

# delve

FEBRUARY 2021 V11

## Loving What You Do

Why Design Is A Dream  
Career For The Right Person

Healthcare Design  
Spotlight

## Our Love Letter To The Contract Furniture Industry

Voices From Across The Industry Tell  
Their Stories



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**LOVING WHAT  
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Susan Mulholland discusses why commercial interior design can be a dream job for the right person.



**OTTLITE INTRODUCES  
NEW LINE**

OttLite introduces a new line of sanitizing desk lamps designed for maximum functionality in all settings.



**OUR LOVE LETTER  
TO THE INDUSTRY**

Voices from across the industry tell their stories about why they love the Contract Design/Furniture Industry.

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## editor's note

Dear Reader,  
We are celebrating the month  
of February by focusing on why  
we love the Contract Furniture  
Industry!

We reached out across the in-  
dustry to get your stories about  
what makes the world of Con-  
tract Design so unique and fun  
to work in.

Some may have stumbled upon  
the Contract Industry while oth-  
ers were born into it. We have  
really enjoyed learning about all  
of these different perspectives  
and can't wait to share them  
with you.

We are highlighting those sto-  
ries as well as more from our  
special event library, Healthcare  
Design Spotlight.

We invite you to dive in!

Enjoy!

*Do you have an idea for an article in  
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# Loving What You Do

## Why Design Is A Dream Career For The Right Person

Not that long ago, I received a promotional gift from a manufacturer. Now, I know that anyone who has been to any trade show has gotten numerous pens, notebooks, and tote bags over the years from manufacturers who attend these shows. Most of these promo items are not actually worth keeping- But this gift was special. Not because of what it was, but because of the message. JSI sent out coffee mugs with their new marketing tagline- a simple but meaningful saying: "Love what You do." Printed on the front of the mug.

This message hit home for me for several reasons. First, because I have been working in the commercial interiors industry for almost 30 years and I often tell people that I can't imagine working in any other field- that I actually really do love what I do!

Let's face it; this is not always an easy industry to be a part of. This past year our world has been through hell, and our industry, in particular, has taken a big hit. Our clients' offices, hotels, restaurants, and retail spaces have been left almost empty. We have all been forced to live our lives online instead of in the public space we used to. For a business that is entirely focused on designing spaces for people, this seems particularly ironic and cruel.

Interior design and, most importantly, commercial interior design has had to adjust to this new idea of how we design our commercial spaces. For young designers just entering the profession, the work can be daunting and stressful. I often tell students that this is not a glamour business- it's a feast or famine industry, even without a pandemic.

I also tell students that not everyone is cut out to be interior designers, especially commercial interior designers. Our design title is often defined



### 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.](#)*

**INDUSTRY  
HOT TOPICS**

by what type of commercial space we design, and most of them are not glamorous. Facility managers, space planners, and even healthcare designers work in very different ways. Their design skills are unique because they are very specialized and complex. Their projects are not visually exciting unless you know what design problem they were trying to solve or the client they are working with.

Very few designers can say that they have worked in a variety of different market segments. Our world and our spaces have become so specialized that you sometimes get stuck in one particular type of design specialty, and that is where you stay-whether you really like it or not.

I have been lucky-I have worked in a variety of different types of commercial design. I have worked in workplace and healthcare, including senior living, hospitality, retail, education, government, and even industrial design, like warehouses and manufacturing. Not all of my projects are what I would call great examples of design excellence. I would even go as far as to say they are not worthy of having them professionally photographed for a design portfolio or competition. But they were projects that needed my insight, my design expertise, and my knowledge of space utilization, construction, color, finishes, and furnishings. The clients who hired me needed my help to create a space that they could feel comfortable in, a space that solved a problem, or simply a space that would work better for their customers and employees.

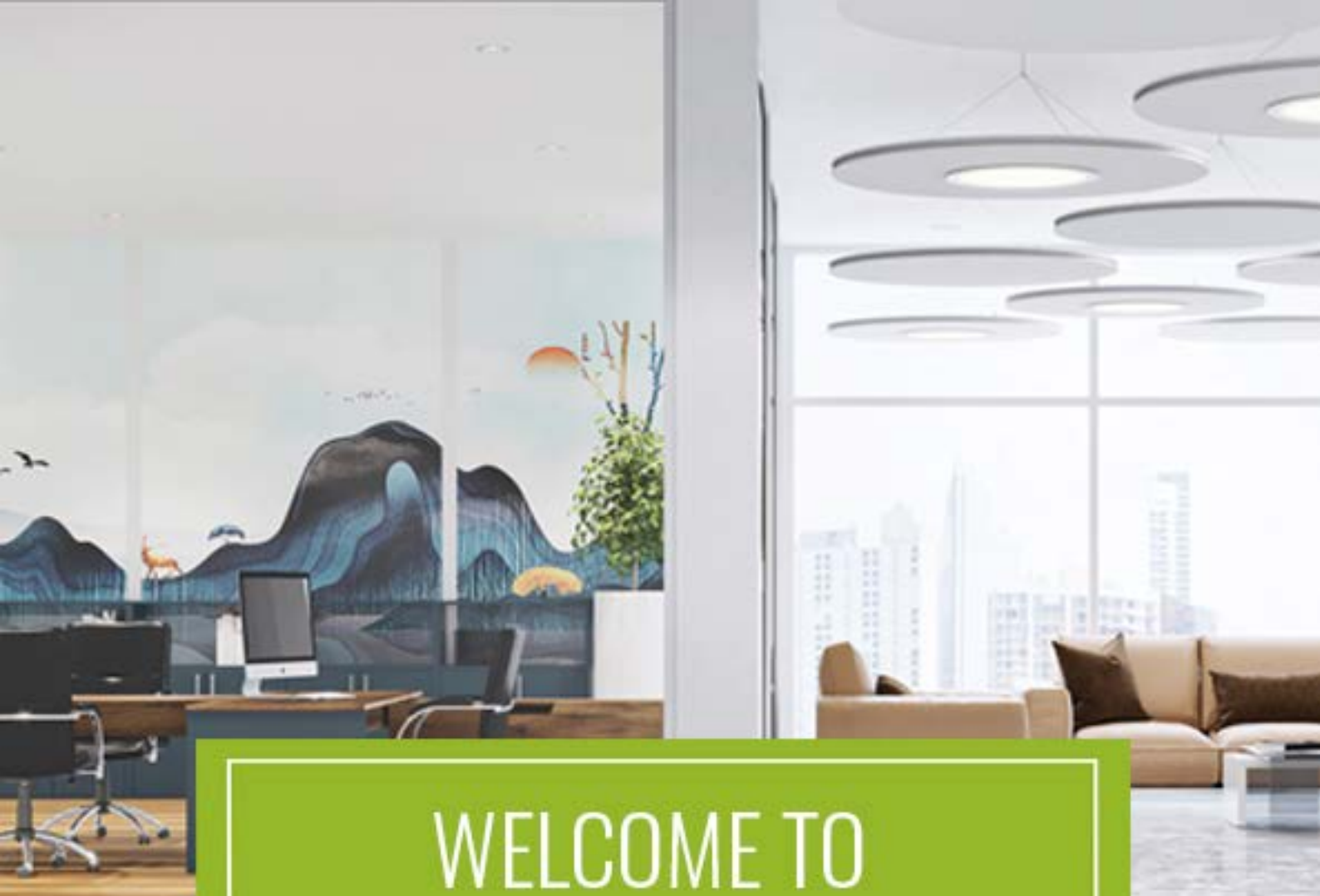
The commercial design industry is one of constant change; every space, no matter the market sector you specialize in, is al-

ways in need of some design innovation. To be a designer is to be someone who recognizes this. Our intent is to make spaces better than they are now.

