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APRIL 2021 **V13**

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By Unika Vaev**

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editor's note

Dear Reader,
This month is all about crafts-
manship! From old-world crafts-
manship to innovative, technol-
ogy-driven craftsmanship, we
have brought together a wide
range of stories that highlight
the very best of the Contract
Design Industry.

We have highlighted perspec-
tives from the design world as
well as stories from our partner
manufacturers' perspective. All
culminating in a wonderfully di-
verse collection of stories that
provides a unique peek into
what makes this industry so
special.

We invite you to dive into the
world of superior craftsmanship.

Enjoy!

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Craftsmanship

Is It Too Late To Save Our Artisanal Traditions?

Interestingly, especially in this age of machines, there is still a need for true old-world craftsmanship. Even if the word "craftsmanship" is not understood, there is still an appreciation for it.

If we think about the current situation our world is facing with the shortages of goods not making it to where they are needed, everything from raw steel and lumber to rubber that goes into manufactured goods, our appetite for expediency to get something quicker and cheaper is taking its toll on our everyday lives.

Before the pandemic, a small movement started to gain some momentum with the idea that handicrafts or made by hand items can be a great way to decompress from our overly digital, fast-paced world. Engaging in craft-works like woodworking, knitting, sewing by hand, and pottery has proven to be great stress relievers. The same is true for writing, drawing, and painting with pens, pencils, real paints on paper and not with a computer. These actions require us to use our imaginations and thought processes to communicate to our hands, eyes, and the rest of our senses the action of creating something useful or enjoyable is something only human beings are capable of.

"Craft," as a noun defined by Merriam Webster, is a skill in planning, making, or executing dexterity. The verb is to make or produce with care, skill, or ingenuity. When you think about the word craftsmanship in this way, there is an irony to the way we actually expect things to be made today.

Throughout our human history, we have depended on the skills developed by craftsmen and women to further advance our existence. The more skilled



By Susan Mulholland

Susan Mulholland studied interior design at Northern Arizona University and is an NCIDQ certificate holder. She has 30 years of interior design experience in commercial design. Her experience in the industry covers a large variety of projects that focus on workplace, healthcare, and hospitality. Her design studio Mulholland Art & Design Commercial Interiors is in Tucson, Arizona, where she has been helping clients for the past 20 years. [Connect with Susan Mulholland on her website.](#)

society is, the more evolved it becomes. But what happens when these skills are forgotten due to the extreme advancement of civilization? Do they disappear forever, or is there a way to save them?

Our world has faced this many times before; with each new advancement, we suddenly fear losing what we had. When I was in college, I can remember, and Computer-Aided Drafting was making its way into the world of architecture. Many architects rejected the idea of drafting on a computer instead of the traditional methods of hand drafting that went from a skill into a unique art form. Drafting-putting pictures as directions to build something on paper is part of the creative process. The skill of transferring shapes and lines onto a piece of paper to convey a message is indeed a human skill. But this is one master craft that has been replaced by the need to have something as quickly as possible. Hand drafting is still done, but the masters of this craft are lost in our modern world.

Drawing is just one of the many exclusive human skills we have. Ingenuity and the need to solve a problem is where the act of creativity begins. We have to have shelter and food to survive. We need to be able to make things to accomplish this. Skill sets and tools are developed over time to make these tasks less time-consuming. That is when the craft of these skills emerge. Carpentry, furniture making, and metalsmithing are crafts that are well known in our industry. For centuries, these skills have been needed to ensure that we have a life that has comfort and is enjoyable.

Craft guilds are starting to make a comeback in order to preserve some of these skills we are starting to see less of. The construction industry has suffered enormously because of the lack of a skilled workforce. But this industry is working hard to overcome these obstacles. Our construction costs and lead times were increasing at an alarming rate because of the lack of a skilled construction workforce before the pandemic. Because of the supply chain issues and lack of raw materials being available like steel, wood, gypsum board, concrete, and rubber, we face more time delays and price increases.

Construction is not the only industry suffering from the lack of skilled craftsmanship; other sectors face the same challenges. We need to recognize that as we move on from the current pandemic and into the next phase, some things will not be the same.

The challenges that will be facing the contract design and manufacturing industry now will take a while to overcome. Our industrial designers and craftspeople who make the furniture we as interior designers want to use in our projects will need to address a different set of issues. Materials will need to be evaluated on their ability to take more vigorous cleaning methods. The designs will need to be more flexible so that these products can be used in various spaces, not just office conference rooms or lobbies. We will need to think more broadly about what we mean when we want an "office" chair and how that will look, feel, and move to meet the changing demands our clients are putting on us.

I have always believed that true craftsmanship and design are synonymous with quality. My projects' goal is to help my clients understand that quality in the workmanship and materials is worth the time it takes to make and have it. That the cost you are spending has lasting value.

We are not being good stewards of preserving and teaching the gift of craftsmanship. The trades, skills, and knowledge that have been developed by laborers over the past millennium of human history are being replaced with robots and machines. True craftsmanship is learning a skill from a revered master and practicing it to perfection. Are we actively training our next generation to do that, or are we hoping that a machine will be able to do it for us? This is a question we all need to think about seriously. Arts and crafts are instrumental to making our lives more fulfilling. We need to continue to value the master craftsmen and women in our lives. They still possess these human-centric skills and continue to celebrate their works so that future generations value these skills enough to want to learn them to become masters themselves and continue the tradition of craftsmanship that sustains us.



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03 Who thought you could outfit a fire station living quarters? What about a college dorm or off campus apartment? Who thought you could provide state of the art safety and protection to business and government? Or even fever detection technology? How about a military barracks or an emergency temporary COVID treatment facility? What about outfitting a college or hospital lab? Who thought you could provide green walls?

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6 MRL FAVORITE PRODUCTS FROM ACROSS THE LIBRARY

The following products represent 6 of our favorite products currently on My Resource Library. The products are listed in no particular order.

CANYON EDGE THERMORY GABION ANOVA FURNISHINGS

Canyon Edge modular benches showcase mixed materials for a naturally modern look. Get a quick, no-fuss gabion-style seating look without the hassle. Simply add the stone of your choice to the provided cage, then mount the seat cap on with no additional structural support needed.



SANDSTONE FIRE TABLES HOMECREST OUTDOOR LIVING

Much like our Sandstone table collection, our Sandstone fire tables give outdoor spaces a solid foundation. The inspiration for this rustic design comes from the southwestern quarries of the United States. Full of beautiful, rough-hewn detail, Sandstone tops offer years of low-maintenance and architecturally pleasing outdoor enjoyment.



CANTILEVER UMBRELLAS BEAUFURN

Unlike single pole umbrellas, the bases of cantilever umbrellas are offset, allowing the canopy to open to the side. This provides more space underneath the umbrella for seating and enjoyment of shade. Beaufurn's cantilever umbrellas are modern, sleek, and functional.



WINK LANTERNS BLUE DOT

Wink Lantern-Cool shapes (or hexagons as fancy geometry people might say) rendered in aluminum with perfectly positioned perforation to maximize ambient glow from candles (or flameless flickering devices) held within. Set the mood indoors or out. Wink, more than just your favorite emoji.

CONCRETE FLEX SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS

Concrete Flex is an environmentally friendly and sustainable collection that redefines the concrete 'concept'. Suitable for both exterior and interior applications, Concrete Flex is a thin composite panel of flexible concrete.

The panels are flexible (can wrap tight columns), extremely lightweight (easy to handle), and highly stable (can be used inside or out).



