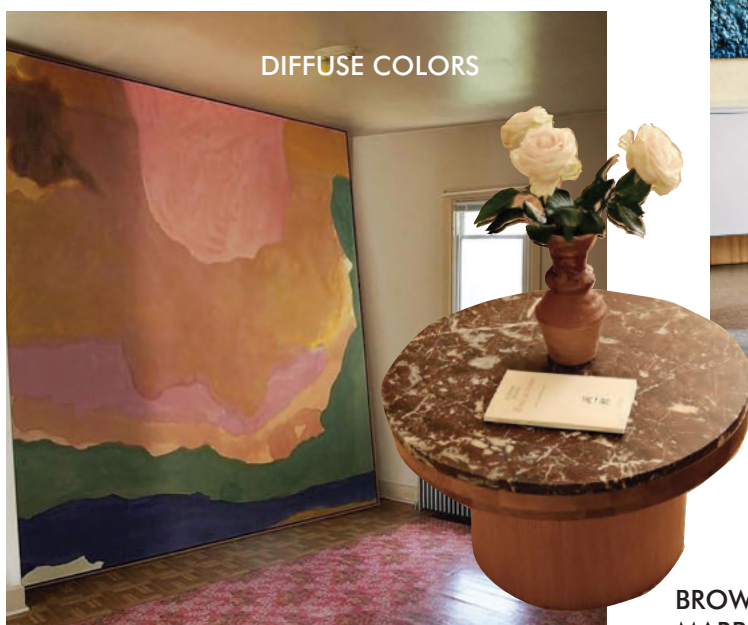
"Euphoric Design includes some interesting nostalgic throwbacks that are, in some ways, a new version of a futuristic '60s and '70s aesthetic with an otherworldly feel." Mize calls some of the more playful, contoured creations ice cream constructions. "They are," she said, "comfortable and crafted of a soft-looking resin. It's an Eames aesthetic updated for this metaverse feel.

Urban Outfitters has started to address this market in a fun way. It's a minimalism that's monochromatic but feels elevated and almost futuristic. There's a sense of harmony, repetition and balance." Key takeaways from FS include: Futuristic Dreamland, Conforming to Our Surroundings, Innovative Developments, Continuing Curves and Monochromatic Minimalism.

Elaborating on Gen Z preferences, Mize said that this group is "much more willing to shop secondhand than for what they consider fast fashion home. They are done with plasticky furniture that looks like it might fall apart in six months.

Diffuse

Source: Helen Frankenthaler (Artist)



**BROWN
MARBLE**

Source: Lucas Madani (Designer)
from Studio Yellowtrace



Source: Pion Studio
(Photographer)



Source: Pion Studio (Photographer)

This is true across younger consumer groups who want their furniture purchases to have a quality feel that's in line with their sustainable mindset."

Transcendental Design Aesthetic

"This story is highlighted by a darker home-set coming to the forefront," Mize explained. "The focus is more spiritual, balanced and harmonious. Transcendental is associated with a consumer desire to decipher what spirituality means to them in this new age. Millennials are redefining how to incorporate spirituality, mindfulness and self-care into their lives." FS describes this Design Aesthetic as a consumer need to take "note of the consumer's new rituals and applications towards soul care that center around symbology and the darker elements of nature." Takeaways include:

New Awakening, Meditative Quality, Contemporary Symbology, Systemic Balance and Moody Ambiances.

Symbiotic Seasonal Design Shift

FS reports that Symbiotics reflect a consumer desire to find comfort in natural materials. They are willing to "push creative boundaries as they develop a deeper appreciation for mother earth. With sustainability at the forefront of design, the conservation of our planet's resources influences the eagerness to adopt innovations that represent future impacts."

"The Symbiotic story is deeply nature-inspired. We're seeing it play out in fabrications that mimic eco-spaces," explained Mize. "It's an almost intense nature infusion. Featured are green colors and materials like recy-

cled stained glass, seaweed textiles and kelp yarns that grow like crazy and are a vast sustainable resource. Designers seem obsessed with ocean themes right now and are using material applications that have almost a forest-like feel." Takeaways for Symbiotic include: Designed by Nature, Reciprocal Earth, Eco Alternatives, Cavern Comforts and Raw Richness.

"Coming to the forefront with Symbiotic," added Mize, "are zinc-treated applications, cement, composites and non-woven rattan, raw earthy stones and imperfect elements. Architects are experimenting with materials used in new homes and hospitality that feel a lot more organic. Details include everything from aluminum and concrete mixes to glazed patchworks, organic shapes and soil textures that mimic mother earth in every way possible.

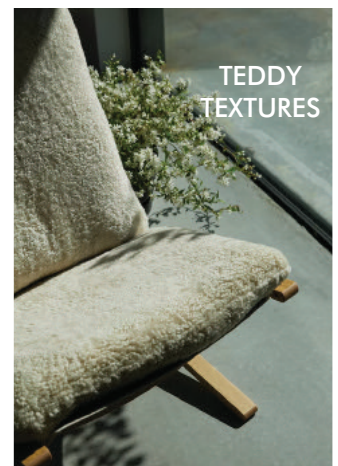


MINDFUL
ESSENTIALS

Source: D
WR (Brand)

Source: Jim Stephenson
(Photographer)

Diffuse



TEDDY
TEXTURES



RECYCLED WASTE

Dirk Van Der Kooij (Designer)



INTRICATE
DETAILS

Source: Emily Hendy
(Designer)



MUTED
FEMININITY

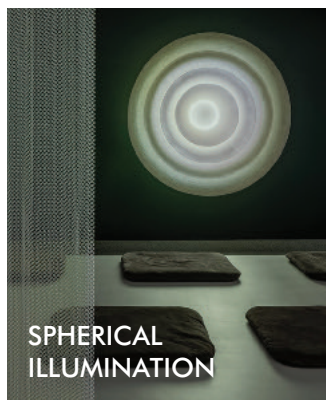
Source: Pion Studio (Photographer)



Source: Silvia Rivoltella (Photographer)



Source: Rafael Gamo (Photographer)



Transcendental



Source: Cero Doce (Architecture Firm)

Source: Thomas Pagani (Photographer)

"There are also elements of Brutalist design playing out but with added cozy, more familiar elements. These were everywhere at the Milan show, where we saw a new use for reconstructed wood applications that will probably only be adopted at a high-end luxury design level."

Refuge: A Cultural Sentiment

FS describes this sentiment as "one where we come to accept the constancy of change, conflict and uncertainty. We learn to adapt, seek out products, environments and modes of expression that can respond to our every need or desire and prep us better for what may come tomorrow."

Mize said that grounding as a design theme "speaks to the Refuge storyline. Earthen experiences are translated over into home architecture and decor in interesting ways. These mimic or get their inspiration from caves and underground

spaces. Refuge is associated with an approach to design that focuses on mindfulness.

"Some applications may seem a bit forward, but are still high design. They feature transformed textile materials used in ways that might look like a tree mended them together organically."

She believes that this trend is rooted in the lifestyle choices of Gen Z. "They have more transient lifestyles, shuttle between Airbnbs, live in refurbished vans or off the grid. They seem desperate for a connection with nature. Many Gen Zs and younger millennials feel this disassociation as a desire to be surrounded by nature, right now seen primarily in higher-end designs.

"Refuge aesthetics are coming to the forefront at hotels that want to embrace off-the-grid design and a more mindful hospitality," Mize added. "For most home furnishings retailers, this aesthetic will take two years to hit. Then, watch for themes like cavern comfort, more raw

richness, and lots of reciprocity with the earth.

"At retail, we are likely to see more grounded bedframes as bedroom wellness becomes more important. These will be increasingly sophisticated, incorporating unique upholstered treatments compared to typical wood or metal construction. There will be some really nice mindfulness styling coming to the forefront focused on personal care and rituals. Refuge-inspired designs will

"Elements of the Nuance, Euphoric, Diffuse and Symbiotic Seasonal Design Shifts were on display at the 2022 Fall High Point market."

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Source: Coming Soon (Brand)



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Source: Eva Herzog
(Photographer)

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DEVELOPMENTS



VISIONARY
LANDSCAPES

Source: Tom Dixon (Product Designer)

ROUNDED COMFORT



Source: Philippe
Malouin (Designer)



Source: Philippe Fragniere
(Photographer)



CONTOURED CREATIONS

Euphoric

incorporate the natural foundations of life curated for consumers in an authentic way."

Seen at High Point Market

Mize said, "Elements of the Nuance, Euphoric, Diffuse and Symbiotic Seasonal Design Shifts were on display at the 2022 Fall High Point market. Jaipur Living, for example, had a flora and fauna party that featured a Symbiotic setup. Gabby's bird sanctuary display spoke directly to the Nuance theme, and Nathan Anthony was completely Euphoric. It was like Tina Nicole and Khai Mai are designing for the metaverse and channeling a younger Gen Z and Alpha mindset. Also displayed were more contemporary pieces that fit solidly into the Diffuse arena, taking Farmhouse in a new direction.

"Almost every showroom had a

teddy bear textured upholstered bed that added a feeling of soft femininity. We also saw free-formed curves that seemed to be channeling Sarah Ellison, the Australian furniture designer who creates what I call ice cream-inspired furniture, including comforting sofas and ottomans. It's a very millennial and Gen X aesthetic.

"Lots of eco-innovations are another solid bet for retailers going forward. You can find every type of slub fabric out there right now. At the most recent Milan Fair, we saw upholstered applications that mimic fashion sweaters. Even sparkle lurex fabric, typically used for 1970s fashion, has found its way into upholstered furniture designs.

"Looking forward to the '23-'24 seasons within the seating category, fabrics will continue to become more slubbed and almost antique-ish with fun looks plucked right out of the '70s."

Newfound Heritage Lifestyle Movement

Furniture World asked Jaye Anna Mize to comment on how furniture retailers might acknowledge the trend toward buying pre-owned furnishings.

She observed, "So far, retailers can

"In 2023, it will be a good idea for retailers to adjust product mixes toward smaller pieces and away from big 'Bubba' items. The market will be more accent-driven."

“Alphas and younger Gen Zs have developed a preference

for items in the real world that mimic their decorating choices in gaming platforms like The Sims or Fortnite. It’s a small beginning to an enormous shift toward what we call Euphoric Design.”

take comfort in the fact that the only demographic group that is heavily invested in buying non-antique second-hand furniture is the Alphas, though more generally, people will be buying and refurbishing more second-hand Americana.