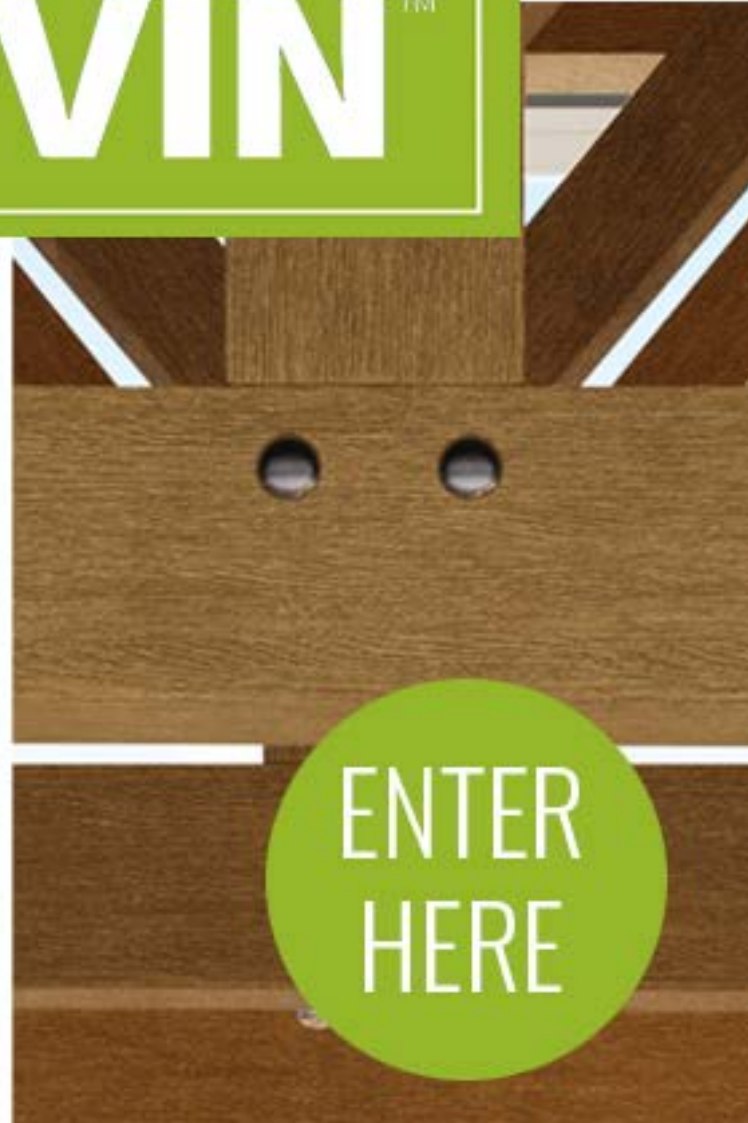
So, when we see that a manufacturer is working on a new chair, new textile, or finish material, we get excited about the possibilities. Color palettes, textures, and of course, patterns are the tools of our trade. We know that if you give us an empty room or an entire building we can turn it into anything as long as we have the right tools: a chair, a desk, a lamp, and a computer are just things required for most people to do their particular job, but not interior designers.

We are always looking for something new or unique to add to a project. Suppose you ask any professional designer about a project they are currently working on. In that case, they can always tell you that there is something they could do differently or better to make it spectacular! Our work is not what you see now but what you can't see yet. Our vision is all about the design process and the creative spark we get when we see an empty space. You can always tell a designer who actually loves what they do; they are always trying to find the perfect something that is missing, and if they can't find it, they often just design it themselves because that is what we do. We create outstanding design, we love our profession, and we want to share our vision of great design with the world. So my wish is that everyone, regardless of job title, can say the same-LOVE WHAT YOU DO because life is too short not to!





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ENTER  
HERE





# You'll Always Be Our Glue.

*The pandemic has been a true equalizer. It has ravaged most professions, affected all livelihoods, and maintained a global grip. And while the pain and loss over the last twelve months will take even longer to heal, we are strengthened by the profound effect the interiors industry has in society's recovery. **The built environment is the glue of the world, and Manning Group could not be prouder to be associated with it.***

**BY MANNING GROUP**

The last year has forced a great pause, a needed recalibration, and a reshuffling of priorities for humanity. As we approach Valentine's Day, a day reserved to celebrate love and gratitude for the things one cherishes most, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the industry that creates what civilizations need to both survive and prosper.

By 'industry,' we naturally refer to the collective talents that design, build, manufacturer and deliver space within buildings. Our collective industry continues to set the benchmark for collaboration in times of crises. The ways in which we respond to rapidly changing events, the ways we band together to support each other, and the ways in which we make spaces have meaning are to be commended.

In the most basic sense, a world without buildings is a world without stable shelter. The talents of our industry, however, create appropriately appointed interiors for buildings, stretching their purpose further to become respites for learning, working, healing, and innovating.

We are thankful that the design and construction fields were largely considered to be essential sectors throughout the pandemic. However, the fact that they remained operational over the last year has not gone without criticism. While most of our industry players were not frontline workers, there is something to be said for the very important roles each played into our overall recovery...

## INDUSTRY HOT TOPICS

- To the furniture manufacturers that converted factories to create PPE: we applaud you.
- To the interior designers who reconfigured floor plans so people could return to offices and schools: we thank you.
- To the furniture dealers that pivoted from specifying furniture to providing janitorial supplies: we respect you.
- And to our fellow installation peers around the country who were (and continue to be) the literal backbone and muscle of this great space metamorphosis: we appreciate you.

While we agree that conceptualizing and constructing space may not be critical in a pandemic, we strongly commit that it is essential. Hearing that new space is coming to life infers progress towards a better tomorrow. Seeing workers convert lines on paper to places with purpose confirms that our economy maintains a pulse. And experiencing new or reconfigured space provides both tangible and visual notions that hope is not foregone.

Both literally and figuratively, 'space' is what we need during a pandemic as it bonds us on many levels. It has this simple and innate ability to awaken, stir, and sometimes even rattle our minds, bodies, and souls. How surreal and awesome is it to be a part of the equation?!

### **We admire how our industry affects the mind:**

Together we create schools where children can learn both practical and social skills with classmates. We create office spaces where adults can earn a living and contribute to a worldly economy. We create laboratories and incubators where the brightest minds innovate and tap left and right brain thought processes.

### **We are proud of the ways our industry supports the body:**

As a rock-solid group we provide the spaces where the injured can seek treatment. We create comfortable and sensory-appropriate spaces for people to heal. We also provide the energetic and kinetic spaces that allow people to exercise and push their bodies to their limit.



### **We are humbled that our industry impacts the soul:**

We join forces to unveil spaces where people come to worship. We facilitate laughter and conversation through spaces that foster community and camaraderie. We shape spaces where memories are both born and recollected.

In a more direct way, we want to wrap this letter of affection to the industry with a gratuitous red bow. Your dedication to the built environment lets us consistently do what we love to do. It affords us the ability to work with the peers and partners that make us better humans. And most importantly, it allows us to contribute to a professional mission that makes tremendous changes and positive differences in the world.

We offer the sincerest thank you for continuously fostering opportunities to exercise and perfect our passion. The players that comprise our industry have always been, and will always be, essential.

And you will always be the glue in our world.



### **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.

*“Since joining MRL we have forged many new relationships with the 80,000 plus MRL users and appreciate the many opportunities to build our brand awareness.”*

— Rob Mayer  
President, Mayer Fabrics



## High-Performance Crypton® Fabrics

Using classic weaves and constructions, the **Crypton® Structures Collection** expands Mayer’s strong foundation of performance textures with the addition of patterns **Channel, Form, Function and Gatsby**.

- Crypton® with Antimicrobial Silver Ion Technology
- Crypton® Moisture Barrier
- Polyester
- Bleach Cleanable
- 100,000 Double Rubs
- GREENGUARD Gold Certified
- Exceeds ACT Standards
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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. Can you guess the theme?

## **FAVN**

FRITZ HANSEN

Derived from the Danish term for 'embrace', the Favn™ sofa is a design collaboration between designer Jaime Hayon and Fritz Hansen. Its open and rounded curves are intended to appeal and invite – the perfect setting for relaxation, work and everything in-between.