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The Craft of Installation

Craftsmanship runs deep in commercial interiors. The industry requires a careful orchestration of many partners with each building upon the efforts of its predecessors. And while the contributions of those near the end of the line are often overshadowed by the heavy hitters before them, the last stretch can make or break a project. It is in that spirit that we celebrate the artistry and mastery that installation teams lend to turn visions into real-world applications.

BY ANTHONY HANSEN

Perfect Product for an Imperfect World

We are not envious of furniture and architectural wall manufacturers. They have this incredible task of developing products that appeal to the masses and can 'work' in any built environment. Their robust quality control checkpoints and efficient factories (in some cases handcrafted detailing) yield precision-engineered fan favorites. Yet, these perfect products leave assembly lines for a very imperfect world. Floors are never level, walls rarely plumb, and true right angles are unicorns. Further, the need for as-built drawings confirms that spaces rarely fully translate from CAD to construction.

The quantity of product needed to keep the industry moving and the speed at which it must be produced creates this great dichotomy. Product modularity and real-world flexibility are not simpatico. This very gap creates need for the installation profession, a critical player in the furniture spectrum.

Left- and Right-Brain Thinking Required

Furniture/wall installation requires a balance of creative and pragmatic approaches. Installers must uphold the structural integrity and pristine condition of the product they are assembling to maintain manufacturer warranties. At the same time, they must overlay mad visualization and imaginative skills to transform parts and pieces into functional applications. Installations can often be akin to the 'square peg in round hole' scenario when field conditions are a far cry from install drawings. Creative problem solving while maintaining real-world time and fiscal constraints therefore flexes left- and right-brain thinking.

Aside from brainpower, we must acknowledge the strength, stamina, and motor skills required of an installer. It is a physically taxing profession of nonstop hauling, unpacking, lifting, flipping, fastening, and many other '-ings.' It is a profession

that calls for teamwork to navigate tight stairwells, align weighted tops to bases, and hold steady mammoth panes of wall glass. And certainly, it is a profession that engages with a logistical web of parallel but disparate tracks: the receiving, delivering, and installing of product; and coinciding with other trades who move to the beat of their own drum. We reiterate our industry is a symphony of many partners working towards a grand finale.

There are Tools of the Trade and Tools of the Mind

When we look at the 'tools' needed to accomplish commercial installations, there are two major subsets: mechanical/manual and mental/mathematical.

With regards to mechanical/manual tools (e.g., mallets, screwdrivers), prowess in their capabilities and the safety protocols associated with them is a requirement for installers across the country. The notion that the product a client views in a showroom arrives to the jobsite whole is askew. You would be surprised at how many types of blades and saws are required in the field to meet application intent. Interesting enough, shims, cow magnets, caulk, painter's tape, and chalk are also major contributors to an installer's toolkit. And while manual and battery-powered tools make field cuts and customization easier, there are no do-overs with a client's product. Understanding how blades can become out of alignment, how surfaces can chip once altered, and how glass can crack or shatter when too much torque is applied are just a few of the cause-and-effect scenarios playing through an installer's mind.

People incorrectly classify installation as a profession of pure labor. Installers ACTUALLY USE the math concepts the general population has forgotten since high school and college curricula. From algebra to trigonometry, and of course geometry, installation teams run calculations on the backs of product packaging to visualize the cause and effect of every adjustment they make. Because alterations bring great finality to fabricated furniture and walls, installers must exercise great forethought and implement a 'measure twice, cut once' mentality.

Interpreting Skills Rank High

The rise of ancillary products in recent years and the customization of spaces have really pushed the required skillset of industry installers. Installation scopes are not just seas of workstations anymore. Moveable walls, variations in workstation setups, data/cabling considerations, acoustical and graphic adornments, and raised flooring are all now part of the daily grind.

The fact is that the installation profession has become a hybrid of the construction and furniture delivery families. They draw their assignments and completion cadence from both construction drawings and manufacturer instructions. This bridging requires a delicate approach to the staging, installation, and in some cases, decommissioning and disposal of furniture assets. There is a constant need to interpret and interpolate provided drawings, client and end user intent, and the reality of site conditions.

The rise of intermarket work and furniture dealers with a hub and spoke model have contributed to lack-luster installation drawings. Not through any fault of their own, but because their ability to view the site in person is severely diminished. Installers today are often the eyes and the ears of project sites and are key players in the on-site massaging of product to meet space expectations with a pre-determined kit-of-parts from the manufacturer. This juggling act is especially important when critical dimensions or code requirements are missed throughout the design and ordering process. The extensive knowledge of product lines and the great dexterity installers around the country exhibit should not be taken lightly.

The Last Line of Defense

Without question the commercial interiors industry is complex and takes all kinds to make spaces come alive. From the dealers who extrapolate designer and architect visions to the manufacturers who produce quality products, there are many players that keep the collective engine running. Lest we not forget the installer and the craftsmanship they lend to the process. They are the last line of defense in upholding the entire delivery process and the quality control measures that discerning clients rightfully expect.



About Manning Group:

Manning Group is Arizona's largest commercial furniture services company. Their comprehensive offering includes the installation, asset management, repair/refurbishing, Day 2 maintenance, and commercial moving of furniture, architectural walls, and millwork.

Manning Group is an active member of Facilities Services Network (FSN), an international group of independent installation firms which set new benchmarks for performance and value in the management, installation, and care of contract furniture.

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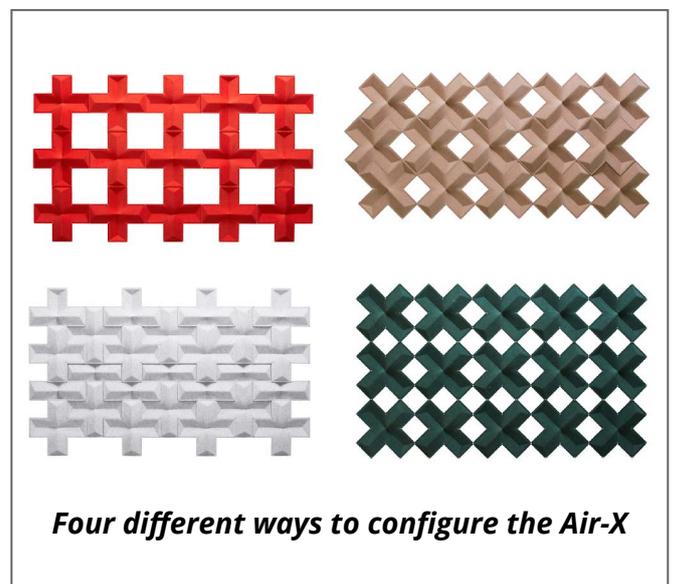
The beautiful Air series acoustic hanging screens keeps you separated and together at the same time.

The designer **Stefan Borselius** is inspired by geometry and nature for his Air designs – like the shape of flowers, snowflakes, leaves and abstract figures.

The Air Collection is available in five designs with different installation options for each design. The first Air product was introduced 15 years ago, and the series has been a very successful collection throughout the years. The latest addition to the collection is the Air-X that was introduced in February 2021.

The Air modules are constructed of molded felt covered in fabric, providing excellent noise absorption and echo cancellation. The Air products are available in 80 colorways.

The modules are assembled in patterns using plastic clips and are fixed to an aluminum rail for installation on the ceiling or on the wall. NRC ratings between .15 and .85 depending on Air design and how you configure the installation.