“The Nuance and Diffuse Seasonal Design Shifts and a lifestyle story called Newfound Tradition in our forecast speak heavily to that trend. The Newfound Heritage story is an overarching movement that spans multiple years. It addresses the consumer need

to act as modern-day curators/archivists of their homes and personal histories. Traditional design motifs appeal to people searching for timeless modes of maximal expression. The result is often an eclectic and globalized sense of design. For them, mixing nostalgia with travel along their journeys is key.

“We didn’t talk a lot about nostalgia yet,” Mize realized toward the end of our interview. “In times like these, when there is a sense of political, economic, daily chaos, older generations gravitate

towards traditional design.

“There are some interesting statistics that reflect the nostalgia described in our most recent forecast. Between 2021 and 2022, Pinterest saw a 20 percent increase in searches for modern traditional. During the pandemic, people took up hobbies that gave major boosts to platforms like Etsy. Chairish reported that 31 percent of people in the millennial and Gen Z cohorts increased their interest in buying used vintage or antique furniture online.

Source: Benjamin Guedj (Designer)



Source: Crane Kalman Brighton (Artist)



Euphoric



Source: Chen Chen & Kai Williams



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KELP YARN & SEAWEED TEXTILES

Source: Anubha Sood (Artist)



SOIL TEXTURES

Source: Soma Studio Milano



FIRE
DETAILS

Source: Jesse Shaw of
Episode (Artist)

Symbiotic



FEATURED FOLIAGE

Source: Love Studio



SUBTERRANEAN
AMBIANCE

Source: Andy Kerstens
(Interior Designer)



WASTE BRINE CEMENT

Source:
Wael Al Awar (WAA)
(Architect)

"At FS," she said, "we've broken this idea of nostalgia down into three additional themes called Newstalgia, Return to Tradition and Cross Culture."

Newstalgia: "This theme addresses a willingness to buy items such as chiclet chairs or the creations of Wilkes, Eames and Herman Miller. Newstalgia includes the secondhand surges we've seen in the market. Even Ikea has incorporated this secondhand thinking into their designs by mimicking vintage razorback chairs or heritage Scandinavian design. There are retro revivals, particularly in upholstery with reintroduced paisleys, plaids and retro prints. Hobby culture, including pastimes like crocheting, knitting and needlepoint, are pushing Newstalgia forward as well."

Return to Tradition: "Consumers want

handmade items that speak to a historical legacy. The hobby resurgence is a part of this mix but focused on localized design. Food culture has moved in this same direction as has a desire for furniture purchasers to know the maker of the wood furniture they purchase. Along with that, we are seeing heirloom materials and localized design, Victorian decorating and fun elevations/reinterpretations of traditional designs becoming more important."

Cross Culture: "This theme looks at how traditional design can be appropriated. It is a topic of concern, especially for younger consumers. Cross Culture has come to the forefront in adventure and discovery conversations, globetrotting and multicultural mixes.

"At present, Cross Culture is mostly of interest on the contract hospitality side.

In the retail home furnishings space, we are talking more about materials and construction like using antiqued metals, refurbished mahogany and old-school joineries that reference cultural stories. The paisley prints, more scallops and ribbing I mentioned previously can all tie Cross Culture in with the Diffuse and Nuance Seasonal Design Shifts. When considered from a retail perspective, the design landscape is becoming more eclectic than ever. For retailers, that means bringing diversity to product assortments and considering cross-generational attributes that really speak to nostalgia."

Buyer's Tips for 2023

Mize observed that the rate of change in furniture trends as they've played



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“Consumer behavior tends to roll out

in a continuous wave that might hit a New York City staple like Bergdorf Goodman early and then a mass-market furniture retailer in middle America a year or two later.”

out at retail—colors, themes, schematics, product assortments—have generally slowed down over the past couple of years. “Categories that will continue to evolve more rapidly are outdoor spaces, decor, tabletop and soft goods, including top-of-bed pillows and throws.”

She suggested that no matter how Furniture World readers are positioned, or who their customers are, they should focus on color. “Soft browns,” she said, “and earthier greens are coming to the forefront. Sky blue will become popular in Spring 2023. Color prints and patterns will be important at retail along with the colors tiki brown, burnt sienna, brick red, chai spice and stormy sky blue. These are colors that are comforting while still feeling fresh. Browns, in general, are becoming the grounding base across the board, outweighing traditional greys and blacks. Ochres, compost green, Spanish moss and olive hues are green casts that are close to becoming new neutral colors. I believe that the color compost will advance to the fore as the new navy. We haven’t been in this warmer brown territory, even for wood tones, in a long time. They’ve been grayed out but will be carried back onto retail floors as the palette for a new traditional wave.

“Younger generations are going to diversify between secondhand and new purchases with an emphasis on investing in quality over quantity. In 2023, it will be a good idea for retailers to adjust product mixes toward smaller pieces and

away from big ‘Bubba’ items. The market will be more accent-driven. People will look to improve their home decor but not necessarily replace mainstay items like beds or large upholstered pieces. Chests of drawers and side tables may perform better.”

Youth Furnishings

Mize told Furniture World that she sees a lot more emphasis on youth furnishings. “Kids Home,” she told us, “is blowing up in a big way. People spend much more on furnishing their kids’ bedrooms than ever before. Some FS clients, the Big Lots, Targets and Walmarts of the world, are increasingly focused on finding more innovative changing tables, storage shelving, beds and top-of-bed products.

“The reason is that parents already have their bedrooms sorted, so now they’re looking for new and interesting ways to keep their kids, who are spending more time at home, busy in their rooms.”

“This phenomenon has also extended to colleges and universities,” said Mize. “Check out RushTok, one of the biggest trending things on TikTok. Students are getting rid of existing beds and dorm furniture so their parents can outfit dorm and sorority rooms to the nines. It is true that retailers are worried about a recession, but there’s still a lot of money out there to be had by chasing interesting

home furnishings categories.”

Retail Trend Cadence

When asked how retailers, who are more promotionally-minded, might address some of these forecasts, Mize noted that every retailer has its own trend cadence. “Not every organization can be fashion-forward,” she observed. “Sometimes a retailer needs to be one or two seasons behind the actual timeline of a trend. We forecast two or three years out in advance, but it is the storyline and the way that a trend will hit that is most important. Consumer behavior tends to roll out in a continuous wave that might hit a New York City staple like Bergdorf Goodman early and then a mass-market furniture retailer in middle America a year or two later. Many of our retail clients are still working off our 2021 or 2022 reports, while others are already studying consumer behavior forecasts and planning their buying strategies for 2025.”

Even though every retailer is different, Mize believes that no matter where a retailer’s product selection is along the curve, it is important to have a strategy and timeline. “Without that,” she concluded, “it’s difficult to deliver inspirational seasonal displays in place to anticipate customers’ buying moods and preferences for style, selection, color and display.”



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The New Hall of Fame Building—What's In It For Us

Interview with Karen McNeill, Chief Vision Officer, AHFHFF

The debut of the American Home Furnishings Hall of Fame Foundation's High Point building in April will signal a new focus on how consumers, job seekers and those of us who sell home furnishings see our industry.

Karen McNeill, the American Home Furnishings Hall of Fame Foundation's Chief Vision Officer, got her introduction to the furniture industry in the 1980s when she accepted a job opportunity in High Point with what is now IMC. Later she formed McNeill Communications, a marketing agency that specialized in home furnishings, and also served clients in a number of other industries. "One longtime client," she told Furniture World, "was Visit High Point, a company that encouraged groups and individuals to visit High Point.

"The major challenge for Visit High Point," she recalled, "was that people who visited the Home Furnishings Capital of the World™ wanted to experience the home furnishings industry. And, of course, when they asked to do this, the answer was always, "You can visit the Bienenstock Furniture Library and drive by the world's largest chest of drawers on North Hamilton Street. There are some wonderful furniture retailers in the area as well, but we are sorry to tell you that there isn't a place for you to learn about the home furnishings industry and discover why High Point is the Home Furnishings Capital of the World.

That Will Change This April

"In April 2023, with the grand open-

ing of the new Hall of Fame building near the corner of Green Street and Hamilton," McNeill predicted, "all that and more is going to change for the furniture buying public as well as for home furnishings retailers, manufacturers, supply companies, their employees and future employees.

"Ours is an important and noble industry that plays an essential role in improving people's lives. But at the same time, we are a hidden industry," she observed.

"Everyone furnishes their homes and interacts with our products at home and in commercial settings, but when the average consumer is asked what they know about the furniture they've purchased or why they might want to pursue

"Ours is an important and noble industry that plays an essential role in improving people's lives. But at the same time, we are a hidden industry."



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a career in home furnishings, they really have no clue at all.

"Solving this issue is just one reason so much effort went into creating an amazing 25,000-square-foot centerpiece for our industry. Not only will it be inspirational on so many levels through its exhibits, but it will reach out to the world via an interactive digital platform."

McNeill realizes that most Furniture World readers haven't been sitting around thinking about the new Hall of Fame building. "But I will say this," she offered, "I love those folks who are skeptical because it will not be just another High Point showroom. More than 50 groups toured the building while it was under construction during the most recent High Point show and were stunned by the beauty of the physical space and the vision behind it.

"When the doors open in April, less than four months away, visitors to High

Point will be welcomed by an immersive theater experience. A fast-paced video will show the breadth of the market, giving them insight into the buying experience and the pride, design, craftsmanship and ingenuity that goes into creating home furnishings. And that's just a small part of what will be available.

"The building will embody three aspects of the Hall of Fame's mission. The first is to honor our leaders. The second is to tell our stories. And the third is to inspire future leaders."

Honoring Our Leaders

"Being inducted into the Hall of Fame is the industry's highest career honor. Individuals are chosen based on four major attributes: enduring excellence, superior accomplishments, innovation and creativity, and philanthropic generosity. Inductees have changed our

industry by putting their mark on it.

"True leaders understand that they have a responsibility to give back to their communities, industry and the world. That's why their stories will be featured in the Hall of Fame Gallery and displayed on a huge multimedia Tribute Wall exhibit near the front entrance."

"Consumers are more passionate about their homes than ever before and will be encouraged to share their home furnishings experiences."