## **LIDO**

MARTIN BRATTRUD

Meet the Lido family, a flexible mix of seating and surface products designed to be open to interpretation. Lido's signature waistline creates a playful, buoyant shape that echoes the mobile nature of the series. Specify Lido as multiuse accent pieces. Or when a static floor plan is too rigid, let Lido anchor a space for ultimate versatility.



## **ACOUSTIC DOMO WALL TILE**

UNIKA VAEV

The full elegance of Stefan Borselius's Domo Wall concept is revealed when multiple panels are combined on one wall. A beautiful interplay of light and shadow then emerges from the meeting of their beveled edges. Sound absorbent filling is contained within square or rectangular wood framed panel components that are upholstered in numerous options.



## **BENNY**

MONTISA

A solid row of lockers can do double-duty as a counter-height bar or work area.

## **BEYOND UPHOLSTERED**

SOURCE INTERNATIONAL

Designed by Gemma Bernal Fully Upholstered, Tight upholstery with or without channel stitching. Solid wood tapered legs in standard wood finishes 4 star swivel base in polished aluminum.



## **STELLA**

HIGHTOWER

With a spacious seat and a playful shape, Stella is the perfect addition to any informal seating arrangement. The curved back provides support from all angles, while also offering a slight give, creating a comfortable place to relax, converse or focus.



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# OttLite Introduces Line of Sanitizing Desk Lamps

## Patented SpectraClean™ Technology First and Only Desk Lamps to Break Down Harmful Bacteria

OttLite Technologies, Inc., experts in healthy lighting, introduces the first and only line of sanitizing desk lamps with proven patented technology that safely breaks down harmful bacteria while working, creating a healthier space.

OttLite has partnered with Hubbell Lighting, a global leader in commercial, industrial, institutional and residential lighting, to retain the rights for the SpectraClean™ patented technology in desk lamps throughout North America.

Patented SpectraClean visible light disinfection technology is safe for eyes and skin and is blended with OttLite ClearSun® LEDs to create a clean, white light ideal for reading, working, studying, crafting and more.

Research\* has revealed that more than two thirds of office workers are at risk of sickness due to dirty desks. The average desk contains 400 times more germs than a toilet seat. \*\*Cell phones have been known to be covered in germs: 25,127 bacteria per square inch.

SpectraClean technology breaks down harmful microorganisms, including bacteria, fungus and mold, at the cellular level making them unable to reproduce and infect. OttLite's new desk lamp technology continuously sanitizes every time the light is turned on, including phones and laptops within the illuminated area. Antimicrobial disinfection through illumination is proven effective with proper dosage levels on pathogens suspended in air or attached to a variety of surfaces, materials and objects. SpectraClean resides outside the UV

**HEALTHCARE  
SPOTLIGHT  
OTTLITE**

spectrum and will not damage non-harmful plant and animal cells or degrade inanimate materials.

The Sanitizing Line includes four new feature-rich lamps in OttLite's expanded Wellness Series, ranging in price from \$49 to \$89. The lamp designs are packed with high-tech, convenient features like Qi wireless charging, touch dimming, flexible lamp neck design for re-directing light, digital clock/calendar, and USB ports for quickly charging devices.

"Right at their desktops, people can have the same Visible Light Disinfection technology used commercially in hospital sterilization and food production," said John Sheppard, CEO of OttLite. "During these times, we're all looking to stay safe, healthy and productive. Our new sanitizing line offers a simple change that can help make a big impact in people's lives and health."

"Hubbell Lighting Components is excited to extend its antimicrobial technology into areas of lighting beyond the existing portfolio of SpectraClean fixtures by partnering with OttLite for use in their innovative desk lamps," said David Early, brand manager for Hubbell Lighting Components. "We have significant expertise in developing custom lighting solutions for a wide variety of customers and this partnership is yet another example of how we can apply our industrial lighting market intelligence to incorporate SpectraClean into solutions for specific applications."

Hubbell Lighting, the parent company of Hubbell Lighting Components, has licensed the University of Strathclyde's High Intensity Narrow Spectrum ("HINS") lighting technology. There are many studies that prove the effectiveness of this technology. For example, the use of 405 nm light for environmental disinfection has undergone clinical evaluation in occupied patient isolation rooms in Glasgow Royal Infirmary, where it was used as a background lighting system to provide continuous disinfection of air and exposed surfaces in the presence of patients and staff. The results demonstrated a significantly greater reduction in levels of environmental contamination than was achievable by normal disinfection control methods alone.



*Thrive LED Sanitizing Desk Lamp With Clock*

The Sanitizing lamps also feature OttLite's ClearSun® LED technology which has been shown to reduce eyestrain by 51% and have the best Color Rendering Index (CRI) available to show colors with incredible accuracy.

Three out of four Americans suffer daily from eyestrain, but most don't realize that the lighting they use at work and at home may be contributing to the problem. Eyes work best in balanced, natural light. After two years of development, OttLite created an exclusive proprietary ClearSun® LED formulation that delivers the closest thing to natural daylight available indoors. Users experience clear, crisp illumination that's easy on the eyes. The OttLite Wellness Series of lamps are available at [www.OttLite.com](http://www.OttLite.com)

**About OttLite Technologies Inc.**

OttLite was founded in 1989 by Dr. John Nash Ott to bring the power of natural daylight indoors through his one-of-a-kind natural daylight bulb. A pioneer in natural light research, Dr. Ott discovered through 40 years of scientific research the remarkable effects specific wavelengths of light have on all living things. Known as the father of full-spectrum lighting, his research concluded that a light with the entire visible spectrum of light wavelengths was best for vision and wellbeing. Today, OttLite Technologies manufactures and distributes a wide range of high quality lighting for offices, homes and travel.



\*<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/average-desk-germs-toilet-seat-kitchen-keyboard-mouse-phone-a8237431.html>

\*\*<https://www.statefoodsafety.com/Resources/Resources/the-dirty-cell-phone-25-127-bacteria-per-square-inch>

# Welcome to the Emergency Department



**Resident Physician**  
*Médico residente*



**Attending Physician**  
*Médico*



**GOAL**  
*Objetivo*



**For:**

**e:**

**Care Concerns:**

*Preocupaciones relacionadas con su atención:*

Fall Risk  
*Riesgo de caída*

Nothing to Eat or Drink  
*Nada de comer o beber*

Languages/Special Needs  
*Idioma/Necesidades Especiales*

Isolation  
*Aislamiento*

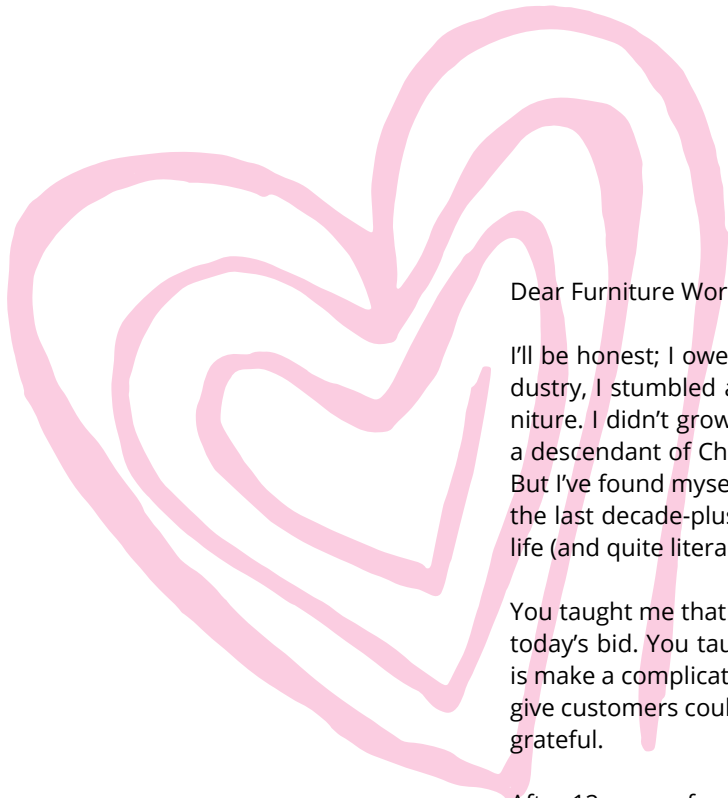
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# Dear Furniture World

Dear Furniture World,

I'll be honest; I owe you a lot. Like many of my colleagues in the industry, I stumbled almost blindly into the world of commercial furniture. I didn't grow up dreaming of going to design school. I'm not a descendant of Charles Eames, nor do I hail from Muscatine, Iowa. But I've found myself learning at the feet of the industry masters for the last decade-plus anyway. What I learned changed how I live my life (and quite literally, where I live my life).