**UNIKA VAEV
FEATURE**



Airleaf, much like an autumn day



Airleaf, much like an autumn day



Airflake, think snow!



STEFAN BORSELIUS DESIGNER SPOTLIGHT

Stefan Borselius is a designer who takes no shortcuts. Going about things thoroughly is something he learned from his grandfather and great-grandfather, both cabinetmakers. His path to becoming a furniture designer thus began with learning this craft properly at Steneby in Dals Långed. He then continued his studies in Stockholm at the Carl Malmsten Furniture School and later completed a master's degree in furniture design at the Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design.

In the long run, it pays to be thorough – as Borselius, renowned for his great attention to detail, is today amongst Scandinavia's leading furniture designers. His design range is also impressive. Included in his portfolio are chairs, sofas, lamps, carpeting and room dividers – created for some of the most prestigious furniture companies in Scandinavia.

My Resource Library recently had a chance to ask Stefan some questions about his process and his recent work with Unika Vaev. We hope you enjoy this inside look!

Q. How did you get started in your design career?

A. I first trained as a furniture carpenter but continued at different schools to become a designer. So after 11 years of education, I became a designer focusing on furniture for industrial manufacturing. I designed my first piece of furniture together with a colleague, Fredrik Mattson, for the Swedish company Bla Station. The chair was called Sting and was made of extruded aluminum. It won many awards and received extremely much attention, so it was a grateful start.

Q. What do you love most about the design process?

A. The fun part is of course to think about and sketch new products. I sketch a lot by hand, making models in clay or other materials. It is extra fun when you succeed, the products are produced and you see that the market has understood and buying the product. Being part of the whole design process from the first idea until it is launched is what I love, even if it between there are many steps and hours that are not so great. Over and all, I love my work.

Q. How do you come up with your design concepts?

A. I often try to see and think about what has not been done. Avoid looking at what already exists. I am starting from how we live our lives today and try to solve problems for the time we live in. It is rare that the ideas come immediately, they usually come after a lot of hard work and many hours of sketching and thinking. The design process often starts with a function or a need, but sometimes I find new materials that can solve old problems in a new and better way.

Q. What was your inspiration for Unika Vaev's Air Collection?

A. The first part of the Air Collection came in 2007 and is called Airflake. I saw that most sound absorbers were in the ceiling, on the walls and standing on the floor. I did not see anything that could break the sound in another way. Something that could be both sound-absorbing and aesthetically pleasing to the room, while at the same time not being too solid. I had a few years earlier worked with a felt material that was mainly used in the car industry. I then developed the first piece of furniture in this material when I realized it would be perfect for this purpose. Airflake was the first product on the market of its kind and the collection has been grooving ever since.

Q. Do you typically design acoustic pieces exclusively?

A. No, I work as a freelance designer. Products focusing on furniture. I design everything from chairs, armchairs, sofas to luminaires and sound absorbers.

Q. What do you hope people feel when they experience the Air Collection?

A. Hopefully more silence. But I hope people can see all the possibilities there are with the different products in the collection. There are now several products and patterns that give a great freedom of choice. You can put the parts together in so many different ways, directions and in vary colors and design. I see the entire Air collection as a tool or brush for the interior designers to use to create their own designs and paint the room.

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By Michelle Warren

Michelle Warren is President of Catalyst Consulting Group, a firm specializing in providing strategic solutions to the commercial furniture industry to enhance their sales and positioning within the industry and distribution.

Michelle has been in the commercial furniture industry for over 25 years with experience on the dealer and manufacturer side of the industry. She has experience at the EVP, VP and National Sales Manager level for large and small manufacturers in addition to in-depth understanding and experience in creating programs to target and selling to the Federal Government, State Government, Higher Education, and working with Cooperative Purchasing.

GSA selected her as 1 of 2 board members to represent industry on the Quality Partnership Council which she served on for almost 4 years. Additionally, she has represented the manufacture she worked for as a member of the Coalition for Government Procurement for over 4 years.

Because Michelle believes in the healthy building and how a building can affect employees, she is a Fitwel Ambassador.

She is known as a "serial networker" in the furniture industry and enjoys meeting people and making connections happen. If you want to connect with Michelle connect with her at Michelle@strategic-catalyst.com.



Vertical Markets: Tips & Tricks for being successful

For many just the thought of vertical markets, especially GSA, creates confusion or anxiety. The term vertical market as defined by Wikipedia is "a market in which vendors offer goods and services specific to an industry, trade, profession, or other group of customers with specialized needs." So, for the purpose of this column we will be discussing some of the "other group of customers." With a focus on federal, state/local government, education, and healthcare specifically as it relates to selling to these markets and the use of contracts to do so.

Early on in my furniture career I was the Sales Manager and then VP of Sales for a satellite office of a dealership that served Maryland, Washington D.C. and Virginia. Just based on geography you probably guessed we sold to the federal government as a major vertical. At that time, I had very little knowledge of selling to federal agencies using the GSA (General Services Administration) contract, but I was managing a team of people who focused solely on that. As I think back to that time, the thing I remember most is that the GSA sales team made it seem very mysterious to sell GSA and I felt very confident they were convincing me that I would not be able to do it even with my sales success in the market in other areas. Since I was in management, I did not question it and I let them do what they were very good at doing. However, as I changed companies and held different roles throughout my career learning more about GSA and other verticals was unavoidable and overtime, I ended up leading a vertical markets team for a manufacturer and now offer consulting for manufacturers on how to create a program to successfully target Federal, State/Local/Education and Cooperative.

I call myself a GSA geek, others have called me the GSA Queen which I clearly prefer, but regardless of what term you use I have built a career and now business on demystifying these markets for myself and for companies. Through this column I hope to impart some of the wisdom I have learned in the 26 years I have been in the furniture industry and ultimately, I hope to encourage you to get involved in these markets by making them easier to understand and a little less scary.

As this is the first, hopefully of many, columns on this topic I will start with an easy question that I get all of the time “How do I sell to (insert vertical market)?” Believe it or not, selling to any vertical market, including GSA, is the same as selling to commercial as long as you hold or have access to a contract that they are eligible and want to buy off of.

Here are the sales steps with some tips where applicable:

- Identify the agency, school, hospital, etc. that you want to meet with: I think this is somewhat easier in verticals than in commercial. With federal and state/local a lot of the data is public information and with education and healthcare since you are using a contract you will most likely be selecting from a list of members and the entity who issued the contract or organizations that focus on these verticals have a wealth of information regarding spend. On the federal side, if you know where to look you can also find what their annual budget is, what they plan to spend it on, who they need to spend it with to meet their goals, and who they are currently buying the products you offer from.
- Identify the contacts within the end user: The titles may be different than commercial, but again, the contacts are public information including email and phone. A lot of them are also on LinkedIn.

- Identify the other decision makers: Internal or External Designers; General Contractors, Commercial Real Estate Companies, etc. As you do your research and work with these markets, keep a list of the companies that work with the vertical market you are interested in and who at the company/firm specializes in that vertical. If you call on A&D as a career and want to get into vertical markets look at the firm’s website to see if they have done any projects in the vertical market that you are pursuing before you call on them.

- Get the meeting and sell them on your value proposition as a dealer, manufacturer or dealer/manufacturer combination and get them to want what you are offering.

Once you do all of this, then the contracts, legalities of some contracts, access and/or approval to use specific contracts and other requirements such as socio-economic status come into play.

My hope is that this has provided some clarity to selling within the different vertical markets, eliminating fear and anxiety, while also arming you with specific steps to start inspiring you to pursue these significant sales opportunities within specific vertical markets.