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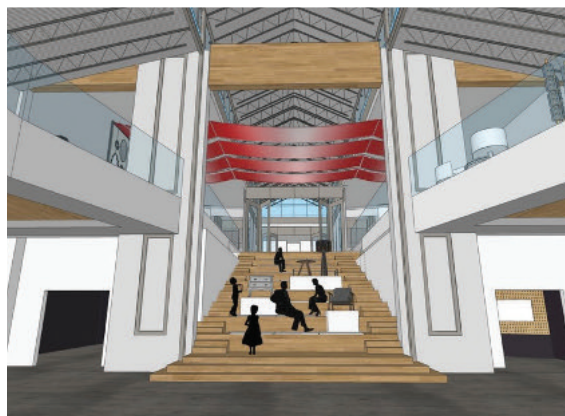
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Las Vegas Market

Celebration Hall

This space will hold seated dinners for 150 or cocktails for 450. Pictured at right is a top-down view of the grand staircase, under construction, which will lead into Celebration Hall. The staircase will feature comfortable seating for guests to watch in-person presenters as well as impressive digital content. This will be featured on the 25 x 17-foot Dynamic Discovery Wall which can easily be programmed for corporate events, announcements, and social functions.



Telling Our Stories

"Kyle Hughes, the Hall of Fame's full-time historian," noted McNeill, "is tasked with helping us to tell the stories of our industry. Having earned his Ph.D. at Trinity University in Dublin, he understands the value of presenting information in a way that relates to what is happening in society. It's an important focus that will keep the exhibits alive and relevant over time." As an example, McNeill used the Innovation Gallery exhibit that will debut in April.

The Innovation Gallery

"People, even those who work in furnishings-related careers, see our business as rooted in old-fashioned hand craftsmanship," she explained. That's true, but it's not the whole story.

"A portion of the Innovation Gallery will present advances in furniture production on a timeline that clocks innovation from well before the industrial revolution to today's digitally printed fabrics and 3D-printed furniture. The exhibit will evolve with a focus on different technologies, product categories and observations about how advancements both

change society and reflect it.

"This April, the first installment of the Innovation Gallery will feature three chests. The first chest will be handmade, the second machine-made and the third 3D-printed. The evolution of technologies from hand saws to advanced robotics will be featured in a fast-paced video. The exhibits will be interactive and over time will focus on many different product categories, including lighting and home accessories. There are plans in place to follow up with a rug showcase that highlights rug construction including hand-knotted to machine woven and printed—all technologies presently being used to craft products sold in retail stores today. So, the exhibits will not be one-and-done. There are so many interesting topics to cover that go beyond just historical facts from how products are designed to how they are delivered, used and the broader impact on people's lives."

Innovation Gallery is just one of a number of interactive forward-looking exhibits that will form a discovery center for learning.

Tell Us Your Story Booth

"The 'Tell Us Your Story Video Booth' is central to the Hall of Fame and its mission. "Consumers are more passionate about their homes than ever before and will be encouraged to share their home furnishings experiences." McNeill imagined they might tell a funny story about furnishing their first apartment, how just the right furnishings turned their house into a home, or how finding the right interior designer changed their family's life forever.

"Retailers, manufacturers, component and fabric suppliers, designers, salespeople, industry consultants and operations experts will also share their rec-

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"We've had many inquiries from retailers

and manufacturers about bringing groups of employees into this space for programs that provide a panoramic view of our industry."

ollections, anecdotes and career information."

McNeill said that plans are in place to incorporate these industry-specific stories into a new consumer-facing website to inform and inspire people to consider the many career options available in our industry for bright, creative, motivated people.

"Attracting and retaining talent has been a challenge for the home furnishings industry. This has always amazed me," McNeill confided to Furniture World. "We are one of the most wel-

coming industries, one that's tremendously creative and a place to form lasting personal relationships. I think people haven't considered joining us because they don't understand the breadth and quality of the opportunities available. Even new industry hires will be surprised and excited when they discover how their jobs and the companies they work for fit into the larger picture.

"This has been made possible through the Hall of Fame's collaboration with Roto, a world-class, international exhibit design firm that worked closely with the

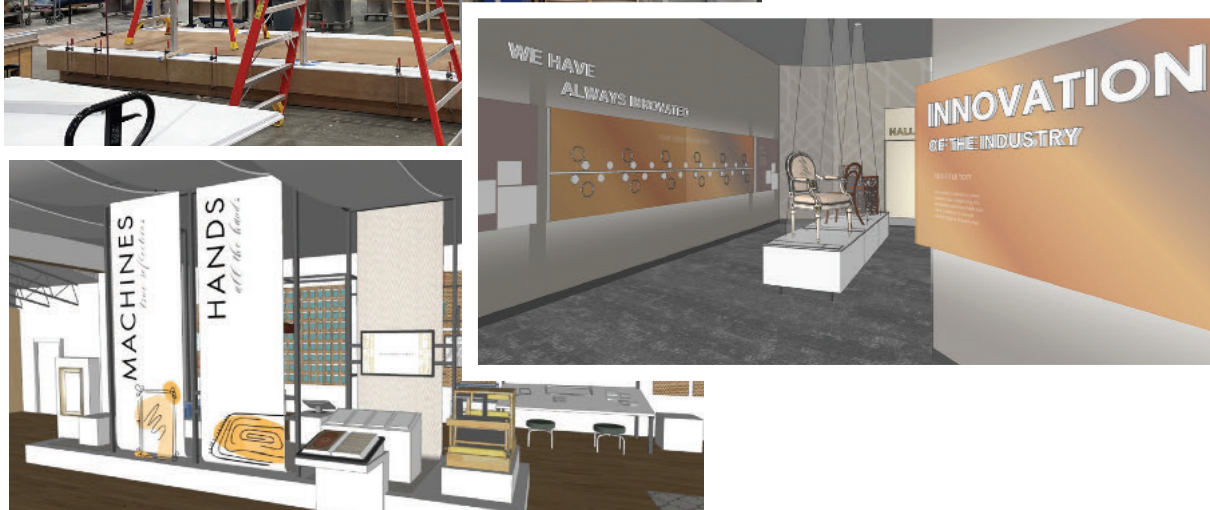
Hall of Fame's amazingly creative board members, Caroline Hipple and David Gebhart."

Who Will Use the Space?

When asked about other ways companies, including retailers, will use the facility, McNeill replied, "We've had many inquiries from retailers and manufacturers about bringing groups of employees into this space for programs that provide a panoramic view of our industry. And, as the new home for the

More Exhibits

Pictured at left is work being done on the Trend Spotter Exhibit, one of 14 exhibits in Phase One that are under construction at ROTO in Columbus, OH. Others include the Tell Us Your Story Video Booth, the Wall of Fame, Innovation Gallery and the Process Gallery.





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The American Home Furnishings Hall of Fame Foundation's new Chief Executive Officer, Patrick Chapin, and Karen McNeill, Chief Vision Officer.

industry, this building has facilities that can be used by other industry organizations such as Interwoven, High Point Market Authority and Fashion Snoops."

Fashion & Trends

"Twice a year, the Hall of Fame will host a huge exhibit in collaboration with FS, a leading trend agency and consumer behavior platform think-tank. The first installment will feature their forecast for 2024, with an emphasis on four major

trends, along with information on how each storyline is being incorporated into furniture, fabrics, rugs, lighting and home accessories. Jaye Anna Mize and the Fashion Snoops team will give a seminar on Monday, April 24, at the new building. It's an exhibit that promises to be a huge draw for all segments of the furniture industry and for trend-obsessed consumers who will visit this living, breathing space."

Traveling Exhibits

"A best practice for any museum or discovery center is to reserve space for traveling exhibits. There are a number of these in the works that will engage and

inspire visitors who will come back to explore what's new at the Hall of Fame."

Future Leaders

As McNeill previously mentioned, a

"The Hall of Fame will host a huge exhibit in collaboration with FS... with an emphasis on four major trends, along with information on how each storyline is being incorporated into furniture, fabrics, rugs, lighting and home accessories."

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The Leaders Bar, a dramatic wine and coffee bar, will be a perfect place to find a favorite beverage or to meet friends at Market.

Meeting Spaces



Leaders Boardroom



Pond Library



Leaders Bar

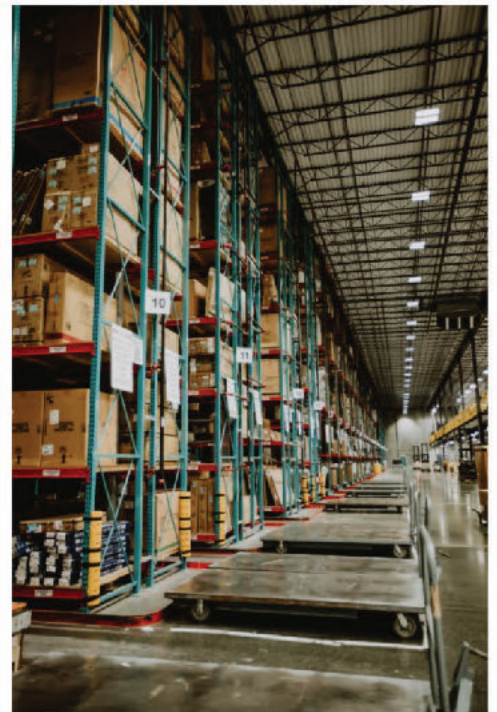
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"A portion of the Innovation Gallery

will present advances in furniture production on a timeline that clocks innovation from well before the industrial revolution to today's digitally printed fabrics and 3D-printed furniture."

major focus of the Hall of Fame is its commitment to developing emerging leaders. The industry is changing more rapidly than at any time since the industrial revolution. Despite the ubiquity of online networking, people are asking for more face-to-face interaction with their peers.

"The Hall of Fame building," she said, "has addressed this need by including a special area in the building for them to gather. It's called The Hub. The Paul Broyhill Future Leaders and participants of the Hall of Fame's Leadership Institute, launched last year at High Point University, will be among those who will use this space. Programming will include learning-based events where up-and-coming leaders will gather and

connect."

Speaking of new leadership, McNeill introduced the American Home Furnishings Hall of Fame Foundation's new Chief Executive Officer, Patrick Chapin. "The American Home Furnishings Hall of Fame Foundation," she explained, "has never before operated a public space. Patrick has an extensive background in this area, having worked with multiple Chambers of Commerce and YMCA facilities, in property development, and with the Walt Disney Company. He has the creativity and leadership ability to bring people together. And, has the experience in operations needed to manage the influx of everyday visitors and special events that will take place at the industry's new home. We are fortu-

nate to have him on board."