You taught me that relationships supersede whether or not we won today's bid. You taught me that sometimes the hardest thing to do is make a complicated thing simple. You taught me that the tools we give customers could unlock their highest potential. And for that, I'm grateful.

After 12 years of working in an industry I knew nothing about; I now can't watch a television show or enter a hotel room without checking the furniture labels. I can't imagine an office layout where I don't have four ideas about how to improve it. I find myself appreciating design, craftsmanship, and a product's story more than I ever thought possible. That love of the process is something I have you to thank for.

But as much as I love you, Furniture World, I'm nervous too. Our world (and industry) are in the middle of some enormous change. The way people buy, how they work, and how they live are all in flux. We've never been described as an industry of "cutting edge" or progressive thinkers. Many of us are still hocking chairs or trying to close a deal on a cherry laminate desk project for some Midwestern headquarters.

When you love something, you want to fight for it. But the battle won't be fought with sample kits out of the back of our SUVs. It won't be won by companies that cling to the status quo. We spent our careers building brands that stood for quality and dependability - but the next decade will be about agility and simplicity.

My sincere hope is that we love the industry enough to allow it to evolve instead of clinging to "the way we've always done things."

Sincerely,

Bryce Stuckenschneider  
CEO | Loftwall



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- ✓ CONCEALED HARDWARE
- ✓ TRUGRAIN™ TECHNOLOGY
- ✓ ROUNDED EDGES
- ✓ CLASSIC PANEL DESIGN

[NORIX.COM](https://www.norix.com)



*Jensen Lounge By Stance Healthcare  
Launching March 1st*

# Introducing a new U.S. showroom and design collaborative from Stance Healthcare

**The multi-use space will encourage education and collaboration, in addition to housing inventory of healthcare-grade fabrics and furniture designs**

Redefining the furniture showroom as we know it, Stance Healthcare announces the opening of a new design collaborative space in Charlotte, N.C. In addition to showcasing their vast inventory of healthcare-grade fabrics and award-winning furniture collections, the Stance Healthcare Showroom in Charlotte will provide a space for designers, healthcare facility decision-makers, and Behavioral Health and wellness leaders to meet, receive industry training, and collaborate with Stance Healthcare's design team on projects in the works.

Conveniently located just 15 minutes from Charlotte Douglas International Airport, the showroom solidifies Stance Healthcare's presence as an industry leader in the U.S., where the company has experienced remarkable growth through partnerships with

Behavioral Health and general healthcare facilities in the past decade. Known for their highly durable and functional products that also offer a comforting, warm aesthetic, the company is a leading furniture provider for healthcare integrated delivery networks (IDNs), primary care facilities, and Behavioral Health treatment centers of all sizes across the U.S.

"Our furniture serves a higher purpose of aiming to improve the experience for healthcare patients, visitors, and caregivers," said Suzanne Fawley, Stance Healthcare's Behavioral Health designer. "This design collaborative is a natural extension of Stance Healthcare's mission to create more healing environments through the spaces we furnish. We want anyone who visits the space to leave empowered with not only product knowledge

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SPOTLIGHT  
STANCE HEALTHCARE**

about Stance Healthcare's lines, but also the insights and best practices that will continue to transform the healthcare experience – from the waiting area to patient rooms – across the country.”

Experience the full breadth of line from Stance Healthcare, including their award-winning Behavioral Health drum table collection, Resilia, and new Jensen seating collections, launching in March, at the new showroom located at 712 Morris Street in Uptown Charlotte by appointment only.



Perfect for Behavioral Health facilities, Stance Healthcare's Resilia Drum Table features a Marmoleum™ surface that makes it extremely durable and easy-to-clean. Combining that with Resilia's unique appearance, which helps provide an environment that feels overall less institutional, is what makes this award winner ideal for any healthcare setting. The concept behind this stand-out, highly functional design was years in the making.

Years before healthcare designer, Suzanne Fawley, joined the Stance Healthcare design team, she made an observation that would plant the seed for Resilia. While designing for high-impact medical facilities, Suzanne kept running into a recurring problem that seemed to be a common refrain for many healthcare settings: specifically, they all had a laminate problem. The popular surface material for healthcare furnishings is prone to splitting when worn or punctured, and its sharp edges create potential for immediate safety issues in such environments.

“While working as a designer in a prison hospital, I was concerned with a chair that had a laminate side panel which began to chip and split. In these types of high-impact settings, something like split laminate can quickly become a weapon for self-injury or harm to others,” says Fawley. “I knew there was an opportunity to replace laminate furniture with something safer and more durable, and I began to seek a solution.”

Suzanne began researching alternate materials with durability being top priority. Her first instinct – using a flooring product that withstands daily wear – ultimately led her to Forbo Marmoleum™, the nontoxic, naturally durable and sustainable surface material that would answer the call. In 2016, Suzanne pitched the idea as a new furniture collection to Stance Healthcare's Bruce and Carl Kennedy, and within a year, Resilia was born.

The Resilia Drum Table's modern and practical design, in combination with its innovative surface materials, made it a fast award winner: The product took home Healthcare Design's 2017 Nightingale GOLD Award in the same year it launched. Three years later, the table is a popular seller for the company due to its winning combination of long-term durability and pleasing aesthetics.

“Resilia is a completely different take on the industry status quo for these types of tables, which are still typically just laminate weighted cylinders,” says Fawley. “For healthcare facilities, you can't find a better quality investment for your space, as this is a product that will stand the test of time. Resilia is the most durable, cleanable drum table available – and most importantly, that translates to safer environments for the users it serves.”

Resilia is available in 10 different size selections, including two oval options released in 2020.

Introducing Jensen, the newest lounge and guest seating collections from Stance Healthcare that blend stylish design with the strength of metal. Launching this March, Jensen is thoughtfully designed for today's modern healthcare facilities with its on-trend, mid century modern aesthetic – and provides a new level of cleanability in healthcare lounge seating for the COVID era and beyond.



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SPOTLIGHT  
STANCE HEALTHCARE**



*Jensen Lounge By Stance Healthcare  
Launching March 1st*

The full family of seating options provides the option to carry the aesthetic throughout the healthcare facility. The collections, which are tested for durability and offer customized seating width options, also include a Limited Lifetime Warranty, replaceable seat, back and arm caps, and a wall-saver frame design that protects walls against damage. Optional moisture barrier, choice of open or closed arms, and custom frame and wood arm finishes are also available.

Jensen is the latest line from the award-winning healthcare furniture designer and manufacturer, known for their durable yet comfortable designs with modern, beautiful aesthetics. Jensen

releases in both lounge and guest seating collections when it launches on March 1.

All products in the Jensen line offer Stance Healthcare's highly cleanable, healthcare-grade surface finishes and fabrics, making them an ideal selection for facilities of all sizes and practices. The Jensen options, which include solid surface and healthcare-grade vinyl, continue the company's commitment to supporting healing environments through healthcare furniture that anticipates the needs of end-users – including the ways they are cleaned.



*Jensen Lounge*

*Resilia Drum By Stance Healthcare  
Winner of the Nightingale Award Gold*



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# Falling In Love With The Office Again With Watson

Imagination and inspiration are amplified when we come together, and no place does it better than the office. Meet the needs of the team and the individual to keep the love alive with the office. Here are some ways to speak in every office love language.