The Design POP was created as a platform to serve, educate, and inspire the entire POPulation of contract furniture designers. And yes, the name could also account for the number of times we have all been asked to add a “pop” of color to our designs.

Every organization has limited resources. Small dealers may not have the training budget that larger ones do. Some manufacturers offer training, webinars, or other services to aid our industry, while many others don’t offer anything. Either way, contract designers need training, best practices, and a community of knowledgeable individuals to be successful.

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Decca Contract: The Integrity of Craft



Is true craftsmanship a thing of the past? Today, you may have to look a bit harder, but it's out there, practiced by companies like Decca Contract. The art and craft of beautiful furniture, aided now by technology, is still in the expert hands of Decca's skilled craftspeople. "Our people are second to none," says Decca President, John Fischbach. "From the men and women on the factory floor, to our project managers and logistics team, we strive to exceed the quality expectations of our clients".

On any given morning in the city of Minneapolis, Decca's team could wake up to a balmy 85 degrees Fahrenheit, or a wind-chill factor of minus 4 and 8.5 inches of snow on the roads. Nonetheless, the Decca team is hard at work. Every day is a buzz of activity as the team generates quotes, prepares engineering drawings, creates renderings, gathers custom finish samples, and coordinates transit. The significant number of custom products that Decca Contract produces requires close attention to the details of product development and equally, the ability to guide clients through the process.

"The process of designing, building and transporting high quality furniture is what we do, and we love doing it," notes Fischbach. Recently, a highly renowned client came to Decca with a challenge. "Can you deliver 355 custom private offices, 65 workstations and 11 custom conference rooms all in the same week

to two different locations in the same city? Decca's answer was, "absolutely."

Recently, Delve asked John Fischbach to tell us more:

Our client called with two very large orders to be delivered to Los Angeles in the same week. It was a big ask, but thanks to our state-of-the-art manufacturing facility and dedicated employees, we pulled it off. It would be one thing just to deliver that much furniture, but to make good on a massive order with well-designed and beautifully hand crafted furniture? That's another level. Our response was, "We can and we will. And, in fact, we did."

Q: It's been said that it takes 10,000 hours to get good at something. How long has Decca been in business?

A: Fifty years. Decca started out as a high-end millwork shop in Hong Kong and grew into a wood products manufacturing company with international clients. Our growth has been humbling. Decca now has a 1.5 million-square-foot factory that's unsurpassed in technology. We employ 2,000 people. From a technology perspective, our facilities are very sophisticated. However, honestly, it's the engineers, technicians, and craftspeople who work in the factory that are at the heart of our business.

CELEBRATING CRAFTSMANSHIP

Q: Many furniture manufacturers have to buy different components from manufacturers and suppliers around the world. Is this not true of Decca?

A: Not at all. I think we are one of the few companies that can actually claim to have a substantial level of vertical integration. We kiln-dry solids, press veneers, and size formaldehyde-free MDF. We also manufacture architectural metals, create custom stains and make our own cardboard packing for shipping. The only things that we do not do in-house are slice veneer from the log, or cut stone and glass. This level of vertical manufacturing gives us tremendous flexibility to bring our clients' ideas to reality.

Q: What is the value of vertical integration? Why would a client care?

A: We can control the quality of the materials we use. It means that our workers "build" rather than "assemble" furniture as others may do using this and that component from multiple sources. We have much more control over quality and over what we can promise in terms of shipment and delivery.

Q: Anything worth doing is worth doing well. What materials does Decca use?

A: There's a wide variety. Metal components are fabricated using stainless steel. We use low-lead glass, various stones, solid surfacing and laminate, as well as architectural grade wood solids and veneers. We make our own foam for our upholstered products. Upholstered furniture also requires textiles or leather, either custom or through our partnership programs.

Premium wood is absolutely essential to the level of quality we insist upon. We purchase solid wood and veneers from the most respected mills that harvest responsibly. We then select only those products with exactly the color, figuring, and character that will enhance the aesthetic of the product. The integrity of the wood makes all the difference.

Q: The care you take is telling. Decca tables and case-goods do have an extraordinary polish.

A: That is thanks to people who know about the properties of the various species. We have craftspeople who know how to shape wood, who have the eye to match veneers, the skill to fit an inlay that will bring out the full beauty of the wood. Our furniture is hand-finished. It's a very exacting and time-consuming process, but worth every minute. For example, our attention to the veneer and finish color aesthetics is such that the raw veneer is hand-selected based upon the finish color to be applied.

Q: What about design? How do you find people with original ideas?



A: We are incredibly lucky to have been able to partner with a very talented group of product designers. Brian Graham has worked with Decca for over 15 years, designing collections like the Ratio™ table and more recently, FrameWork, which is both furniture and architecture. Lauren Rottet has designed a lounge collection that's very smart and sophisticated. Gary Lee, Jess Sorel, and Alyssa Coletti are all award-winning designers who have made invaluable contributions to our company, but these are just a few. All of the independent designers we work with - and our in house design team as well - have vast talents and a very good understanding of market expectations and trends.

Q: Watching a piece of furniture come together is fascinating:

A: It is! Once you have a drawing and then create the prototype, there's still a great deal of contemplating, measuring, double-checking, making notes and adjusting. If the product is a chair, you want to do a "sit test" to make sure it's completely comfortable, that the pitch of the seat is just right, that the height of the arms is supportive. Every detail has to be reviewed and tweaked and refined. It's a process of evolution from concept to finished product. And there's always an excitement about seeing a newly completed chair, conference table, or private office. For me, as well as the product designer, product development is a fascinating and exciting process.

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Finding Your Passion

Celebrating Women In Leadership

BY ALEXANDRA TSEFFOS

Before HGTV and as early as I can remember, I wanted to be an interior designer. I grew up with parents who remodeled homes while we lived in them which meant sleeping in the living room until the hardwood floors were refinished, or the wallpaper was stripped from my room. It was inspiring and so was the fact that they instilled the confidence in me to “do whatever you want to when you grow up.” I felt that being female would never hold me back or provide a different opportunity to that of my brother. I naively believed that men and women were entirely equal.

So, I did it. I became an interior designer and fell hard for commercial furniture; specifically, the client interactions that came with the design/sales process. I had a fabulous job at a dealership doing what I had always wanted. I never thought I would leave it behind, to go to work for Configura, a technology company during a recession. My new position was as a Training & Support Specialist.

I also never imagined that I would not return to the role of interior designer, instead embracing something called CET Designer with every fiber of my being. Things in business change and within a year of working for Configura, I was asked to add sales to my role. I always said I didn’t want to be a salesperson—even though every Saturday of my childhood my dad would ask me

what I wanted to be when I grew up. The answer was always the same and it was followed up by asking if I had considered working in sales. Dealer designers and the unique qualities of the product inspired me to test the waters. I educated dealer owners on CET’s benefits, trained designers, and worked with manufacturers across the Americas. My fluency in Spanish allowed me to expand my reach and develop lifelong friendships.

I was working across 2 continents, in a new capacity, and I felt fearless. I know that many women face incredible adversity and I feel very fortunate that is not a bigger part of my story. That being said, I was conscious of the fact I was expected to adhere to different standards. As a woman who traveled 70% of the time, I was always aware of my surroundings: walking to my car at night, dressing conservatively, and rarely drinking at work functions.