April Debut

Many private and public events are being scheduled at the Hall of Fame for High Point Market.

The facility is designed for maximum flexibility. Its impressive Celebration Hall will seat 150 for dinner. There's a Leaders Bar and a full catering kitchen for events that might include bringing in a celebrity chef.

"We can handle 450 to 500 people for cocktails," McNeill explained, "or host a private meeting for eight to 10 people in the Pond Library. The Immersive theater seats 35. Our Women's Center is



Wall of Fame

The Hall of Fame honors industry leaders for enduring excellence, superior accomplishments, innovation and creativity plus philanthropic generosity. Pictured are the space under construction and renderings of the Wall of Fame exhibit. A tribute wall within the Wall of Fame area will feature digital audio and visual content.



Design Gallery

The Grand Atrium



The Grand Atrium will be an entryway for visitors to step into the world of home furnishings and begin their tours through the building. Facing the street, the imposing Grand Story Wall will feature video, and messaging easily programmed to suit any event.

The Design Gallery space will include exhibits that explore trends, personal style, the product design process and the impact of home furnishings products on our lives. Highly interactive, visitors will be able to explore product categories and styles.

more like a living room environment, and there's an amazing boardroom that seats 40.

"In April, the Hall of Fame will host an open house for the industry as well as large and small private events for retailers, manufacturers and industry associations. In between Markets, the Hall of Fame will be available for all manner of business, social and community events,

while presenting our industry as cool, fun and exciting."

Screens Everywhere

"Digital content will be presented everywhere in the new space. Most notable are The Grand Story Wall, which faces out onto Hamilton Street, and The Dynamic Discovery Wall, facing inward toward Celebration Hall and the Grand Staircase. These 25 x 17-foot displays will set the stage for amazing events, impressive sales meetings, new product introductions and much more."

The Upstairs Galleries

"The second floor," McNeill continued, "will feature a gallery devoted to how products are made and delivered through the supply chain to consumers. Another exhibit will focus on product design and trends. Portions of these exhibits will be fully completed following

April Market in phase two. It will take an unbelievable amount of content to create these digital displays. The Hall of Fame is looking for lots of input from companies in manufacturing, supply and retailing to share video and photography.

"For the most part, this material is branded, presenting an opportunity for consumers and content suppliers. Throughout the Hall of Fame, visitors can scan QR codes to access information about companies and products featured in the exhibits."

For More Information

In closing, Karen McNeill, Chief Vision Officer, noted that Furniture World readers can visit <https://www.homefurnishingshalloffame.com> to share ideas for using the space. Just click on the "Have An Idea For Us" box. She also said that she is looking forward to welcoming you all there during the April High Point market.

"A new consumer-facing website will inform and inspire people to consider the many career options available in our industry for bright, creative, motivated people."

WHAT'S IN STORE?

Predictions and Insights for Retail Life in an Uncertain 2023

Interview with Tom Liddell, Planned Furniture Promotions, Inc.

There will be winners and losers in the furniture retail community this year. Industry observer Tom Liddell provides insights into what may be in store.

Furniture World recently spoke with Tom Liddell, senior vice president, director, Planned Furniture Promotions, Inc., to get his thoughts about the likely challenges and opportunities facing furniture retailers in 2023. Liddell grew up in furniture retail, became a sales rep and then a manufacturing executive. An astute observer of the furniture industry in his own right, he prepared his comments after surveying retailers in trading areas across the country.

He began his remarks by addressing a number of major concerns for home furnishings retailers in 2023. At or near the top, for most, are concerns about current inventory levels

The First Loss is the Best

"Retailers couldn't get it, so they bought more. It wasn't necessarily the right product. They paid too much, and the freight rates made everything much worse."

"Now that business has slowed at retail," Liddell observed, "Murphy's law has kicked in. To compound the problem, a surge of late product being shipped to retailers has loaded credit lines and caused continuing cash flow problems."

"The important thing here," He noted, is to do whatever it takes to move this inventory out quickly. The first loss is the best loss in many cases. Instead of big discounts, try doubling commission rates or adding a big SPIFF. This will motivate your salespeople to sell more. It's a good way to kill two birds with one stone. Instead of giving huge discounts to customers, your salespeople will get an incentive to perform well during a time of reduced traffic. Doing this will also serve as a powerful retention tool.

"Consumers love to feel like they're taking advantage of retailers forced to offer big and legitimate discounts. That's why when you do choose to discount prices to offload excess inventory, it's a good policy to tell shoppers the truth about your situation. Let them know that you are overloaded with inventory and the reasons why."

Lots to Say About Cash

Liddell had a lot to say about cash flow and financial issues. "More furniture retailers," he explained, "are having trouble paying their bills than we are being led to believe. Right-sizing inventory will help not only with cash flow but also save on expenditures for overflow



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Building B, 2nd Floor,
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"Banks have recently cut off credit lines

and called notes... That's why every retailer who reads this article should review the covenants in their bank loans to ensure that they are in compliance."

warehouse space."

Staffing: "It's not unusual for us to go into a store that's struggling financially and find that it has up to double the staff needed for current operations. If a retailer's volume slips, in addition to right-sizing staffing levels, a major task on their to-do-list should be to re-evaluate salaries. This is especially important for stores that are paying above market rates. Having a conversation about salaries is one thing store owners who are having problems rarely do. There are many reasons, including loyalty and the difficulty of having this conversation with long-time and trusted employees."

Credit lines: "Retailers are having credit line issues. There are only two major factors providing manufacturers with receivables financing. And while those factors are supposed to provide specific credit lines for each manufacturer, in practice they look at a company's global credit line. Recently, credit lines have tightened due to the instant, immediate and unexpected failure of retailers and some manufacturers. An example is United/Lane, which sent shock waves through the whole industry."

Bank Covenants: "As business has slowed, retailers are using more bank credit lines at significantly higher interest rates to satisfy cash flow demands. That's causing banks to take a hard look at the furniture industry as a high-risk proposition."

"Banks have recently cut off credit lines and called notes for more than one large retailer. This is similar to what happened in 2008, 2009 and 2010. Back then, we joked that it was almost as if somebody sent a memo to every banker warning them about the potential for furniture store failures. That's why every retailer who reads this article should review the covenants in their bank loans to ensure that they are in compliance."

Creditors: "Retailers need to communicate frequently with their creditors. Credit managers tell us that their retailer customers don't do this effectively. They just go radio silent when things get tough, the worst possible thing to do. Furniture World readers who are having cash flow issues need to be honest with suppliers, and only make promises they are 100 percent sure they can keep."

Closing Locations: "When cash flow is

challenging, closing a weak store with a professionally run store-closing event can be a great way to generate significant cash flow. We do that frequently for clients who have multiple stores. It cuts back on massive amounts of inventory, generates cash flow and frequently, most importantly, generates profits."

Employee Retention

"Recruiting and retaining employees is problem number one for every retailer out there," Liddell told Furniture World.

"PFP has closed a number of stores for clients recently, and more are getting ready to close because of an inability to achieve proper staffing levels. The latest government reports indicate that approximately seven million healthy Americans are choosing not to work. They are not getting government money anymore, so we're not sure what they are doing with their time. Fortune magazine just wrote an article noting that in 2022, one in eight millennials, the oldest of which are turning 41 this year, moved home to live with their parents."

"Retailers need to do even more to attract and keep employees." Liddell



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RETAIL LIFE 2023

related a number of tools retailers are using to achieve this end.

Perks & Benefits: "Over the past few years," he observed, "employees have seen tech industry giants giving countless perks and benefits. For example, six weeks of paternity leave for new fathers plus four to six weeks of paid vacation. How can any retailer compete with that? Some have tried giving sign-on bonuses, paid after a period set by the retailer. Others have switched to paying a commission on written versus delivered. It's not a new idea, but it can be helpful."

Creative Compensation: "Others," he

said, "have offered creative compensation packages to provide commissioned salespeople with more consistent income streams. This helps job candidates overcome fear of the peaks and valleys often associated with commissioned-based positions. One retailer I recently spoke to pays his salespeople a flat amount each week and settles up on their earned commissions at the end of the month—a pretty smart idea. That same retailer noted that his people absolutely love it."

Frequent Gratification: "More ideas? Try profit sharing. Retailers who do this are often shocked by the positive results.

It's important not to make goals impossible to reach or have employees wait too long to get paid. Build in frequent gratification. Monthly or quarterly bonuses or profit distributions work best to maintain loyalty. These distributions don't need to be large. At a minimum, profit sharing gives employees the feeling that they have an important stake in a company and that the role they play is more than just a job."

Recognition: "Gone is the time when employees could receive a quick training session and be on their way to perform at an expected high level. Continued training, awards programs,

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A woman with grey hair, wearing a grey turtleneck sweater and blue jeans, is pushing a shopping cart in a furniture store. She is looking down at the cart. The background is slightly blurred, showing other furniture items and store fixtures.

"These same retailers are proud their brand has survived for 50, 70 or 100 years in the furniture industry, but this longevity is a liability if their model is tired, or if younger shoppers believe it is."

confidence-inspiring sessions and finding ways to keep morale high during slow periods are critical to retention. For example, taking a different team member out each week for a special lunch shows them that they are valued. When doing a sale, we frequently treat entire sales and warehouse teams to lunch or dinner to recognize stand-out employees. Another idea is for owners or managers to hand out gift cards to top performers. Do this while they're working with a customer. It acknowledges their professionalism. Just walk into the middle of a sales presentation, introduce yourself and say, 'I don't want to interrupt, but Jane has done such a good job of serving her customers that I am giving her this gift card to show our appreciation.' After handing Jane the card, say, 'I trust that you will be able to help this customer find exactly what she needs as well.' Then walk away. In short, let your team members know they are important to your business and that you can't do it without them."

Mature Shoppers

"About a year ago, I asked one of our clients in North Carolina how old his average customer is," Liddell recalled. "The retailer replied that it looked like

they were some place between crutches and a walker!

"Since then, I've asked all my clients the same question. Many smaller, independent retailers say, 'Oh my gosh, so old.' Younger shoppers aren't showing up because they don't believe these stores have anything they are looking for. 'It's mom and dad's store, not mine,' they tell themselves.