## **BE FLEXIBLE.**

Reconfigure floorplans. Use meeting tables as individual workstations. Assign private offices as meeting rooms. With integrated power options to keep cables tidy and hidden and an array of finishes to match any design, repurposing spaces has never looked so purposeful.

## **EMPHASIZE WELLNESS.**

Height-adjustable desks help keep bodies healthy. Height-adjustable conference tables help keep minds active - standing meetings encourage the expression of ideas. Organic table shapes help foster creativity in meetings. Biophilic elements add calm, and designing individual workstations that are a refuge creates a space to recharge and refocus.

## **MIX AND MATCH.**

All of our furniture is MFEO (made for each other). Bring together a height-adjustable Seven desk with the bendable C9 Rail, and add a Zo Sidecar. The options are endless to create an office that teams want to be in.

## **STAY MOBILE.**

Miro and Seven Flip tables transform a space for multiple uses and store with minimal footprint. Zo and C9 personal mobile storage keeps team members feeling a sense of place in an unassigned workstation design. Need to stay nimble? We've got you covered.



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**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



# Our Love Letter To The Contract Furniture Industry

**M**y Resource Library has a special love and appreciation for the Contract Furniture Industry. We have built our entire mission around serving the unique needs of this industry, and we are thrilled to celebrate it this month!

We asked representatives from across the industry to answer these four following questions:

*What makes the contract furniture industry unique, and what do you love about it? What makes the people in the contract furniture unique? What made you choose the contract furniture industry?*

*How is the contract furniture industry like family?*

We have put the answers we received together in this section as a celebration of the Contract Design Industry and the incredible people that make it work! Now, more than ever, the strength of our community is essential to the longevity of our industry, and we are grateful to be a part of it.

We invite you to dive in and enjoy all of the unique insights and stories found in this loving compilation. It's our love letter to the industry!

**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



**ALEXANDRA  
TSEFFOS**  
PRINCIPAL,  
SILENT T CONSULTING

I love this industry because regardless of geographic location, when we encounter challenges, we embrace them, bonding over the experience. We may all solve the problems differently, but we learn from each other. This is one of the reasons that I was drawn back to the industry after transitioning to a role in commercial real estate. I love to learn about the processes and solutions that our industry has put into place, and I hope that I am able to provide some insight along the way to serve our businesses better.

What makes the industry unique are the people. When I compare my professional experiences to my friends outside the industry, I feel very lucky. I have had a mentor, if not multiple mentors, in each of my roles within the contract furniture market. I have had the opportunity to learn and grow beyond what I ever thought possible. Thank you to the forward-thinking leaders who have furthered my career by inspiring and educating me!

I like to say; I never chose the contract furniture industry; it chose me! After getting my degree in Interior Architecture, I interviewed through a recruiting service who had described the furniture dealership as an A&D firm. As soon as I met the owner and my potential boss, I realized the organization's hands-on nature--and I took the job. Little did I know that was the start of my career in supporting dealer designers.

The contract furniture industry is like a family in the way that we support each other. The day I changed my LinkedIn to say that I had started my business, I had people who I had barely met reaching out, asking what I'm doing. They offered client referrals, encouragement for my success, and, most of all, kindness.



**BRIANA WILSON**  
DIRECTOR OF BRAND +  
CULTURE, CULTURA

The furniture industry is unique because you get to work with all kinds of people and types of companies. Every project is also unique, but most of the time, the goals and trends applied are similar. I love that furniture style, configuration, finishes, etc., can have a huge impact on a company's culture and its employees' happiness.

Most of the people I've encountered and work with love to be collaborative and are always striving to improve the way we do things and, in turn, meet and exceed expectations. Since we are spread out across North America and have various market differentiators, it's easy to gain inspiration, learn from one another and share best practices.

Did I choose the contract furniture industry, or did this crazy industry choose me? I clearly had no idea what I was getting into! I came from a graphic design background, and while I knew I didn't want to be a graphic designer (even before graduating college), I did know that I wanted to be creative and collaborative. Over time I have grown to love this industry because of the people I work with on a day-to-day basis. There is a wonderful balance of technical, creative, work, and play that makes every day a little different. I have been fortunate to personally grow and advance within this industry, and seeing how the contract furniture industry has changed over the last 14 years has been an interesting ride... #lovewhereyouwork

It's a small industry, and therefore you can build great, long-lasting relationships that expand beyond the boundaries of work. Like most families, it's made up of a cast of characters; The Indulgent Uncle, The Sister Who is Also Your Best Friend, The Food Loving Grandma, The Cool Cousin, The Mom Who Always Treats You Like a Kid, The Quirky Brother, The Fun Dad, The Grumpy Grandpa, and The Wild Aunt. All together, they make up a balanced, winning team that can accomplish anything.

**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



**KIP PEPPER**  
VP SALES + MKTING,  
PETER PEPPER PRODUCTS, INC.

There are always multiple challenges in each contract sector we work with, and we're always excited about contributing to the design process to enhance both the aesthetics and functionality of the different environments.

Diversity in cultures, backgrounds, education, experiences, and creativity advances multimodal thinking and, ultimately, the best solutions.

Originally coming from outside the furniture industry, my father, Peter Pepper, considered me to join the family business. After a 2-day interview, yikes! I joined the team, and that was 35 years ago.

It's a small group really within the industry; A&D, dealers, sales representatives, and end-users, where we build new and long-lasting relationships in both our business and personal lives. And in my case, it IS family.

**ROBERT DAY**  
EXECUTIVE VICE  
PRESIDENT, FELLOWES  
CONTRACT INTERIORS

There are a lot of different directions you can go in this industry. I've had the pleasure of experiencing all sides; the Dealership, Independent Rep, and Manufacturer. Each has its own perspective, but at the end of the day, we must all work together. And that is what I love - the relationships I've built through the many years in the industry.

I'm not sure if this makes our industry unique, but relationships are so important for mutual success. If you align with the right people, then you try to take care of one another. It doesn't matter if you're the dealer, rep, or manufacturer. We must work together through the good and bad and make sure the end-user has the best experience and is taken care of. This comes with a lot of stress at times, but there is a "team" mentality that comes through.

Like most, I fell into it by happenstance. My degree is in Aviation Management and Technology, and finding a job when I graduated was tough. My wife's college roommate was in the business, and she recruited me to a dealership in Atlanta. The rest is history.

It's a pretty small industry, and everyone knows everyone. Neocon is where it all comes together. I know we are there to do business, but it's like a class reunion every year. You never know who you will bump into, but it's always great to catch up with those you haven't seen in a few years. We know about each other's families, traveled to Europe on business as well as going into the darkness of warehouses. It's the adventure and memories you build - simply put it's about building long-lasting relationships.



**BLANCA SAUCEDA**  
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING,  
DESKMAKERS

Contract furniture as an industry is so visual. I'm constantly surrounded by pretty things, either in the office, walking through the factory, or when I'm flipping through magazines, social media, etc. It's inspiring to be a part of this industry.

As a whole, I think most of us in this industry know not to take ourselves too seriously. We always make sure our days include laughter, and that's especially important after a year like 2020.

Fresh out of college, I was looking for a job where people were passionate about their work. Over the years and in the different roles I've been in, I've been fortunate to work with people who really love what they do and do it well. It keeps me motivated to be my best.

It's a small industry, for sure! Just walking the halls at NeoCon or other industry events, you bump into so many people you've met along the way. Everyone knows everyone, and at the end of the day, it feels a lot more like family than coworkers.

