

Boutique Showrooms and Design Centers:

KITCHENS OF THE COMMUNITY

BY BRETT WILLIAMS

WHAT THE KITCHEN IS TO THE HOME, BOUTIQUE SHOWROOMS AND DESIGN CENTERS ARE TO THE COMMUNITIES in which they exist: a meeting ground, a forum for discussion of new ideas and trends, a center of influence and a place that fuels the interior design industry. **Barclay Butera** is a pioneer and prime example in this area, and starting his showroom concept 25 years ago, he adapted his vision to be a strong resource for the design trade as well as a platform for charitable ventures. "It's a very successful model for us," says Butera, "we're not just known as an interior design firm or showroom, but an active member of the community."

“Boutique showrooms have the unique ability to not only focus on national design trends, but also measure and dictate regional or community-level trends.”



BARCLAY BUTERA

Photography Credit: Eppig Photography



WORKSPACE AT SCHWARTZ DESIGN SHOWROOM

Photography Credit: Neil Lantieri Photography

Boutique showrooms and design centers are becoming increasingly popular and strong client relationships are key to their success and proliferation. Whether the showroom serves the trade only or works directly with consumers, their business philosophy emphasizes lasting relationships and their size and structure is well-suited to serving the client in a comprehensive, empirical way. Established in 1971 and with a fashion-forward approach to carpets, **Designer Rugs & Carpet by Peykar** builds alliances with their trade clients and caters to each by "giving extra discounts, extra service and supporting them so they can serve their clients best."

As a result of these partnerships, many showrooms and design centers have a vested interest in the interior designers with whom they work and feel a shared responsibility to educate the end consumer about both the value and process of design. **Amy Manor of New Jersey's Red Bank Design Center** provides "a collaborative workspace for the design community and their clients... resources include: work space, [materials] library, back-office support and access to vendors, designers, builders, architects and homeowners." Manor works tirelessly to bring visibility to the value of the designer and often takes on projects and hosts events in line with this effort.



Complete Tile Collection focuses on presenting the tile itself in an "objective, yet detailed and organized fashion."

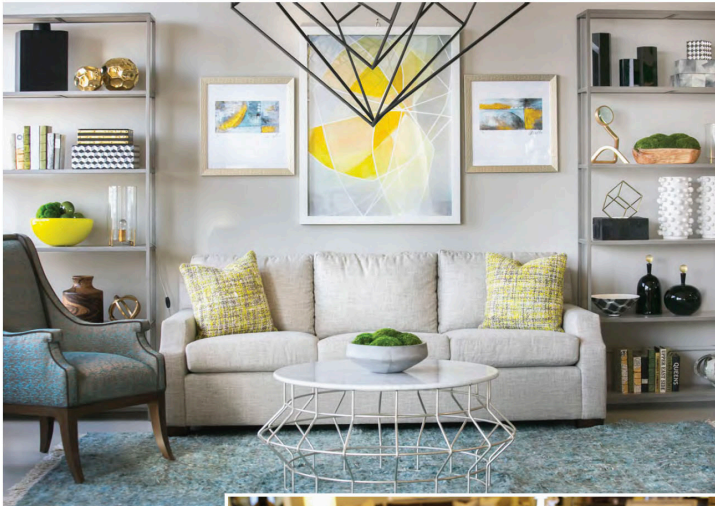


Photography Credit: Red Bank Design Center

RED BANK DESIGN CENTER

Boutique showrooms also have the unique ability to not only focus on national design trends, but also measure and dictate regional or community-level trends. In other words, they are influencers in the design community and serve as constantly updated, curated materials libraries. **Complete Tile Collection**, with showrooms in both New York and New Jersey, houses one of the largest collections of tile and stone in the world and "[designers] love our on-demand sample library, which allows [them] to leave with all the tile samples they need... with minimal waiting time," says Judy Yun, Marketing Manager.

Complete Tile also gears the presentation of materials toward designers: rather than putting together kitchen or bathroom vignettes, they focus on presenting the tile itself in an "objective, yet detailed and organized fashion."



Photography Credit: Neil Landrock Photography

TOP: SCHWARTZ DESIGN SHOWROOM,
RIGHT: ALEXIS VARBERO, PRESIDENT OF
SCHWARTZ DESIGN SHOWROOM

Wostbrock Home, a full-service interior design resource and retail store in New Jersey, serves consumers directly but also caters specifically to interior designers through, among other things, a loan program for artwork, furnishings and accessories; each piece can be viewed in the space prior to purchase.

Decades ago, part of the value of a designer was to open doors to products that were out of reach to everyday consumers, and while this remains true to some extent, consumers today are "digitally" flooded with product. The value of the designer or showroom today is more about filtering and curating. Melissa Fenigstein at **The Final Touch** – a complete resource for design professionals on New York's Long Island – understands this well, "consumers are very design savvy . . . I believe this makes the process both challenging and,



in the end, more gratifying as we help them realize their vision."

It is worth exploring the financial opportunities in working with design centers and showrooms; as it were, economies of scale. Many of the home furnishings brands work on a tiered pricing system and, in simple terms, the more volume the higher the tier (designer, non-stocking dealer, stocking dealer) and the lower the price. In theory, rather than each designer holding a relationship with the brand themselves, if designers collectively pool their orders through design centers a better pricing tier can be achieved – and both parties can leverage the cost savings. In addition, the showroom or design center can "provide end-to-end expertise and support, from research through delivery and follow-up on customer service," says Alexis Varbero, President of **Schwartz Design Showroom** – a family-run design destination in business for 75 years.



Photography Credit: Dominique Rollins

BIJOU COVERINGS

Visiting a boutique showroom is much more than just a local shopping trip; it is the start of a relationship, dialogue and support system to help push creativity and bring value to the design process. Jason Kaen is owner of **Bijou Coverings**, a producer and importer of wall coverings and textiles in Syosset, New York, and his approach is indicative of this mindset. Kaen works hand-in-hand with the creative minds of the interior design world, and he notices that "each and every day the sky's the limit in this industry!" ■



Photography Credit: Jennifer McEraw