"These same retailers are proud their brand has survived for 50, 70 or 100 years in the furniture industry, but this longevity is a liability if their model is tired, or if younger shoppers believe it is. At this point, it can be too late to throw advertising dollars at the problem. The best option for them, other than accepting continued decline, is to implode their existing model. It's a tough pill for store owners to swallow. Often, we recommend that they close down completely with the help of a store closing sale, then reopen under a new model with a new brand and a concept that's fresh and exciting."

Furniture World asked Liddell if many of them took this advice. He replied, "Very few, but the ones who do tend to be very successful.

"When considering this option, owners need to get out of their bubble—

leave their stores and travel beyond their familiar trading areas. We give them names of owners to visit who have developed retailing models that are relevant to a younger shopper, new, hip and fresh. Only in this way can they develop a concept that's unique and exclusive to their market.

"It's very difficult or impossible for independent retailers to compete with the big chain stores anyway. So rather than trying, it makes sense to offer something totally different. That often means becoming style oriented and heavily accessorized with fresh, relevant accessories that appeal to today's consumer. Retailers have succeeded by creating destinations that female furniture shoppers take their friends to visit, not just go to themselves."

Operations Ideas For 2023

"Retailers who have not done so should set up performance teams for delivery and warehousing, use metrics and institute weekly reward systems," Liddell advised. "They should shuffle their teams to keep it fair. In other words, if one team comes out on top every single week, shuffling teams will keep it equitable.

RETAIL LIFE 2023

"Many of our friends in the industry have hired contract carriers to handle their deliveries, which works well. However, retailers should take care when hiring a company to take over warehouse operations. Our experience is that when retailers fail, these companies are often owed millions of dollars. Many warehouse management companies talk a good game, but we've found that the expense isn't always justified."

"Retailers need to watch their compliance on a couple of fronts, including website ADA and the new tip-over rules."

Inflation Weary

Product prices ramped up during the pandemic when deliveries slowed, and consumers were desperate to furnish their homes. "Now, the promotional sector of the furniture industry is being hit hardest by inflation," Liddell said.

"A promotional sofa used to retail for \$299. That's no longer the case. Stores that specialize in promotional products have been devastated. My advice for these stores is to get out of the business of being a promotional specialist since it's not getting any easier. We've seen these stores try to adjust their models, but I've never seen anyone do it successfully. That's because if they've done any advertising—if they've screamed price for a while—that's all they will ever be known for to the buying public. As they say, you can't change the stripes on a zebra.

"Lower income consumers no lon-

ger have government-subsidized free money. And even worse, their dollar won't go nearly as far as it used to. Priorities have shifted away from furniture to food and rent as always, plus the latest, greatest smartphones."

Compliance Issue Risk

Liddell said that retailers need to watch their compliance on a couple of fronts, including website ADA and the new tip-over rules. "Everyone needs to keep an eye on the new tip-over regulation," he warned. "Once it goes into effect during the first half of 2023, retailers will need to make sure that they don't have non-compliant inventory subject to the new law in inventory.

"Another issue I've heard about from several people has to do with ADA non-compliant websites. Certain attorneys specialize in finding retail websites that don't measure up, then file lawsuits. I've been told that defending against such a lawsuit can cost 80 to 100 thousand dollars.

"Similarly, retailers need to make sure that their aisles, restroom, and doors are all ADA compliant. That's another situation local attorneys are searching for. They all have a client on standby, willing to file a lawsuit."

Discounts and LTL

Moving on to pricing, Liddell said that at wholesale, "the market is slowly returning to normal levels with pricing coming down along with freight rates. Many

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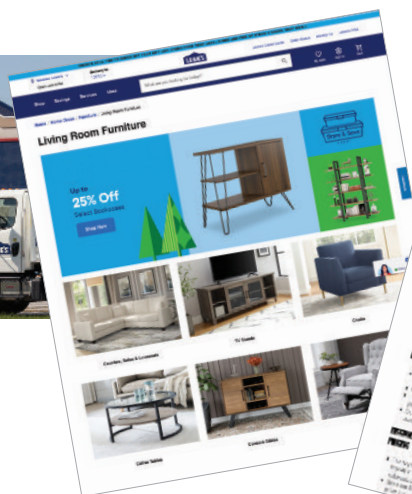
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"Another thing that should be of some concern to retailers is that everybody, and I mean everybody, is getting ready to jump into the furniture business."

vendors offer significant discounts, especially on slower sellers. Retailers must remember that lower prices won't make a weak product sell better. It's a better practice to stick with best sellers."

Beware discounted goods: "Most vendors are completely doing away with pandemic pricing. Instead, they choose to eat their shipping costs and take the loss immediately. Those that do this sooner know that they will move the most product and be more important to retailers. Companies are vying for United/Lane's business, but so far, no one company is able to handle all the mix and volume needs. So, we will see how that affects pricing going forward."

LTL invoicing: "LTL freight is a continuing problem. In some cases, invoices are still going past due before retailers receive their products. I mentioned the issue in my interview with Furniture World, about a year ago. We suggest that retailers ask their vendors for help dealing with this issue. Manufacturers' logistics departments have the leverage to negotiate with carriers on behalf of retailers. Even though the retailer is ultimately pay-

ing the freight bill, the freight carrier's customer is really the manufacturer."

Selling or Closing Stores

"In 2022, we handled events for stores that chose to retire while business was still good. Some didn't have a next generation to take over the business. Others felt that the time was right to get out. Many think that companies like ours only handle events for financially challenged clients, but that's less common than retirement sales or closing an underperforming store, which again, is a good way to boost cash flow.

"One consideration for retailers thinking of getting out of the business is that it is very hard to sell an independent furniture store, regardless of how successful it is. Even when a buyer can be found, they may not pay as much for a well-positioned store as an owner might earn in a liquidation event.

"It's my experience," Liddell continued, "that selling to employees almost never works. The new owners often have difficulty paying rent and setting up large credit lines with dozens of vendors. The

result is the original owners get the store back and end up with a greatly diluted liquidation opportunity. That happens all the time.

"Throughout the pandemic, we saw numerous major bankruptcies that kept us very busy. Independent store liquidations were much rarer. Owners got a taste of the PPP bailout money and stores were busy. They chose to stay in business and work for a couple more years. Right now, we are seeing an uptick in people looking for exit strategies."

When asked if some well-positioned retailers will use the slowdown to build stores and grab market share, Liddell replied, "I don't think a lot of retailers will add significantly to their store count in the near term. Those retailers that opened stores during COVID got hit with a huge dose of reality in the last 12 months as expanded payroll and the additional debt they took on has made retail life more difficult. The bottom line is that we don't know a lot of companies that are considering expanding at this point."

"Many vendors are offering

significant discounts, especially on slower sellers. Retailers must remember that lower prices won't make a weak product sell better."

More Competition in 2023

As if furniture retailers didn't have enough to worry about, Liddell heaped on concerns about competition from big box stores and online marketplaces.

"At the time of this interview," he noted, "consumer confidence is near an all-time low, and consumer credit usage is near an all-time high. Savings that consumers built up during the pandemic are being depleted. Both consumers and retailers are worried about a perfect storm situation."

"Another thing that should be of some concern to retailers is that everybody, and I mean everybody, is getting ready to jump into the furniture business. Lowe's, Home Depot, Menards, and even Bass Pro Shops, are featuring expanded furniture options on their websites. Many of the home improvement players who haven't done so in the past are starting to stock furniture in their stores. At first, these stores thought they would pick up incre-

mental online furniture business. Now they are buying and stocking."

Liddell also warned about marketplace companies like Beverly Hills-based StyleRow (stylerow.com) that provide a number of services to designers, including product sourcing.

"Basically, StyleRow is a marketplace seller potentially catering to tens of thousands of designers. This kind of marketplace selling is shaping up to be a major competitor for retailers because it will turn thousands of designers who currently purchase from them into direct buyers."

"Many high-end home furnishings manufacturers are jumping at the opportunity to feature their products on these marketplaces. It's true that designers have had the ability to buy product for some time, but now it's going to be wide open. What's interesting about StyleRow's revenue model is that they don't make money selling home furnishings. Designers pay to be members. Vendors pay to be members. StyleRow

provides a portal for these two groups to come together and do business. It's another reason for concern among high end retailers."

Winners and Losers in 2023.

"The winners," Liddell concluded, "will be those retailers that used PPP bailout money to solidify their financial foundation. The big chains will continue to benefit from economies of scale, container buying, high-volume discount pricing and the ability to add new stores with greatly reduced incremental costs. Frankly, I don't feel good about ending this interview by talking about losers. I'm hoping retailers who read this article will avoid the fate of ending up in that category. As always, I'm glad to speak with Furniture World readers about any of my comments in this interview or issues they foresee in 2023. My contact information can be found at www.pfpnow.com."

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RETAIL REAL ESTATE OPTIONS FOR 2023

Interview with Ben Haverty, Colliers

As the cost of buying, owning and operating stores increases in 2023, there are still opportunities for retailers to create wealth by making smart real estate decisions.

Retailers have plenty of questions about the future of their businesses and many of the answers hinge on what may happen in the real estate market. Furniture World asked Ben Haverty, with the Furniture Industry Real Estate Group at Colliers, to share his insights into opportunities and difficulties retailers should be looking out for in the coming year. Colliers is a leading diversified professional services and investment management company.

But first, we asked him to provide some background on himself and his experience in the furniture industry.

A Retailing Family

"Like many second and third-generation members of furniture retailing families," he said, "I grew up talking furniture around the dinner table and working at our local warehouse. After college, I attended Haverty's management training program to get exposure to every part of the business, from merchandising to home delivery. From there, I became an assistant store manager, was transferred back to the corporate office for a while, then ultimately managed the entire Georgia region. Haverty's is a

wonderfully run company and a great place to work."

Haverty, eventually left the company his great-grandfather, James Joseph Haverty, founded in 1885 to found Ben's Brands for Less, with a retail model that sold furniture through brick-and-mortar pop-up stores. "At the time, there was an abundance of vacant real estate as well as an oversupply of product," he recalled. "In those years, I probably did 70 real estate transactions with local brokers and quickly found out that people would pay me to help them find great real estate locations."

"Unless someone is in a desperate situation, there's a tendency for landowners to pull their properties off the market and wait until it heats up again. That's the current situation."

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By the way, he added, “variations on the pop-up theme are still around. I’ve recently seen vacant warehouses and empty retail spaces used for serial one-day events. Companies that do this bring in attractive merchandise, such as RH knockoffs priced at half to one-third off. These operations often have lines of customers waiting to get in to join the buying frenzy. It’s like a treasure hunt. When the event

is over, they load up what’s left to sell another day at the same location or elsewhere.”