In fact, I have had a few funny situations along the way. For example, when I was working for Configura, I did a few training classes a year in South America. Most designers there were highly educated men, not women which is the norm in the United States. One class was a struggle for me. The attendees had gone out late and were not taking me or my class seriously. I finally told them all to turn their laptops off, put them under their chairs, and listen. The guys busted out laughing and called

their boss into the room. The boss fully supported my actions but also pulled me aside to ask what had happened. After I explained the situation, he laughed harder. He said, “you know we have something called machismo in Columbia and you just violated every aspect of that.”

After Configura, and the empowerment I felt from my position, I knew I had to get off the road and start establishing roots. I took a job in Minneapolis on a dealer business development team. Again, a dream job. A few years later, the idea of leaving the industry seemed like a fun experiment. A friend of mine offered me a business development job working for CBRE on a Minneapolis tenant rep team.

This was a very different world for me. I sometimes say that I left brokerage because I do not look like a broker, act like a broker, or drink enough to be a broker. As much as I joke, not looking or acting like a broker was a huge advantage. My team was comprised of one male and one female, in their late 30s. We took a different approach. Our focus was the younger generation of CEO's that was looking for new ideas and innovation to solve their needs.

Two years later, I was pregnant with my first child and trying to imagine what my life would be like in the future. If I stayed in real estate, I would never be home for bedtime. I knew that if I went back to a dealership, I'd be working 24/7 because I couldn't turn down an opportunity. In 2017, our oldest was born and within two hours of his birth I remember saying to my husband “I am totally changed.” I was always the woman who thought there was not a difference between men and women.

I thought children would fit into my life, not that I would change my life for them. It was like biology had just slapped me awake and I was betrayed by feminism. Why had I spent so much time thinking about equality instead of embracing our differences—and celebrating them?

To brainstorm my future options, I called on past and present mentors. One of them invited me over to talk while his wife held my son. At that moment, I was so relaxed knowing that they understood me and what I was going through. Not just as a mom, but as a woman who wanted to put her talents to work but on her own terms. I also called on a small group of friends from outside the industry and asked their perceptions on my abilities. The biggest question that I had to answer for myself was: “what affirms me?”

Within a week, I had decided to start a business that focuses on helping dealers adopt Configura's CET Designer. I flew to Grand Rapids, with my breast pump in my backpack, to meet with old friends and start laying out my plans. I never once struggled with confidence in my career. But for whatever reason, working for myself, for the first time, had me second guessing my decision. In the beginning, I started small. Listened to everyone's advice and tried to plan a week at a time. This month marks three years in business. I'm thankful to the incredible community that has supported and encouraged me. My business continues to evolve and only 20% of it looks like I initially planned. One thing is steady; for the first time in my life, I feel that we have a balance that works for my business and our family.



ALEXANDRA TSEFFOS

Founder of Silent T Consulting, Alexandra Tseffos is passionate about the Contract Design industry. She helps furniture manufacturers and dealerships in the adoption of CET Designer. Traditionally, adoption of CET Designer only impacts the designer. she believe management, sales, design should all be involved in the process together to achieve true success!

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**Celebrating the Art of Craftsmanship
With Watson**

Watson Orchard Woodshop-Hand Finished

Watson's story dates back to the early 1960s, when a South African-born cabinetmaker and metalworker named Grahame Watson set up shop on Bainbridge Island near our present-day home in Poulsbo, Washington. Twenty-five years later, Grahame handed the keys to a partnership led by Bill Haggerty, Daniel Warn, and Clif McKenzie, whose leadership stemmed more from custodianship than ownership. These days, we continue to honor Grahame's vertical integration model but have developed a continuation strategy to ensure long-term stability for the hardworking men and women who form the backbone of Watson. We employ some of the finest tooling and equipment in the world, but without the skilled and capable people running & programming them, the equipment is trivial.

There's dignity in working with your hands.

Making beautiful things is immensely satisfying. We all feel it at Watson, whether we're designing, building, marketing, or shipping furniture. There's something very special about contributing to a process that results in tangible products made with care and respect. Equally true for those of us in innovation, sales, and support roles as it is for those of us on the factory floor. In addition to creating beautiful things, Watson is creating jobs. Jobs for people who want what a lot of workers don't

have: the pride that comes with craftsmanship. That's what building and manufacturing can do. That's why we do this.

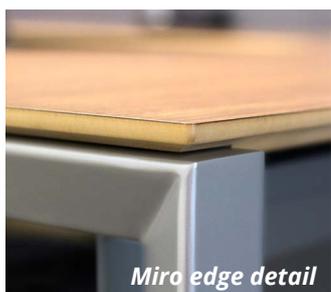
Built respectfully.

We build our furniture from scratch, which means we can demand a higher quality of materials. Our location in the Pacific Northwest gives us access to some of the best timber in the world and we carefully choose engineered wood boards that have no added formaldehyde. Many of our products are built using these boards which means that the men and women cutting, sanding, and laminating them are safe from the toxic properties of the formaldehyde used in many wood adhesives. We only work with polypropylene edge banding but encourage the use of our hand finished exposed edge option. This eliminates additional material and celebrates the quality of the wood we use. Built respectfully has many meanings at Watson. It encompasses our belief that materials matter and building furniture to be durable is important for its longevity and subsequent impact on the environment. On top of that, it means having the utmost quality in our craftsmanship and providing more than a living wage to our employees who are at the core of making truly remarkable furniture.



Miro

Everything we do at Watson is rooted in soulful design. Design that is guided first by the functional needs of our clients. Design that is refined to achieve a timeless and understated beauty that doesn't scream "look at me." Design that is executed respectfully, uses honest materials, and delivers deeply satisfying quality.



Miro best expresses our commitment to our design ethos. It's the genesis where cutting edge technology meets hand-craftsmanship. Miro was introduced in 2007 and remains one of our best-selling product families. The collection artfully demonstrates Watson's fluency in blending environmentally friendly materials and celebrates our expertise in steel fabrication through its timeliness design, intricate details, and support structure which delivers superior strength and durability.

Miro's work surface is highlighted by a custom-profiled CNC-cut edge that exposes the MDF substrate and is hand-finished with either a water-based clear coat or stain. The custom profiled top floats above a robust base formed by Miro's distinguished triangular steel tube leg, made of 14-gauge, cold-rolled steel. The table frame is constructed of mitered corners and fully welded to create the iconic design detail that makes the Miro leg a classic.

Every Miro leg is hand mitered, welded, ground before it leaves our dock. Watson purposefully TIG welds Miro bases. TIG welding is a slow, skilled process that yields an incredibly strong precision joint when performed by expert hands. TIG uses long welding rods, gradually fed into the joint to create the arc. The process requires two hands to complete - one hand to hold the welding torch while the other hand deliberately feeds the filler metal to the weld joint. Because two hands are required to weld, TIG welding is considered to be the most difficult style to learn and execute. It's time-consuming but gives the welder more control over the final product. The miter detail on Miro is so exceptional that we encourage the use of clearcoat finish on the steel, so the true craftsmanship is visible for everyone to see.

Exceedingly balanced and well proportioned, Miro has it all, and tells our story of precision steel craft in a refined and elegant way. We believe that when you choose any Watson product, you're getting something we're proud of. Something we've extensively tested ourselves. Something that didn't roll off an anonymous assembly line, but something that has a history. You come to Watson because you're inspired by design, but you stay because of our story, attention to detail, passionate people, unmatched experience, and because we're not afraid to pull back the covers and show you what makes us Watson.

watson

Aerie



VERSTEEL



BY VERA REINKE

We organized a virtual interview with Sheri Mleynek and Kyoungmee "Kate" Byun, both Assistant Professors, in the Interior Design program at Northern Arizona University. Sheri shared sage advice about her career and what she wants students to take away and Kate shares what influenced her to pursue interior design, what she does to develop herself and keeping up with technology. They also gave us insight in how they use MRL at Northern Arizona University.