**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



**TIM KIGER**  
VP OF SALES  
EXEMPLIS, SITONIT  
SEATING

One thing that I think makes the contract furniture industry unique is that the average consumer doesn't really know what "contract furniture" is. Suppose you have a friend or family member that works for Coca-Cola or General Motors, or Proctor & Gamble. In that case, everyone inherently knows that those companies make soft drinks, cars, and consumer products. We all purchase those products in our daily lives and have some relative feeling about them. But when you meet someone on an airplane, and they ask what you do for a living, they aren't initially sure what "contract furniture" is when you first tell them. Once you explain that your company makes the desks and chairs they likely sit in every day at work or the furniture in hospitals or colleges, it's like a lightbulb goes on. I love this notion because it allows professionals in our industry to really bring consultative value to customers who need to purchase "contract furniture". It's not like they can walk into a grocery store or visit a website and make a quick decision about whether to buy Coke or Pepsi. We all add a lot of value.

If you work in the contract furniture industry, I think you must be an effective problem solver, first and foremost. We create custom workspace solutions that make people more productive and happy in their professional life. Every company has unique circumstances and needs, so there is no single cookie-cutter solution that will work best for every customer. Whether you work for an A&D firm, a furniture dealership, or a manufacturer, we all have to be effective problem solvers. And the creativity that is inherent in this industry lends well to being a problem solver.

If I'm being honest, I didn't choose the contract furniture industry; it chose me many years ago, fresh out of college. But I've certainly chosen to remain in this industry.

It's really a small industry. Many companies are larger than our entire industry. Partly because of that, you get to know people across the business, and in my job especially, across geography, as we work together to solve our customers' problems. Add to that the human interaction required, and it's a great industry to build relationships in.



**JOHN W. FISCHBACH**  
PRESIDENT,  
DECCA CONTRACT

I think that the contract furniture industry is unique because it is at the intersection of form, function, and emotion. Form could be the way a chair feels when you sit in it, or it could be the statement that a beautifully crafted, custom reception desk makes when it anchors a lobby. Function can be something as simple as easily accessible desktop power, sit-to-stand work surfaces, or something more complex such as controlling noise and airflow. Emotion plays a significant role as well. We all have favorite colors; some people like a contemporary style, and some like traditional. When someone walks into a room, the furnishings elicit an emotional response. I love the inspired way that our industry addresses the creation of products that meet the form, function, and emotional challenges. It would be hard not to love our industry when you see the look on the face of a client that is immensely proud of his or her new space.

From the time that a design concept is sketched on a napkin to the introduction of that design at Neocon, the passion that people in our industry have for excellence is readily evident. A good example of our industry's passion and its products is that we all admire one another. A beautifully designed and well-executed product is always appreciated, even if a competitor does it, and we do not hesitate to extend a compliment. In our industry, there is a level of professionalism and respect that is unique in the business world.

As a hobby, my father enjoyed woodworking. He made furniture for our home, our backyard deck, bookcases for the church, and countless other projects. I learned to appreciate well-designed and well-crafted creations. So, when I was offered a sales position with an independent rep group, I immediately appreciated the high-quality products that they represented. Four months after I was hired, I was off to my first Neocon. In those days, Neocon was a week-long affair; however, it only took a day, or two, of seeing all of the beautiful designs for me to know that this is where I belonged. Since then, I have enjoyed being a part of this industry, and I am honored to have been able to establish decades-long relationships with some very talented people.

It is like family because we do not like going for long periods of time without not seeing one another. Neocon is business, but it is also an annual reunion; it is not just about the furniture. I enjoy smiling when I hear a voice from the past on the phone. At the end of the day, I think that we all share the same goal of raising the bar in the contract furniture industry. We push one another, we respect one another, and our clients reap the benefits.

**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



**BRANDI HOFFMAN**  
DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL,  
INDEAL

It's the Nashville of industries! People like to say that Nashville is a big city that feels like a small town, and I feel the same about the contract furniture industry. It's a multi-billion dollar industry where everyone seems to know each other.

They are equal parts hardworking and fun! When you walk around the Mart during NeoCon, you can see the immense amount of hard work that people from the manufacturers have put in, and the dealers/designers/etc. are pounding the pavement with aching feet and waiting on overstuffed elevators to explore and engage with them. Yet everyone is smiling and laughing with a drink in hand. Work hard, play hard!

I'm from Jasper, IN, so it was pretty much inevitable. Since my first role in sales and marketing support at Jofco when I was 20 years old, I've worked for local manufacturers. For the past (almost) three years, I've been with the fantastic team at INDEAL, where our unique position in the industry allows me to help both dealers and manufacturers – I couldn't love it more!

You can go a whole year (or more... thanks, COVID) between seeing people, and when you do get together again, it's like no time has passed at all.



**NICK FERNANDEZ**  
PRESIDENT,  
SERVEX

The Contract Furniture Industry is an awesome little community within a relatively obscure industry. I miss the old AIS and Teknion parties from Neocon pre-2008 recession.

People in our industry are constantly interchanging ideas with talented designers and selling to high-level executives at Fortune 500 companies. I think that constant exposure fosters a creative and professional environment with a work hard and play hard attitude.

I was born into the industry. My dad was the first to bring Herman Miller to Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1960s; he was personal friends with Max De Pree and still is upset for not investing in Herman Miller back then. He would take me to Neocon when I was in High school for some reason, and I remember getting Action Office miniature models as toys when I was a child. I'll just say I preferred Tonka trucks.

Everyone stays in the industry for so long, you get to know a lot of people over the years, and even though you don't see them often, they feel like close friends when you see them at Neocon or other industry events. I still keep in touch with my first boss, who is the owner of a nationwide Teknion dealer out of NYC

The industry's end-users, designers, dealers, independent sales reps, and factory sales reps all working together. Sure there is competition, but there is enough room for all of us! I like the fact that we all become friends..... it is an industry with "like" people. The events and tradeshow (when we had them!!) are all great fun, and it's always good to see a familiar face. I also like the travel. I get to go to some cool places, and I am a bit of a foodie, so I eat at some unique spots too. I now have my go-to restaurants in a couple of different cities!

It's a small industry that mixes business and pleasure. It's ok to have a little fun and do business at the same time. It is relationship intensive.

I was kind of born into the industry, which I have now discovered is somewhat common in contract furniture. I would not have known it existed otherwise!

For me, it has always been family. I see mine pretty much every day! Neocon feels like a family day to me, not just my family but all the great people I have met over the years coming together in one place. I just think most people in the contract furniture world are drawn to the business's relationship side, which makes it a great industry to be a part of.



**BEN MCLEAN**  
REGIONAL SALES  
MANAGER, SPEC  
FURNITURE

**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



**JEFF THOMPSON**  
VICE PRESIDENT,  
DEALER DEVELOPMENT,  
HUMANSCALE

First and foremost, I love the people. There are some absolutely wonderful people in this industry, which makes getting up and getting to work a joy. Some of my closest friends and mentors have come from this beautiful industry of ours. Second would be all the amazing opportunities we have as an industry to transform a space, from the furniture to the floor covering. The miracles we all pull off, day in and day out, are quite impressive. Like most of us have been taught, form follows function, and we get to see that come to life every day. How incredibly cool!

Finally, all the people that will line up to help you. From the people, you work for to your competitors. I have found that every dealer, A&D firm, broker, and manufacturer is always willing to help and teach. That is something you don't typically see. We all have a genuine drive to leave this industry better off than when we found it.

Many of us have heard that we are in the fashion industry of furniture, which brings together a lot of unique personalities. Every day is different and exciting. I realize most of us are suffering from Zoom fatigue, but we will get out there again and experience our industry to the fullest shortly. There are so many cool, creative, passionate, and intelligent people in our business.

Like many of us, I just happened upon the furniture world. Early in my work career, I got exposed to a Teknion/Kimball dealer. I was quick to submit to the power of contract furniture. Now I look back 20+ years later (I started when I was 15), and I am so grateful I stayed with it through the ups and downs.

I really want to give a huge thank you to all the folks who have sat down with me for coffee to teach me what they knew and let me pick their brains (OK, let's be honest, rarely coffee and almost always too many drinks). You know who you are! Family, so often to me, is not blood, but those people who will take the time to invest in you and your success. There are a bunch of you out there who have invested in me – that makes you family, and for that, you have my utmost gratitude.