Current Conditions

“We all know that furniture retail came back with a roar once the worst of the pandemic subsided,” Haverty said. “Furniture retailers had plenty of money in their pockets and wanted to grow as fast as possible. The trouble was that lots of the big-box base had already been gobbled up. There just weren’t enough big vacant boxes lying around.

“The supply situation is starting to work its way out, but the current interest rate situation has dramatically affected every category of real estate, from residential to warehouses and retail. At the same time, the cost of buying and trading property has increased along with the operational costs associated with maintaining larger retail footprints. It’s become much more expensive to

buy property, maintain it and lease it.”

What Business Are You In?

“The first question any retailer needs to ask when looking at real estate is if they want to be in the furniture business or the real estate business,” said Haverty. “How do they plan to create wealth? It’s one of the first questions I ask clients to consider. Many independent retailers respond that they are debt free, have significant real estate equity and don’t have anyone who wants to take over their businesses when they retire. The plan is to exit and give up their retail lifestyles, sell or lease their properties, move to the sunbelt and live off real estate income. These folks think they are in the furniture business but are actually in the real estate business. Their model is to build wealth by selling furniture to pay for their real estate holdings.

“Most public companies like Bob’s or Haverty’s do the exact opposite.

“The first question any retailer needs to ask when looking at real estate is if they want to be in the furniture business or the real estate business.”

"Companies such as Home Depot

and Staples, whose sales have moved online, are walking away from leases that come up for renewal."

They use real estate as a means to sell furniture. While smaller companies may be in the market to buy, large retailers scout for solid locations to lease." Haverty said there are other factors that favor leasing. For example, in urban areas where sellers are scarce and it's more difficult to build.

Real Estate IQ

"Since real estate decisions are such an integral part of being a furniture retailer," he continued, "I find that CEOs and COOs generally have a solid working knowledge of real estate transactions. Most are self-taught, sophisticated novices. People say that it's unwise to go to court and represent yourself. The same is true in the real estate market. In most cases, landlords pay the broker's fee so it

doesn't cost retail companies anything to hire a firm to help them find the best locations. Companies like Rooms To Go and Ethan Allen—which have in-house real estate departments—engage local brokers who know local markets inside out to help them find the best locations and deals.

"However, retailers with less real estate experience are often reluctant to hire professionals to represent their interests because they suspect it will add to their purchase cost. Here's how that scenario plays out. A store owner sees a vacant furniture store with a for sale sign in the window. They call the listed broker, who is professional, friendly and asks the right questions. They may even be genuinely interested in helping the prospective buyer. But at the end of the day, that broker has a fiduciary responsibility to the owner of the building."

Attractive Buys

Furniture World asked Haverty if certain kinds of stores are more attractive buys for retailers given current market conditions.

"It depends on the retailer," he observed. "Some big-name retailers, especially those owned by leveraged private equity, downsize as sales slow and the cost of refinancing becomes untenable. Also, downsizing becomes the only option for operations when their retail brick-and-mortar models become less viable. Companies such as Home Depot, Office Depot and Staples, whose sales have moved online, are walking away from leases as they come up for renewal. That was certainly the case with retailers like Art Van and Toys "R" Us. It's happening now to Bed Bath & Beyond. This can create opportunities for home furnish-

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REAL ESTATE DECISIONS 2023

ings retailers with healthy balance sheets and cash in the bank who are looking to expand."

Building From Scratch

Is it best to buy an existing retail space right now or consider finding a prime location to build? "Again, it depends," Haverty explained. "The assumption right now is that the real estate market is weakening. No property owner wants to sell at the bottom. So, unless someone is in a desperate situation, there's a tendency for landowners to pull their properties off the market."

"Building is a custom solution, but it's not necessarily cheap. The cost of new construction is down from peak levels seen a year ago but is still quite high. When considering a building option, fur-

niture retailers need to weigh a number of factors. Can they find the right piece of land? Does it need to be rezoned and, if so, how complicated is that process likely to be? Properties in wetland areas continue to create difficulties for retailers who may need to purchase 20 acres to get five that are buildable. It's a difficult hurdle to overcome for the many retail operations looking to build in Florida.

"In markets where there aren't many decent leasing opportunities, retailers either need to wait patiently for the next recession or for a big box vacancy to come on the market. That leaves just one other option: to find a suitable piece of land to build on. For smaller family-owned companies, it's a big, long-term investment. Larger operations often do a sale-leaseback. They build, then immediately flip it to get their money back out."

The Right Decisions

Getting specific about how Furniture World readers should approach real estate decision making in 2023, Haverty advised them to make the hard choices. "In a slowing economy," he said, "retailers may need to consider jettisoning under-performing locations—even legacy locations—to take advantage of real estate deals that present themselves."

"During black swan moments, it's the prepared retailer who benefits. Rooms To Go is an excellent example of a smart real estate cyclical buyer. Years ago, they gobbled up Florida properties when the market was at a low point. The result was vast wealth creation. Haverty's also expanded via acquisition during tough times."

"At the end of the day, the adage 'location, location, location,' is still a

"When considering a building option, furniture retailers need to weigh a number of factors. Can they find the right piece of land? Does it need to be rezoned and, if so, how complicated will that process be?"





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"A retailer may have been in business

for a long time, but there are many ways to try something new to attract more customers, different customers, become more profitable and efficient."

great rule of thumb. Choosing the best location with the right demographics and easy accessibility goes a long way toward providing high visibility and traffic counts. That's true whether you own or rent."

Flexibility is Key

"Management flexibility will be critical in 2023. Many retailers we work with feel strongly that a particular store footprint, say 30,000 square feet, allows them to show optimal selection to get maximum returns. But that might not be their best option, given the current real estate market. Right now, CEOs are experimenting with smaller footprint

spaces. Express stores can be a great way to get exposure in lucrative markets where purchase and rental prices are sky-high, there's a lack of availability or zoning restrictions. Instead of that 30,000-foot space, it can make sense to open a 12,000-foot store and double down on in-store technology to make that smaller footprint work.

"At the same time, some are looking for superstore formats. They want to increase their 30,000-foot space to 60-, 80-, or 90,000 to 'kill them' with selection. A retailer may have been in business for a very long time, but there are many ways to try something new to attract customers, become more profitable and efficient."

Hot Markets

When asked where the retailers are competing most vigorously, Haverly noted that "Sunbelt states have never been more important to retailers because they offer solid growth opportunities.

There's been mass migration to places like Austin, Atlanta, Charlotte, Raleigh and Miami, where people are moving for safety and a lower cost of living. Despite recent downsizing, large tech companies, like Facebook and Google, have built large regional campuses in some of these cities, fueling lots of furniture sales and strong competition for store locations."

"Express stores can be a great way to get exposure in lucrative markets where purchase and rental prices are sky-high, and there's a lack of availability or zoning restrictions."



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Focus on DESIGN

Moe's

Grounded and down to earth, the Annex lounge chair showcases blocky proportions combined with soft lines. Echoing Bauhaus architectural reference, its FSC Certified solid Ash wood frame and sling seat put symmetry and balance on display.

Contact information on page 100.



Horizon Home

The new Savannah Bedroom 99" Gallup solid wood console has a multiple column design, cast metal pewter hardware and generous storage. Available in multiple finishes.

Contact information on page 100.



Klaussner

A stunning bedroom piece, the Empire Panel Bed combines today's contemporary design with a touch of Mid-Century. Cross accent stitching adorns the upholstered headboard panels on the headboard. Curved pilasters with brushed metal capped feet accent the foot board.

Contact information on page 100.

Nourison

Bring mesmerizing style to any living room or bedroom with this abstract rug from the Prismatic Collection. Vibrant strokes of purple, blue, pink, and gold create movement across the solid ivory ground. The design is enhanced by carved accents that add an eye-catching sense of depth. Handmade from a blend of premium New Zealand wool and silky Luxcelle.

Contact information on page 100.



Legends

Warm and inviting, Fusion is crafted from straight grain Oak in a subtle Dawn finish. Case pieces feature hand rubbed antique brass pulls, highlighted English dovetail joints and felt lined top drawers, wireless charger in nightstands and USB ports on both sides of the headboard.

Contact information on page 100.

Omnia

The new Aspen style has subtle design details such as embossed leather and pewter nail heads giving this frame a fresh, modern twist. Omnia's extensive leather library gives shoppers the freedom to go as bold or understated as they desire. Proudly Made in America.

Contact information on page 100.



Focus on DESIGN



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Capel Rugs

Where civilizations collide, traditional rug designs such as Heriz, Ispahan, Keshan and Bakhtiar made their way to the European continent. This rug is durable, soft to the touch and machine woven of 100% polyester.

Contact information on page 100.

Craftmaster

Bold and dramatic describe this handsome sofa from the CM Modern collection. Covered in a plush Sangria-colored fabric with faux fur pillows, it features wide track arms, loose box-border back pillows and plush down-blend seat cushions.

Contact information on page 100.



Norwalk

The Gabriel sectional is a compact seating solution. The softly rounded ends of the chaise and armless section are complemented by gently sloping arms. Available in fabric only.

Contact information on page 100.



Furniture of America

The Opheim table's allure comes from its genuine dark marble top, heft and markings. An open, pedestal base finished in black and made of solid wood is flanked by gray fabric chairs.

Contact information on page 100.

Country View Woodworking

The latest addition to CVW's Urban Expressions Collection features vertical headboard panels and grooves in the top panel that complement those in the case pieces. This new bed style joins two original designs.

Contact information on page 100.



Focus on DESIGN

FiVO Design

The Cerulean MOD 5 adds a vibrant pop of color to any home office. The primary desk offers a small space footprint that quickly grows into a generously-sized desk with the addition of an extension leaf and side bookcase. Add the hutch for additional storage and plant holders to liven things up.

Contact information on page 100.



American Woodcrafters

The Rodanthe Bedroom Collection combines tropical, vintage and organic influences with a British West Indies feel. It is versatile for spaces from a small condo, resort villa or master suite in any home.

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A&L Furniture

The Fanback Balcony Set is made from high quality HDPE poly lumber. Low maintenance and weatherproof with 316SS Marine grade hardware, it is available in a huge selection of styles and colors. Made in America and drop ships KD.