Sheri shares...

In speaking to her younger self she would, advise herself to face fears and look at them as an adventure. Be proactive, jump in and get things done!

In speaking to her students, she emphasizes to learn to be excellent listeners and to be attentive in everything they partake. Be present with your mind and the creativity will follow. Do not be fearful of what you cannot do, know that you are here to learn and to practice being your best.

When it comes to work and challenges that can arise, Sheri offered this wise guidance:

1. When working on construction sites, show confidence in your design work.
2. You will often work with seasoned contractors and tradesmen; it is important to believe in your work and voice confidence with these experts who help to execute all design work.
3. Confidence grows with experience.

Sheri realized this about repeat clients...."As the years rolled by in my professional practice, I began to realize that my return clients were absolutely some of my favorite projects. At a young age I did not realize that clients would come back with more design work. I now share this with my students about how important it is to nurture your client relationships because twenty or so years later they may become your clients again. The images attached show a home I designed in the mid 90's and then working with the same client a larger home that we completed in 2019. Both experiences were rewarding and special."

Kate shared a moment in her life that influenced her to pursue interior design, how she develops herself outside of work, how she keeps up with fast paced technology, and a proud portfolio piece.

The time after graduation from the architecture program in South Korea, she focused on the superficial appearance of the

EDUCATOR FEATURE HIGHLIGHT

building itself to create a unique design but did not consider how people feel and think in indoor spaces of the building. When she realized that she would like to design a space for people to stay, live, and socialize, she decided to study interior design regarding human behavior and perception of indoor spaces.

To develop herself outside of her work environment Kate enjoys traveling to experience different cultures, explore new spaces, observe people, appreciate nature, and learn history. It fulfills her thirst for design and helps her to broaden her perspectives.

To keep up with ever changing technology Kate is an active member of several professional organizations such as International Interior Design Association (IIDA), College Art Association of America (CAA), Interior Design Educator Council (IDEC), and Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA). By participating in conferences and attending continuing education units, she is able to learn new technologies and discuss innovative ways of teaching, research, and design.

One piece in Kate's portfolio she is most proud of is the Smart Home in Louisville for CNET. Which is an editorial entity that covers technology news, trends, and products. She was the main designer with four undergraduate interns to create a creative design for a home life in which technology is intergraded, while presenting a clean, modern, and bright environment. The challenge was to transform the Smart Home as a backdrop to technology, with a creative ambiance that considers a full-home experience, an expansive 16-acre yard with a pool, and an interest in sustainability and environmentally friendly features.



How Northern Arizona University Uses MRL.

Sheri and Kate are both newer users to My Resource Library and are impressed with MRL's ability to help their students research in one convenient location, all the products they would need for a class assignment or a real world project.

Sheri was intrigued and started utilizing MRL in her class as a new online source for products. She quickly learned that this is an incredible resource for design projects. In her Senior Studio she changed an assignment to incorporate MRL into their healthcare senior project. She wanted her students to have the experience of using MRL as a research tool and in a realistic way of collecting current information about the selected products from style, sustainability, manufacture contact, and all the additional important information. Sheri found that using MRL is a skill that her students can bring with them in their professional careers.

Kate said in the past, it was challenging to get updated resources for students at the university located in a rural campus town, not a metropolitan area. After using MRL this challenge has been removed; it is helpful for students to get updated resources and their information, connections with specialists, and manage their own repository.

FUN FACTS

Every semester Sheri shares with her students a Ted Talk that inspired her. The Ted Talk is with Shawn Achor, author of the Happiness Advantage. His 12-minute talk captured her interest, and she often listens and share it with her students every semester. The message of practicing being grateful leads to inner happiness makes good sense to her and is a wonderful message to share.

Kate shared a book that changed her life. Space and Place: The perspective of experience by Yi-Fu Tuan. It inspired her a lot to understand space and place especially the difference between the two. She strongly recommends this book for those of you who are very interested in designing space and place for a human.



Sheri Mleynek

Sheri graduated from Northern Arizona University in 1985 and after graduation she focused on developing a small design firm in Sedona, Arizona, specializing in fine custom home design and providing interior design services. Her background is in hand drawing and drafting, it gave her a solid footing for pursuing a career in interior design. She feels that one of the positive effects in coming from a professional practice, is that she has been able to bring in guest speakers from her career into her class studios. She has also had the pleasure of taking students on local architecture home tours to enhance their learning. Sheri enjoys sharing her career experience with her students and finds that as every semester passes it is increasingly rewarding and fulfilling, especially since she takes an active role in her students' growth and expanding their design talents.



Kate Byun

Kyoungmee "Kate" Byun received her B. Arch. in South Korea, M.F.A. in Interior Design from Iowa State University, and has started been teaching college-level students since 2011. Kate is interested in exploring human perception and behavior towards physical settings of interiors and proposing design applications and considerations in interior design and design-related fields for the quality indoor environment.



BY KIM WOODS

Sickler Inc is a manufacturer representative firm committed to marketing and selling commercial furnishings through dealers and wholesalers to businesses, hospitals, schools, and hospitality industries in Illinois, Wisconsin and Northwest Indiana. Sickler Inc strives to meet or exceed sales and marketing goals by providing world class professional service to sales and service professionals, direct marketers, architects, designers, specifiers and wholesale distributors. We hope you enjoy the discussion!

Q: Tell us a little bit about how Sickler Organization got started?

A: *(Steve Sickler)* I was a biology and finance major at Seton Hall University when Uncle Jack (Jack C. Smith) offered me a job. He represented both office supplies and office furniture lines in Chicago and taught me how to run a successful rep firm. During the 1983 recession Jack had too many on the payroll for the revenue stream, so I struck out on my own. I started Sickler Organization with Hayes Manufacturing, Jasper Table Company, Flex-Y-Plan, and La-Z-Boy Contract signed us on in October 1984. La-Z-Boy has been a major part of our success story. Barbara Krech and I have represented them for over 36 years now. I'm not sure who keeps the industry records, but an independent rep's 30-day term contract for 36 years must be some sort of industry record, no?

Q: How has the company changed over the years?

A: *(Steve Sickler)* We have reinvented ourselves as the industry has changed. Business furniture used to have two categories: budget & contract. In the early 90's midgrade became the hot

furniture category, and La-Z-Boy Contract was its leader. This was our first major strategy change. I took the company from a dealer-focused sole salesperson to a multi-person firm with a focus on architects and designers. Barbara Krech



joined Sickler Organization in 1986. Her textile design background added depth in both dealer relationships and A&D relationships – one of our strengths that continues today.

Import furniture came next, upsetting the budget and midmarket categories and its distribution. The Big Box stores and import furniture gobbled up a percentage of budget and midmarket furniture sold. Sickler Organization needed a new strategy and purposely focused on healthcare in the early 2000's. We're very happy we did!

Q: What do you think is the secret to the Sickler Organization's longevity and success?