I think our industry is unique because it is such a collaborative process that involves so many different people coming together to create a beautiful workspace for our clients. We (Dealer) get to work hand in hand with Architectural firms, Design firms, General Contractors and their Subs, Developers, Real Estate Brokers, Owner's Rep firms, and with the end-user groups or business owners. It is a very creative industry that brings together all these groups to design and build spaces that help empower people to do their best work.



**MARK T. CUSTER**  
CO-OWNER,  
CUSTER

The people I described in my previous answer are very unique. We are all super passionate about our industry, about design, about timeless products, about creating inspiring spaces, and mostly about seeing the customer thrive in these spaces. These people are all very creative and push themselves constantly to think outside of the box to make things work. We work hard and play hard. We have business mindsets. We can talk with a CEO one morning and then work with a building facility person in the afternoon. We are a group of well-rounded business people committed to our industry and creating a better workplace for our customers.

We were born into it (our Father started our dealership in 1981), although never pressured by my parents to work within the business. I think our personalities were naturally drawn to this industry, and the comfortableness of seeing it our whole lives made it even easier to enter into the family business.

We feel like our employees are truly our family. You go through so many things with your employees, lots of ups and downs and challenges, that you can't help but feel a special close-knit bond with all of them. Our customers tell us all the time they feel the closeness and family feel within our culture when they walk into our building and start meeting people.

**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



**KEVIN PHILIPS**  
CEO,  
TAYCO

Many of us have worked with our furniture friends for years or decades. You can't put that much energy into relationships and not have that family feel. I love the size and complexity of our industry. Thousands of organizations all playing our part to drive the best solutions to our clients.

For my brother and I, the industry really picked us. My Dad started Tayco in 1976.

Furniture people tend to be have a healthy mixture of creativity, adaptability and resiliency. It's always fun meeting a new contact.

**LORI LOCKWOOD**  
MARKETING EVENTS &  
PROGRAM SPECIALIST,  
SAFCO

Our industry is resilient, which was evident this past year. The ability to pivot and quickly address the needs of helping workers return safely to the office is a testament to our industry's creativity and caring!

The people in our industry truly care about each other! The camaraderie between people and companies proves that our industry is filled with very special people who stick together and the first to step up to help when needed. There have been so many acts of charity and generosity this past year that it's reassuring to know we will come back stronger than ever.

I didn't choose this industry – it chose me!

Our industry sticks together through the good times and bad, and we truly miss each other when we cannot get together in-person!



**CHRIS BENAVIDES**  
VP OF SALES,  
EGAN VISUAL & EXACT  
FURNITURE LTD.

The Contract Furniture Industry is one of the few industries where you can create something from scratch, see it come to fruition, and witness its influence on others first-hand. This industry allows for creativity and challenges you every day/every project to stay at your best.

Creativity, vision, openness. It takes many things to be successful in Contract Furnishings, but to me, those three are essential parts of the foundation. Lack any of them, and it will be extremely difficult to derive true satisfaction from our industry. Pushing myself to practice all three every day constantly allows me to get better every day.

Not sure I choose this industry as much as I found myself in it. But I stay because of the opportunity to serve and bring positive change into the world. This industry gives you an opportunity to make work and "good" four-letter word and work environments better for every stakeholder.

We have every member of the family present in this industry. From the Aunt Karen to that Uncle we don't talk about. We share the common bond of the challenges faced and accomplishments achieved. We share a shared sense of pride in having created something and knowing that it helps someone's work-life be just a little bit better.

**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



**BARBARA NOLAN**  
PRINCIPAL,  
NOLAN BRANDS

I love the size of the industry, the creativity and problem solving, of course, the end result, but mostly the people! I love the people I work with every day, especially when we become dear friends. It is so fulfilling to work on a project from beginning to end. The end result is always amazing!

The people are creative, dedicated, and fun! They put their heart and soul into each project and truly fight for the best end result. We all know, in the end, it's only furniture, but we are all committed to bringing the very best to our clients. The commitment to excellence is truly a passion.

I fell into this industry, and it was the first and only "interview" I ever had. 30+ years later, here I am. This industry has a way of engaging one for the path of their career. I have no regrets! It truly has been remarkable!

We are all after the same goals, living the same passion. Whether it's a colleague or a client, solving problems, and knowing you can depend on each other, leads to a lifetime of mutual respect and friendships. I miss my clients' and friends' energy, but we all know we will get through this together, and we will be there for each other when this passes.



**PAUL HOLLAND**  
PRINCIPAL,  
SOLOMON COYLE

The industry is unique because we are on the cutting edge of helping design and equip workspace. The physicality and aesthetic of space impact people, companies, and cultures greatly. Ultimately we inspire people in their workplace ecosystem to perform their very best, wherever that may be.

What I love most about the industry are the people and relationships I have made over time. I also love the fact that we get to impact the lives of so many.

The people in the industry are unique because they are smart, care about their work, and are conscious about how they impact others in the products, spaces, and outcomes for the customers.

The contract furniture industry chose me. As a young sales professional, I was pursued by a fledging dealership. I was attracted because of the design element and working in the design industry to create spaces that we could be proud of and that our customers loved.

The contract furniture industry is small in comparison to many other sectors of business. It is a complex industry, and it attracts and keeps people that care about creation. Because of that, it is easy to be known, and your reputation follows you everywhere you go in the business. It is visible and known how we treat everyone in the industry. That keeps us in bounds, creates respect, and fosters a family-like feel.



**MIKE KELLEY**  
PRESIDENT,  
ENWORK

The contract furniture industry is unique because it is continuously changing and evolving, determined by emerging workstyles, technology, and architectural evolution. I love it because it provides an opportunity to do research and needs-based product design for people. If we do it correctly, worker productivity and happiness thrive, and so follow the companies they work for. My dad (Jack Kelley) designed Action Office with Bob Probst in a two-stall garage in Ann Arbor in 1965. It was called the Herman Miller Research Corporation until today and is research-based. Since then, human-centered design has led to paradigm shifts in the way people work and interact, and that is what I love about this industry. We get to innovate and develop products that are based on problem-solving and customer needs. What could be better than that?

All the reasons above and growing up alongside the designers that were changing our industry and world through design. As much as I loved teaching, I felt a need to follow the same passion. This industry feels like family because... well, ironically, many of the people in it actually are my family! Family business and like-minded creative people usually get along as well or better than family.



**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



**WICK WOLFE**  
PRESIDENT, COO,  
UNIKA VAEV

One of the most unique things about the Contract Furniture industry is that its trends bleed into our day-to-day lives both in and out of the office. Many other industries focus solely on an idea or product without consideration for our needs and wants outside of their specific market. The Contract Furniture industry as a whole takes into consideration both world events and trends as well as our goals for constant change and improvement. It does have an impact on all of us.

There is such a drive and keen focus from people in all roles of our industry to provide design and working solutions that result in improvements that affect all aspects of life. The desire for great design and solutions really sets our industry veterans apart from others. We all work hard and play hard as well!

Actually, the Contract Furniture Industry chose me! I was fortunate to make the acquaintance of a Senior Executive at Knoll who took a chance on me. My education working for such a great company greatly impacted my fascination, education, and long-term career of 40 years in the industry. I have really been fortunate to have met and worked with so many at all levels of Design, Manufacturing, and Sales.

People in our industry are so passionate about it out of a desire to share ideas across product and business platforms. We all share a drive and connection to positively impact lives both in and out of our direct industry. I have made many great friends and connections in my career and have seen lives changed through relationships that matter.

There are many unique identifiers within the contract furniture industry. It is one of the few industries that can both influence and impact so many facets. The unique expertise lies internally within Sales, Operations, Asset Management, and great Customer Service. We believe that we can do more than just provide new furniture for your space. We can help companies change the way they think about work, making connections, productivity, profitability, retention, and culture.