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Rizzy Home

The Logan collection is power loomed in India using recycled polyester, then hand washed, hand sheared and hand serged. Rich, bold and spicy coloration is accented with a shimmer of crisp ivory Durapoly material.

Contact information on page 100.



Panama Jack

Another strikingly beautiful outdoor grouping. From the iconic brand's Wave Collection.

Contact information on page 100.



Arason

The Brussels style Creden-ZzZ cabinet bed comes in three finishes: white, charcoal and ash. This elegant cabinet holds a queen size mattress.

Contact information on page 100.



Bellini Modern Living

The Jacklyn motion sofa features full grain supple leather from European sourced hides. Superior details include exposed stitching. It is available in warmer, increasingly popular colors that include Hermes orange, terracotta, and both light Tiffany blue and darker Pacific blue.

Contact information on page 100.



NEXT LEVEL TRAINING

The closing training you've been missing!

Part 9— by Scott Morris

The secret of the most effective retail sales closers is that these high-earning salespeople don't treat closing as a separate step in the sales process.

Are your salespeople just "whistling for business," or are they conducting a "symphony of persuasion" to influence your customers to buy today?

There are lots of separate elements that collectively convince a customer to buy. Standard sales training courses usually do a decent job of explaining the importance of:

1. Establishing trust
2. Developing rapport
3. Discovering true needs
4. Presenting in light of those needs
5. Justifying the purchase by filling those needs with a perfect solution at a proven confirmed value.

Many systems imply that when professionally executed, these five steps should almost automatically result in a completed sale, right?

Well, not exactly. What's missing is the most important step of all, which is closing the sale! A salesperson can do everything else perfectly and still not get paid for their time and effort unless the customer agrees to make a purchase.

Training salespeople to close the sale is, by far, the most neglected aspect of sales training in retail furniture

stores even though it is the most important. Recovery is possible following a mistake made during any other parts of the process, but a clumsy attempt at closing, or applying the wrong close, will nearly always cost the sale.

The most common closing mistake made by a large percentage of salespeople is they don't even attempt to close for fear of alienating a customer, thereby undoing all the hard-won rapport they built up. Many salespeople would rather just keep building even more rapport, hand out a card, walk them to the door and hope for the best.

The problem is that this naive approach costs stores literally tons of sales! However, before you can provide your sales staff with a better option than not closing, you must address another problem—weak closers. To their credit, they do attempt to close, but do it in a quick and clumsy way by asking one of the following simple questions:

- "Would you like to go ahead and get it?"
- "Do you want me to start the paperwork?"
- "Should I reserve stock for you?"

Salespeople who close in this way



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"Customers decide to buy

based on a series of cascading influences. With this in mind, we can define the concept of 'Always Be Closing' as building each sale with an intended net result as the goal."

are just whistling for business. Instead, why not teach them how to win over their customers with a symphony of well-orchestrated influences?

A Series of Success Waves

Many believe that proper closing is a single tidal wave that must sweep customers off of their complacent beach of lethargy and indecision. However, the correct approach is akin to a series of consistent, soft waves that eventually entice shoppers to take the plunge.

You probably have heard of the sales concept referred to as 'ABC,' which stands for the adage Always Be Closing. Most salespeople don't have a clearly defined picture of what this means. It does not mean that your salespeople must make as many attempts to close their customers as possible. Closing before the right item has been selected sabotages the establishment of rapport and harms the customer-salesperson relationship.

Customers decide to buy based on a series of cascading influences. With this in mind, we can define Always Be Closing as building each sale with an intended net result as the goal. In other words, each step of the sale must be performed skillfully to have the best chance of completing the very last step, which is to write up the sale.

The Steps of a Sale

1. The Greet. You have probably heard the expression, 'first impressions speak the loudest!' It's true. Do shoppers perceive your salespeople to be warm, friendly, and inviting? If not, their defenses will rise automatically. It's important that they immediately perceive your RSAs to be helpful, engaging, and good listeners.

2. The Qualification. The best tool a salesperson can have in their tool-belt is a predetermined list of the right initial questions to ask. Most training does not focus on this

extremely important qualification step. Asking the right questions gets the conversation off and running on the right track. It also makes the best use of both the customer's and salesperson's time. Last but not least, it establishes the salesperson as a reliable expert and guide, perceived to be indispensable to the shopper throughout their buying journey.

3. Selling Yourself. This step never shows up in traditional training, yet when done early, correctly and with sincerity it lets shoppers know that the salesperson they were assigned to has their best interests at heart. There



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SALES CLOSING TRAINING

are many ways to do this without sounding boastful or disingenuous. Here's an example to clarify what I mean.

Example: "Ms. Shopper, I am a little different than other salespeople you may have met because I am not here just to make a quick sale. I believe that it's my job to help my customers create beautiful rooms and make the best buying decisions. Because I've done that throughout my career, customers come back to me for future home furnishings purchases. I would like to be that person for you. I

hope to share some tips and insights as we walk through the store."

This approach takes just a few seconds and puts the sales relationship on solid footing from the beginning. Once your salespeople learn how to sell themselves, they earn the right to share their knowledge by asking shoppers questions such as:

- *Do you know four great uses of a nightstand besides just sitting next to the bed?*
- *Are you aware of the eight uses for an ottoman besides resting your legs on it?*
- *Did you know which sofa construction benefits customers the most if they have lower back pain?*

4. The Show and Tell. In this step, salespeople walk customers through the store while suggesting suitable pieces based on their expressed needs and desires. Showing them items not on display but featured on your website, an in-store kiosk or catalog is also appropriate. A big mistake inexperienced salespeople make at this stage is to begin a full merchandise presentation while customers are still exploring alternatives. Only once they select the item that appeals to them the most, it is time to move to the next selling phase.

5. Dropping Anchor. This is giving a full product demonstration on the item or product group a shopper likes best. When done properly this 'demo' can be considered a major close as well. Why? About 50 percent of the

time, a great product presentation will close the sale without a separate closing step. How do salespeople know when this occurs? It's when customers become physically involved with a furniture item, using it like they would if it were already in their home. It's a buying signal that lets salespeople know that a shopper has already assumed ownership.

A skillful salesperson will also use 'tie-down' questions to elicit 'validations and confirmations' to get customers to verify verbally the value of each feature presented by the salesperson. The expert use of 'FABS' (features, advantages, and benefits) increases perceived value, turning virtually every touch point into a potential close.

6. Trial Closing. Once a convincing demonstration has been made, only then is it appropriate to ask a non-offensive question referred to as a 'trial close.' This is done to get the customer's opinion. Some examples are:

"The expert use of 'FABS' (features, advantages, and benefits) increases the perceived value in the customer's mind, virtually turning every touch point into a potential close."



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- *"Do you think this would work well for you in the spot it has to go?"*
- *"Is this the one you seem to like the best?"*

These closed-ended questions call for shoppers to render a yes or no opinion, that often turns into a decision. When they respond in the affirmative, they are likely to also say, "I really like this; okay just go ahead and write it up!"

7. Isolating the Objection. There are times when a salesperson attempts a trial close but instead of getting a positive response, a shopper will respond by saying, "I like it, but I want to go home and think about it. Got a card?" It is at this point every salesperson must reply: "I really do understand. Do you mind if I ask you a question? What seems to be concerning you the most at this point?" This is one part of the sale that separates a true sales expert from a novice. Only by identifying the true objection can that objection be overcome.

8. Overcoming the Objection. Your salespeople will be surprised just how many objections they will overcome once they complete step seven. Here's one example. "Folks, you say you need to figure out what color to

paint the room first. If you don't mind, I'd like to share an important insight about that with you. Selecting the living room set, which you have likely just done, is by far the hardest part. After all, it had to meet all of your requirements perfectly: color, style, comfort, quality, size, affordability, durability and ease of maintenance. There are at least a dozen or so wall colors that will go really well with this set. My experience has been that once you lock in your upholstery purchase, it makes picking out the paint color a breeze! Wouldn't you agree?"

9. Closing. We have now finally arrived at the top step of the sales process staircase. Before proceeding, however, your salespeople need to be made aware of two extremely important things. The first is the need to now 'flip' the customer's mind into an entirely different mode of thinking. Why? Up till now, they have been in a passive listening and learning mode. So before asking them to make a major decision, consider flipping them into a decision-making mode by asking them to make a few small decisions, for example:

- *"This sofa was really comfortable for you, right?"*
- *The color would work perfectly,*

"Once your salespeople learn how to sell themselves, they earn the right to share their knowledge by asking shoppers questions."

don't you think?"

If they decide that the sofa is comfortable or the color works perfectly, they are in a better mental space to make the decision to buy.

At this point in the sales process, customers must also have a 'most favorable' opinion of their salesperson. Offering a sincere compliment, being humorous or even mentioning how enjoyable they've been to work with can work wonders at this stage. Relating their purchase to the emotional enjoyment they will experience with family, with their lovable pets or on cherished holiday occasions, can help as well. Doing this helps to sell based on 'emotion' which is much stronger than just facts or logic.

Once the first eight steps are completed, salespeople are finally ready

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"Once the first eight steps are completed, salespeople are finally ready to 'craft a close' that is most appropriate for each situation."

to 'craft a close' that is the most appropriate for each situation. There are many specific closes that can work well for selling furniture. Here are just three.

The Add-on Close: "Mary, see how these lamps make this sofa really 'pop' and stand out? They offer not only light but also provide 'balance,' and really accentuate the 'style' you love so much. Getting them too would make a tremendous difference, don't you think?"

The Take-away Close. "Lisa and John, before you started to fall in love with this set, I guess I should have asked you if you would be upset if we couldn't get this to you for a while? If we're lucky there may still be one set left in stock!"

The Don't You Deserve it Close. "Tim, as hard as you work driving a truck every day, wouldn't you like to come home and relax, by putting your legs up in this comfortable recliner every night?"

Unfortunately, time does not permit us to go into more closes, but I hope that

you clearly see how every step of the sale can be considered its own instrument in the symphony that is a professionally executed closing process.

I think it's important to point out that over the past 20 years, teaching specific closing techniques has fallen out of style. There's a reason for that. When executed poorly, presented at the wrong time, in the wrong situation or without sincerity, it may be perceived by shoppers as patronizing or manipulative. Frequently, this outcome is the result of a lack of training and focus on the first eight steps, The Greet, The Qualification, Selling Yourself, The Show and Tell, Dropping Anchor, The Trial Close, Isolating the Objection and Overcoming the Objection. Not every salesperson can be a skillful closer, but every high-earning professional salesperson is comfortable performing each of the steps presented in this article, including closing.