A: (Steve Sickler) Hah! Like any successful firm, its people. We've been fortunate to have several very talented associates as part of the Sickler team over the years. Some moved on to form their own top-tier rep groups. One even started his own iconic manufacturing company. Barbara and I strive for an open work environment with minimal oversight. We believe that if you have to micromanage staff, you've hired the wrong people. We've also formed an alliance with another rep group in a part of our territory, who represents all our lines in addition to their own. They find the opportunities, but our inside staff does most of the quoting and sales support. Our combined strengths are used to advantage. It is a great relationship.

I credit our longevity in part to a conversation I had long ago with sailing buddy who was the COO of a multinational insurance company. I asked how he managed tens of thousands of employees and billions of dollars of revenue. He said, "If you report to me, I have to know that each morning when you wake up, that you know the direction the company is going, and that you have my back. If I doubt it, I don't care how good a job you've done, you have to go." This notion changed the way I related with manufacturers. Reps must act as if the line we represent is our own company. We need to be concerned with more than sales volume. We need to consider reputation and profitability. We need to align with quality distribution. We need to provide customer service that competes with the major manufacturers. Perhaps we should drop the word "independent" from our rep description. Maybe "field partner" would better describe how the Sickler Organization operates. It's not easy to manage a successful manufacturing company, and reps need to embrace accountability as part of the package.

A: (Barbara Krech) Do what you say you are going to do. Practice random acts of kindness. Be helpful. Respect you are part of the project recipe, even if you are the ½ tsp water.

Q: What makes you most excited about working in the contract design industry?

A: (Steve Sickler) I love the constant changes; it keeps it interesting. The blends of fashion and functionality are unique. I like that - compared to other industries - contract furniture is smaller, friendlier and less ruthless. We even have family-owned manufacturers!

A: (Barbara Krech) The people! We have made so many lifelong friends and have had so much fun. Working on projects with design and dealer partners requires trust and respect. No surprise, the same ingredients of friendship!

Q: How do you think your group will evolve over the next 5-10 years?

A: (Steve Sickler) Our largest evolution will no doubt be in the immediate future as we exit the COVID economy. How we go to market has changed. Our most recent hire is a social media specialist. Over the past year, cloud-disseminated media was THE way we communicated. Period. We now consider our social media specialist as our key marketing person, replacing the in-person presentations with PowerPoints and printed brochures around a conference table. Binder updates have been replaced with My Resource Library. Looking forward, cloud marketing will give us more time to focus on training and on closing sales opportunities in person. We need to figure out how to better market to dealers and A&D via the cloud, to grow our success. Though in spite of a shift to digital, there will be a strong desire for human interaction after a year of isolation!

A: (Barbara Krech) Clients still need to see some of the furniture solutions they've researched and we've presented. One wants to drive the car before buying it. We have warehoused in 2000 square feet of racked space, hundreds of furniture samples. We have 5 manufacturers with showrooms in the Merchandise Mart. This will go a long way in turning our cloud efforts into projects.

Q: If you could use just one word to describe Sickler what would it be?

A: (Steve Sickler) Established. Sickler Organization had a strong sales year in 2020 with sales that matched 2019 despite the challenges of shutdowns and fewer in-person sales calls. One reason is our healthcare focus and the long processing times of healthcare projects. A significant advantage is our deep relationships with other established dealer salespeople and A&D designers. It's just easier for those successful professionals to reach out to people they trust the most. Pros reach out to established firms. I can't imagine being new to the industry and easily establishing new relationships and introducing new products in 2020.



A CHALLENGE TO UPGRADE FROM "BLEACH CLEANABLE"

By Misti Yeager

Today I'm going to challenge you to think differently, ask within your own environment, and understand the choices you have when it comes to toxic chemicals. There is momentum around sustainability in our industry that we can capitalize on: understanding how and what we must do to create quality products that do not harm environmental or human health. We can use

"...BLEACH IS THE #1 CAUSE OF ACCIDENTAL POISONINGS WITH MORE THAN 50K CASES (INCLUDING 8 DEATHS) REPORTED TO POISON CONTROL CENTERS IN A SINGLE YEAR"

this momentum to understand cleaning chemicals in general, what our options are, and remove outdated terms like "bleach cleanable" as a phrase that means "safe" or "clean."

I work for GMi Companies and we just launched an incredible fabric we are very proud of and are marketing as "bleach cleanable". We are a company who has a "Green Team" devoted to implementing sustainable changes and are actively pursuing the reduction of our carbon footprint. I do not think we are trying to contribute to the toxins of the world, but rather keep up with the industry as this phrase and practice of testing is common and understood systemically. We, like you, want to be a part of innovative solutions and contribute towards a safer environment. Our intention is to challenge the industry to think differently about supporting the "bleach cleanable" phrase and cleaning practice. What can we do together to innovate?

"...IF BLEACH IS NOT ALLOWED IN HOSPITALS THROUGHOUT AN ENTIRE COUNTRY, COULD WE POSSIBLY RECONSIDER THE WAY WE TEST DURABILITY OF FABRICS AND CLEAN MATERIALS AND PRODUCTS?"

My first few months into working for GMi I heard the phrase "bleach cleanable" about 5942 times, certainly no less. The question came up in product development meetings and pretty much every other meeting, "Is this bleach cleanable?" In one such meeting, I leaned over to my boss and whispered, "Why are we still using bleach?" She looked at me oddly and said, "COVID". My eloquent response, "Huh?" And now here we are, having the much broader discussion of why bleach cleanable is still a widely used phrase in our industry.

It's no surprise to anyone that bleach is corrosive to the eyes, skin, and is known to be a respiratory irritant and asthma exacerbator. Wait! Let's not forget, it is an actual killer as well (fun side note, you can go down a serious rabbit hole googling "bleach as a killer" - there are many folks in jail for using it as their weapon of choice, but I will leave you to this on your own time, this is my article and metaphorical soap box, so back to business we go). We've long known of the negative, and sometimes fatal, side effects of bleach, and apparently there can't be too many reminders that bleach is indeed a poison. In fact, bleach is the number one cause of accidental poisonings with more than 50K cases (including 8 deaths) reported to poison control centers in a single year. Why, then, may I ask, are we still giving it preferential treatment when there are other products that are equally as effective and not as harsh?

The answer to this question may vary. It could be that we are comfortable with this solution as it is the same one we've been using for years and "that's the way we've always done it". We all know that way of thinking is SUPER progressive <insert eye roll>. Perhaps it is because we simply have not been exposed to other cleaners? Which is completely valid and probably often the case. Or maybe we feel a connection to the odor and thus the bleach scent is the cue that we are safe or clean from germs. There is some psychology behind the safety one feels when their surroundings emit the, what was once a chemical sting to the nostrils, but now is simply: clean. Safely cleaned. The narrative is that the clean scent produces comfort, relieves anxiety and provides confidence in your surroundings. It is exalted as trust-bearing. But lest I remind you, the true scent of clean is actually no scent

at all. I do not want to be remiss to one of the main purposes of "bleach cleanable": to prove that a fabric can uphold various standards of durability, resistance, and strength. I want to propose this question: is there a way to test this strength without risking our health or contributing to the poisonous food chain?

Did you know that in the UK hospitals have banned the use of bleach? Now that we are living in a post-COVID world, businesses are being required to raise their standards of cleanliness. And the healthcare standard is seeping into all areas of our lives, whether we like it or not. So, let's be curious for a moment, if bleach is not allowed in hospitals throughout an entire country, could we possibly reconsider the way we test durability of fabrics and clean materials and products?