**TOM TRIPLETT**  
PRINCIPAL,  
TRIPLETT OFFICE ESSEN-  
TIALS CORP.

We are experts in our field, educated professionals, deliver upon excellence and have a deep passion and commitment for doing the right thing for our customers and bring their goals and vision to life. We strive to be the best and deliver on honesty, fairness, and respect. "Love what you do, do what you love."

The contract furniture industry didn't choose me; I chose it... and then I fell in love with all aspects of it. Triplett Companies is a family-owned business since 1973 and began as an office supplies and printing services company. Over time, our business grew, and we started to sell wholesale furniture to our existing supply customers. Through this new venture and customer relationship growth, I learned there was an expectation for furniture installation, interior design solutions for workspaces, and that the furniture's actual function needed to be of the best quality and provide a return on investment. Through this newfound love of the entire furniture process, I learned how to assemble and install furniture, truly listen to our customers and what their expectations and desires were. I began to instill trust in our customers and grow our relationship together. I saw the value in customer satisfaction and delivering upon good experience and excellence.

The contract furniture industry is like family because we wholeheartedly believe in honesty, transparency, fairness, and respect. We all work together to promote a healthy, productive environment for our customers, and we have fun doing it! That is why we call it "FUN-iture!"

**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



**KEVIN GLYNN**  
EXECUTIVE VP  
SALES AND  
DISTRIBUTION,  
GROUPE LACASSE

To be unique is to be unlike anything else. To me, that is the fundamental attraction to this industry – it's weird, it's whacky, it's diverse, it's individualistic, it's literally multi-faceted. And then there's the aggressive competitiveness! That's the key for me; it has both left & right brain appeal: business-like on the one hand, and art-school wannabe on the other.

Our industry is made up of creative contributors, professional competitors, and skillful business leaders, all characters in a rich stew of personalities that somehow defines our chosen profession. Uniquely, there exists a camaraderie among us, clearly evident at expositions like Neocon, where the genius of our networking skills, along with our fondness for "socializing," is showcased perhaps only second to the furniture.

How I came into this industry is a story too long to recount here, but I kind of fell into it. Suffice it to say the industry chose me; I didn't choose it! I left the contract furniture for a time for the publishing industry. However, I missed the industry and returned to it – which has since been the subject of intense psychoanalysis.

Despite a hyper-competitive marketplace in which we're all fighting each other for a shrinking piece of the office furniture pie, we're like anyone's dysfunctional family. And at the end of the business day, love and friendship prevail, just like family.



**MIKE BRAMSON**  
SALES AT  
CONTRACT SOURCE  
GROUP

I started my career selling cars. I learned how to sell on a used car lot in South Bend, Indiana. I moved around the country a bit came home to Birmingham to grow up and get a real job. I went to work for Pulte Homes and sold new homes for a number of years. I was lured to a Steelcase dealer, Silvers, by a friend who suggested I try to become a contract office furniture salesperson when the hours required to sell real estate became a strain on my family. So having been in a few careers in my life, I have to say I don't find the industry unique, inasmuch as it's all about being toes to toes and nose to nose with customers as much as possible. But not only are our customers unique so are all the crazy people who enjoy or love this business. And I have to say the people I have come in contact with over my 20+ years in this industry are what I love about it.

The people in this industry can never leave it. It's like in the Godfather III, and Michael Corleone said, "They just pull me back in." I think when it's all said and done, it's because we love the passion, and the ability to help people solve problems, to live to work in an atmosphere that is invigorating and exciting

I think this industry chose me. I can honestly say that most of my friends are now in this business.

I've had my entire family work with me at one time or another. My wife now sells for innovative and takes care of her one account Steelcase. My two sons work with and will in the not-too-distant future take it over and hopefully let me retire. Not to mention that the rest of my team are just as important to me. I've also been blessed with manufacturers that I've had for 15+ years, and many of those folks are some of my closest compatriots.

**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



**SHELBY NOBLE**  
MARKETING PROJECT MGR,  
JASPER GROUP

The people are my favorite part of the industry. I truly believe the people make this industry stand out from others that I've been a part of in my career. Whether that's our employees, suppliers, customers, or competitors, the contract furniture industry is full of genuine people that love what they do. I'm so grateful to be a part of this furniture family.

People in our industry have such passion for what they do and bring energy, excitement, and inspiration to furniture and the workplace. I think the best example of this is the liveliness and interactions that we see year after year in each showroom at NeoCon. I still remember my first show and the level of love and dedication everyone brings. It's really inspiring!

Our industry is ever-changing with new trends, designs, and technology. I enjoy the challenge to constantly adapt to create new and exciting solutions.

For me, this industry is like family because of the continued support, respect, and love we have for one another... a true community.



**STEVE CARLSON**  
PRESIDENT,  
CARLSON GROUP

I grew up in the Office Furniture industry as my Grandfather worked for a manufacturer long before I was born. My dad worked for the same manufacturer before working for a dealer and then becoming a manufacturer's representative. I remember traveling with my dad during school breaks as a youngster visiting the dealers he worked with, and I was always impressed with how professional and kind they were to him. So yes, I can legitimately say I grew up in the business.

What makes our industry unique is its size and the people. For example, we are small in overall total dollar sales. Heck, people spend more on dog and cat food than they do office furniture. But our people are passionate about providing their clients with the best possible solution to make their office function smoothly, all while giving their employees the most functional furniture and layout to do their job.

We are also a very giving industry too. Many companies encourage their employees to give their time to various humanitarian causes and not forget the Zero landfill initiative. We also sure know how to have fun and mingle.



**CHRIS FULLER**  
PRESIDENT,  
CONCENTRIC SPACES

Relationships truly matter in this industry, and I love the day-to-day interactions we have. It's what makes this industry so unique. The people in this industry know how to balance work and play. The willingness to share ideas and collaborate with others is also one thing that I love about them.

I chose the furniture industry out of a necessity to provide for my new bride. Stumbling into this career is the best thing that could have ever happened to me!

This industry is like family and always looks to build each other up and celebrate each other's successes.

**A LOVE LETTER  
TO OUR  
INDUSTRY**



**MICHAEL GALLERY**  
PRESIDENT,  
MRG

The contract furniture industry is an industry that other businesses need in order to operate. Most people remain unaware of the contract furniture world but are touched and influenced by it daily. How many other industries can say that they have something to offer every other industry out there? We exist to enhance the experiences people have within the corporate, healthcare, education, dining and entertainment, and retail spaces, just to name a few. (Also, without us, everyone would just be sitting on the floor.)

I have found that people in our industry bring a diversity of backgrounds and interests to the table. This diversity sparks creative conversation. The creative conversations lead to innovative visions. Our industry's people get to spend their days exploring those visions and seeing them come to fruition.

I didn't choose the contract furniture life. It chose me. All jokes aside, from a young age, I was exposed to the power of design. I learned early that design sets the tone of a space and can shape the work environment's culture and positively influence the people who encounter the final design result. Design is intentional. My hope is that my role in this industry will have a positive impact on and result in a fulfilling experience for those who design the space as well as those who use the space.

We are a close-knit community that, once you find your place in it, proves itself to be challenging, rewarding, and enriching. Just like in a family, there are different roles and responsibilities, and each member is an important piece of the puzzle, regardless of where they fit.

I love this industry of ours as there are no barriers with all that we do relating to design. The design work that we get to be a part of is such a rewarding feeling. The finished space with ERG and other contract products being brought together to solve client needs. It drives us to do more as we touch many lives with all that we design and manufacture.

**ROY ZAKI**  
PRESIDENT/CEO,  
ERG INTERNATIONAL

The drive and passion are something quite unique to our industry. There is always a sense of pushing expectations above and beyond what is asked of many in our field. The "getting to the end game" is usually filled with a fun and inviting atmosphere, making it one of the stand-out industries. Creativity is a huge part of our uniqueness.

Our industry is a very tight-knit community that really comes together to get things done. It's definitely a family. We all know one another, and there is much respect for competition, our customers, and end-users. We are regularly challenged by a great bunch of people in the design community that push the envelope as they satisfy the customer requirements for various projects.

**delve**<sup>MRU</sup>  
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