I hope the adage 'Always Be Closing' mentioned earlier in this article now takes on a somewhat more significant

meaning for you than it did before. I encourage you to share this information with your entire sales staff. Unless that is, you don't mind them just whistling for business!

About Scott Morris: Scott produced the advanced 10-hour sales training course titled "The Best Furniture Sales Training Ever!!!" It consists of seven separate Sales Academies, each of which contain unique, innovative and insightful observations and suggestions for retail salespeople. Scott also worked for the four largest furniture retail chains in America, in various sales and management capacities.

The 2-hour furniture sales "Closing Academy" is created exclusively for the retail furniture industry. Every "closing situation" is based on real life experiences, guiding customers in overcoming the dozen most common obstacles that furniture shoppers routinely face. Plus the "30 best closes" for furniture shoppers are given. This training alone can turn any person into a high achiever. It is recommended that you start with this Academy first.

Questions about this article, or any sales topic, can be directed to him at hsm7777@att.net. If you would like to hear a pre-recorded message about the 16 important things furniture salespeople currently never get trained on, or wish to learn more about his transformational training, just visit www.TheBestFurnitureSalesEver.com by simply speaking into your smart phone "Scott Morris Furniture Trainer!"



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Success Strategies

Kaprice Crawford, HFA



HFA members El Dorado Furniture and Badcock &more weigh in on strategies to keep top performers engaged and happy.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, roughly three percent of the U.S. workforce quits monthly. Voluntary turnover, especially among salespeople, is at an all-time high. The workforce is shrinking, baby boomer retirements are accelerating, and employees still have many employment options.

Resource Allocation

Losing knowledgeable, high-earning salespeople hurts. It's a worst-case scenario, but even when average salespeople leave, it becomes urgent to find replacements and quickly get them up to speed. In the process, management can lose sight of the need to engage with their seasoned employees, who continue to drive the majority of bottom-line sales. HFA's members have found that this lack of focus on more experienced salespeople takes a toll on morale and productivity.

Opinions Count

Employees always want a voice,

but this desire is most significantly felt by well-seasoned salespeople.

Engagement Surveys: Engagement surveys are a great way to understand how well your engagement efforts are working and identify opportunities for improvement. These ask employees open- and closed-ended questions such as: Do you find your employment meaningful? Do our company's values align with yours? Is company leadership invested in your success? Have you experienced any problems with co-workers or managers recently? You can conduct pulse surveys on any topic at any time, but at the minimum, perform an engagement survey once a year.

HR Value Chain Measurement: An HR value chain measures the touchpoints a person or team responsible for human resources has made over a specified time period. It quantifies actions taken with the intention of helping reach defined goals.

Touchpoints: Early in 2022, Rob Ball, owner of a chain of Badcock &more Stores, reviewed the HR value chain

within his stores and found that "Except for our annual holiday party, the number of meaningful touchpoints with our employees had depleted during the pandemic. We were so busy keeping up with the day-to-day that we hadn't done much outreach to sales teams via webinars, Zoom meetings, group meetings or one-on-ones."

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Matt Pridemore (above) who owns and operates 16 Badcock stores also produces online content for the Home Furnishings Association Sales Academy. Badcock & more was HFA retailer of the year in 2018.



Ball saw this as a big problem, so he took steps to increase these types of engagements. He also spoke with seasoned salespeople on his team to ask for their help in formalizing the sales process. "It's a good idea to do this," he explained. "By asking your best salespeople for their opinions, you pay homage to their success. And, when you get them thinking about the selling tools they've used over the years, not only does it give them a voice and a role in helping the organization, it reminds them to tap into some of the skills they might not use as much as they should. At our Badcock & more stores, we found that even our top salespeople are selling more after we went through this process."

Goals & Accountability

Discuss team and individual objectives and expectations when you meet with employees. Help them to align their goals to the company's mission so their work feels more relevant and significant. Keeping your employees in the know will help them feel positive

about their contributions and more optimistic about their future in the organization.

Out on the floor: Beyond having these discussions about goals and accountability, "Get your management team out on the floor," added Ball. "Meet with each sales associate to understand how they do what they do for the organization and why. Go over their KPIs and discuss their wish lists and career goals. Listen to their suggestions. These touchpoints need to be personal and frequent. You must manage sales teams by ensuring that you're talking about what's in it for them and not always about their KPIs. Your store wins when salespeople believe you are willing to listen and help them achieve their personal goals."

Interesting/Challenging Jobs

It's essential to keep employees engaged by finding new and creative ways to challenge them in their roles. Keep your superstars involved by investing in their career develop-

ment. Share opportunities for additional training and certifications. Offer them opportunities to engage or lead initiatives in the communities you serve. Encourage them to work with other people across departments in your organization. This will help them overcome boredom and potential burnout. Find them paths for future advance-

"You must manage sales teams by ensuring that you're talking about what's in it for them and not always about their KPIs. Your store wins when salespeople believe you are willing to listen and help them achieve their personal goals."

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KEEP TOP PERFORMERS ENGAGED

ment if that's something they are interested in pursuing.

Lunch Appointments: Matt Pridemore, who owns and operates 16 top-producing Badcock & more stores in the Southeast, commented that "Sales managers need to figure out what each team member finds challenging. Not every good salesperson wants to be a sales manager. That's okay, but just about every team member wants to be challenged. You need to talk with them one-on-one. I like to take my people to lunch and get to know and understand their hopes and dreams." Like Rob Bell, Pridemore produces online content for the Home Furnishings Association Sales Academy. This program consists of 24/7 online training courses with an extensive video library designed to improve sales, increase customer engagement and motivate sales teams.

Oscar Buzz: Miguel Valle, senior sales manager, El Dorado Furniture, shared his perspective on keeping sales superstars engaged. El Dorado Furniture is also an HFA member-retailer. "At El Dorado Furniture," Valle explained,

"many of our seasoned salespeople become instructors at El Dorado University, a several-week training course for new salespeople. It's an additional responsibility that adds value to the program and is rewarding for senior salespeople. Another way El Dorado Furniture keeps our superstars across the organization engaged is by celebrating their achievements at a yearly awards gala. We consider the gala to be our version of the Oscars. It's about sales associates' performance and the performance of leaders at El Dorado Furniture. We don't just hand out awards at the gala. It's a time to share our people's success stories and relate why their accomplishments are worthy of recognition. It's become a powerful incentive for our associates and leaders across the organization. They work all year to get a seat at that event."

stop paying attention to an employee just because they're doing well or have been on the team for a while. Create a feedback culture within your sales team and company-wide to encourage honest and open communication. When employees trust their management to listen, they are more likely to share their insights, including communicating what resources and support they need to succeed.

Conclusion

It is essential to keep your seasoned salespeople engaged. Are you providing regular feedback? Giving them opportunities to learn and grow? Making sure they feel like their opinion counts? If not, start today! Your employees and your bottom line will thank you.

Effective Communication

Frequent communication and feedback are crucial to helping employees feel informed and connected. Don't

The Home Furnishings Association is proud to serve the industry with the latest education, and information that impacts your business. Learn more about membership and resources at www.myhfa.org or by calling 800.422.3778.

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Retail Performance Tip #14

From David McMahon at PerformNOW

IS YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM ONE OF OUR INDUSTRY'S BEST?

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HFA's government advocacy programs: looking forward to 2023

It was a tumultuous year for HFA retail members in 2022. They have navigated various macroeconomic issues, including inflation with rising energy costs, supply chain disruptions and lingering COVID-19 impacts. In May of 2022, the Home Furnishings Association Government Relations Action Team (GRAT) returned to Washington, DC.

Economic Conditions

Furniture retailers are experiencing a high level of uncertainty in their businesses. And there was no better way to illustrate these dynamics than for HFA to explain them in person to Members of Congress, White House

staff, Administration officials and other stakeholders.

While it was not an easy time, furniture retailers and their employees were resilient in the face of an unprecedented business environment. As we continue through the current business cycle phase, container and shipping rates have returned closer to normal and delivery times have become more reasonable. We recently stared down the possibility of a massive railroad worker strike ahead of the holidays, threatening huge supply chain chaos. HFA joined the call to get the Biden administration and Congress to impose a contract deal to avoid the strike.

sold. The CPSC Final Rule was published in the Federal Register in November 2022, giving our industry only six months until late May 2023 to comply.

In September 2022, the U.S. Senate passed a new version of the STURDY Act, which requires the CPSC to adopt a revised voluntary standard as its mandatory federal standard. Negotiations are ongoing in the House to advance this bill to the President's desk. Regardless, significant change is coming to bedroom/clothing storage units. So, if you are a manufacturer, importer or retailer, you must prepare for these updated standards.

"When the CPSC rolled out its proposal in 2022, it reported that only ONE single clothing storage unit it tested out of nearly 200 would meet the minimum standard."

Furniture Tipover Standard

Looking ahead into 2023, a pending regulation from the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) will be significant for our industry. It will create a mandatory safety standard for clothing storage units and transform the bedroom furniture category. When the CPSC rolled out its proposal in 2022, it reported that only ONE single clothing storage unit it tested out of nearly 200 would meet the minimum standard. For furniture manufacturers and retailers, it means all clothing storage units must be redesigned/engineered before they are

Going Forward

HFA looks forward to continuing to share HFA member concerns and experiences on critical issues at the State and Federal level in 2023. That includes addressing legislation under consideration regarding the supply chain, ocean shipping, port capacity, furniture tipover, and more.

HFA advocates on behalf of home furnishings retailers for policies at the local, state and federal levels that impact our industry. Find out more about the Home Furnishings Association at myhfa.org.



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A collage of various commercial trucks, including Suzuki, Isuzu, and Hino models, shown in different settings like parking lots, streets, and construction sites. The trucks are primarily white, with some featuring different body styles like box vans, dump trucks, and flatbeds. The background is a solid blue color with white, torn-edge borders around the images.



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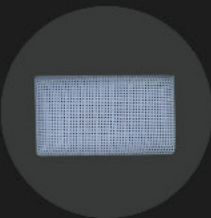
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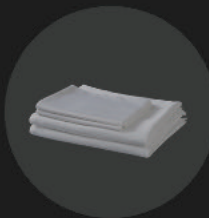
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