As the world has undergone a microscope for overall purity, now would be a good time to explore why we're still married to bleach and its harmful effects. I know, I know, we've all stayed in a relationship at some point or another longer than we should have, even though we knew we deserved better. How about we cut out the years of therapy and agony and jump to living our best lives? (I think I'm still talking about bleach here...?)

I'd like to propose the thought that it is our civic duty to raise the standard in responsible manufacturing. We should all have a vested interest in safeguarding natural systems and utilizing eco-friendly products. Environmentally friendly companies have greater productivity, reap advantages over competition, boost employee morale, and benefit from tax breaks. Taking on this "green" initiative can be daunting and usually requires a team to implement lasting changes. In my next article I will provide alternative options from various vendors to offer solutions toward safer practices. Today I am only here to discuss making one change: think differently about using bleach and other poisonous disinfecting solutions. I am here to ask you to do some research into alternative products that align with you and your company's values. And to ask you to raise the industry standard, to think of a new term or phrase, I certainly can propose some, but we as an industry need to decide: what will our future "bleach cleanable" phrase be?



Misti Yeager

Misti is a Western Regional Sales Manager for GMi Companies – an Ohio based visual communications manufacturer. She has over 15 accomplished years in sales and previously held senior roles with Staples and Office Depot. She passionately pursues health and overall well-being in her personal and professional life. A happy and healthy person is more productive!



We are about giving everyone the Clarus Experience™ — going above and beyond to make sure our customers have the best quality product on the market. What does going above and beyond look like? It looks like designing hardware to better the installation process for installers. It looks like innovating new products to keep people safe during a global pandemic. It looks like adjusting our pricing to fit the needs of our customers best. The list goes on and on. When you sign up for Clarus, you sign up for more than just glass boards. You sign up for the Clarus Experience.

Glass boards come in every shape and size. Some customers want to go beyond the everyday rectangular glass board to create an even more unique writing surface — and that's when they come to Clarus. Our ability to break the mold and produce unique, beautiful products sets us apart from the rest. Clarus has multiple, state-of-the-art glass cutting machines (CNC) whose only job is to cut glass into uniquely shaped glass boards. Over the years, Clarus has made glass boards in the shape of chat bubbles, surfboards, skulls, animals, and more. With the most intricately engineered technology in the industry, your Clarus glass board can be almost any shape you imagine.

At Clarus, we do color better than anyone else. With over a decade of experience under our belts, Clarus has curated more than 150 standard colors in our Colors by Clarus (CBC) library — including more



CELEBRATING CRAFTSMANSHIP



than 40 neutral tones. Beyond the standard CBCs, Clarus has also formulated more than 2,000 custom colors for our customers over the years. If you can imagine it, Clarus can curate your paint color.

Our paint has been specifically engineered to make your colors pop. Since each color formula is unique and individually mixed, we can custom match any color, even outside of our standard CBC library. With proprietary formulas and infinite color-creating ability, our paint process is truly state-of-the-art. Before the painting process begins, we apply a proprietary coating that promotes adhesion to the back of the glass, creating a permanent bond between the glass and paint. After years of perfecting our painting process, the bond between Clarus paint and glass sets the industry standard for adhesion, withstanding more than 6,500 pounds of sheer force.

Clarus paints offer limitless customization while protecting the environment. Our paints have been tested for VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds) — and our VOC levels are so low (zero, to be exact), our glass boards achieved an Indoor Advantage Gold certification and quality to be included on LEED, WELL, BREEAM, and many other green building projects.

Clarus also offers a high-resolution, direct-to-glass printing technology called ColorDrop™. Clarus allows you to print colorful images, graphics, and charts directly onto any glass board. The biggest difference between Clarus and the competition is our color gamut — we print the largest array of colors available, and it's guaranteed never to fade or discolor.

Our specialized team applies a proprietary coating that promotes adhesion to each glass board before running through our UV flatbed printer. No matter the shape or size of the glass board or the print request's detail, Clarus prints high-resolution images every time. ColorDrop is the most advanced printing technology in the industry.

The Clarus design team invents new ways to use the most basic written communication form in the most modern ways. The walls of offices are steadily coming down to create open spaces with fewer walls and more personal interactions. Whether it's wall-mounted, on

wheels, attached to a workstation, or sliding across the wall, Clarus' glass boards maximize existing space and provide hundreds of square feet of beautiful, writable glass.

As the glass board industry leaders, we are initiating a revolution — changing the way manufacturers serve customers and emphasizing how every detail of production, customization, and installation establishes the value of our brand. The award-winning Clarus brand challenges the interior design industry to create products that ignite imagination, creativity, and teamwork in every interaction.

Aside from the everyday products, Clarus had the opportunity to partner with Interior Design Magazine during the pandemic in October of 2020 to create the annual Best of Year awards. Although the awards ceremony took place in a virtual format, Editor and Chief Cindy Allen wanted to make sure the winners still received a physical token of recognition. The Clarus team met virtually with Allen and got to work leveraging our design expertise and cutting-edge technologies to create 2020's unique trophy. It was truly a one-of-a-kind experience in creating the award and envisioning how the award recipients received such a work of art.

Clarus is known for pushing the boundaries of innovation. As a repeat winner of the architecture and design industry's top innovation awards, Clarus' modern and minimalist dry-erase solutions have visually transformed strategic interpersonal communication. From day one to now — Clarus has spent many years inspiring all to see writing surfaces as a centerpiece of design. Clarus is more than just glass boards — it's innovation; it's collaboration; it's the power of a brand.

clarus⁷

KEEPING CONNECTED

With the challenges that 2020 brought, it is more important than ever to "Keep Connected" to our clients, friends and colleagues. We have been simply inspired by all of the innovative ways our Rep Group friends have found to do just that! The pandemic hasn't slowed them down one bit, and relationships are still at the center of their strategy.

In the "Keeping Connected" section of Delve Magazine, we will highlight inspirational snapshots of what our Rep Group partners are up to, and how they are finding innovative ways to stay connected to their clients.

We hope you enjoy this new feature, and are inspired as much as we are!



Cronan & Associates Chat With Customers

Cronan & Associates, representing La-Z-Boy Healthcare/KNU in North Texas and Oklahoma, ran their mobile showroom through Central and East Texas last week. The trip was focused on healthcare facilities, and showing those customers the latest healthcare furniture offering from La-Z-Boy/Knu.

**KEEPING
CONNECTED**



*Cronan & Associates Inside
The Traveling Roadshow*



**It's a traveling
roadshow!**

Cronan & Associates Inside



*Allyn Rae Group On
The Road*



*Allyn Rae Group On
The Road*

**She fit this all
in her car?**

Allyn Rae Group Write Up

With Florida, particularly south Florida having such high Covid 19 rates for over a year now I needed to figure out how to do business despite a pandemic. Thankfully we're beginning to hear more and more people getting vaccinated but they're still not ready to see reps in their offices. We thought about renting indoor venues but we felt everyone might still have fears of exposure. Then we thought about a single outdoor space but realized most people aren't conveniently located to any one location. So we opted to create a traveling road show, bringing each of our product lines to 12 offices in 3 days.

Products and Companies Represented:

**Allyn Rae Group
(Maureen Allyn)**

- Arcadia
- Bendheim
- Boss Design
- Clarus
- Clear Design
- David Edward
- Encore

- LDI Interiors
- Nuans Design
- Soelberg
- Trinity Furniture
- Versteel

- Anzea
- Design Mix

Gerflor (Christine Galanopoulos)

- Gerflor

**CF Stinson
(Amy Carpenter)**

- CF Stinson

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