

delve

FEB 2022 V23

*Cover Photo: Parallon Cafe
by SitOnIt Seating*

**A Love Letter
To the Industry**

**Delving Into The
Public Sector**

**Kimball Launches
Second Season of
Popular Podcast**

**SIMPLY
UNPARALLELED**
Parallon By SitOnIt Seating

Rise.



The chair Elevated.

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SEATING

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COVER STORY: Parallon is a singular collection with a singular look that addresses three distinct applications.

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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 industry to get your stories about what makes the world of Contract Design so unique and fun to work in.

Some may have stumbled upon the Contract Industry while others 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 stories 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 Delve? We want to hear from you! Send us an email at:

industrynews@myresourcelibrary.com.



**THE
MY RESOURCE LIBRARY
FAMILY**



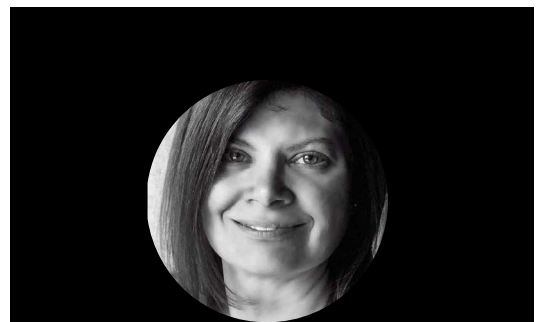
TRUE LOVE

A Designer's Journey in the Contract Industry

Interior designers: we are loved for our talents and our creative spirit. Whether you are a commercial interior designer, facilities manager, or a principal of your own design firm we are in the business of providing an interior place for people. If it were not for interior designers we would all be standing in unfinished building shells. Our jobs involve the planning and specifying furniture and finishes to make these cold empty uninviting spaces suitable for people to work and use safely with beautiful finishes and furniture.

I can remember the first time I told someone what I did for a living- they said "Oh, you are an Interior Designer! That must be a fun job and it sounds so glamorous." But sometimes our jobs are not that great. It's hard to tell someone who isn't familiar with our industry just what that means. If you watch enough "interior design television" you know that there is always some drama associated with the project but in the end everyone is thrilled and happy with the results. The reality and what isn't shown on TV is that it is not always the case.

When I chose this profession I must admit glamor and fun were not at the top of the list. But I will say that what was at the top of the list was that I knew I would be able to be creative and share that creativity to make people's lives better. That didn't mean that I thought I would be solving the world's problems. The job of interior designer is complicated. We wear many hats especially if you own your own firm. Being the owner of a creative business can be challenging and more stressful than being an owner of a non-creative business. Creatives face challenges no matter what type of creative work they do. The reason is because not everyone's idea of art or creative thought is the same. We work in a very opinionated and egotistical world where everyone wants their ideas to be popular and better than everyone else's.



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.***

Every profession has its ups and downs. Service industries, manufacturing, construction- you name it. Everyone has stories of jobs, products and even relationships with customers that didn't go as planned. These "stories" can sometimes serve as lessons for the next time or as catalysts for change in operations or product design. The same is true for interior designers; we have unsuccessful projects and unhappy clients.

The clients that have had situations where they had put their trust in a designer and did not have a great result usually are the people who try to discourage others from hiring us. It's a challenge to say the least, talking about what we do as designers and being able to convince someone to pay us for our ideas especially if they had a bad experience is probably the most challenging and frustrating thing we do. Salespeople are trained and practice overcoming objections. They understand that there is a psychology to getting someone to agree to purchase something. Designers who learn these techniques are better at dealing with objection than those who don't. But interior design is not a "product", it's an idea that doesn't become something until that idea moves from a thought in someone's head to a physical representation of that idea. Even then it is hard to "sell" because no matter how passionate you are about it; you still need to get the client to agree to it and to the process it will take to make that drawing representing your creative idea a real place that can be identifiable in everyone's reality .

Pretty pictures in a design portfolio, design awards and even a long list of prestigious clients doesn't guarantee a successful project. It takes a huge amount of trust on everyone's part to make it successful. Clients want to know that if there is a problem it will be fixed or solved quickly and professionally with minimal effort on their part. That is where communication and understanding comes in. If a designer or design team can communicate with clarity to clients, contractors, and manufacturers the ideas they have in their heads then the project has a better chance of success. If that communication gets lost somewhere in the process than it has an even better chance of failure especially if that miscommunication continues throughout the project cycle.

That is why setting expectations from the beginning is important. If clients are not comfortable with the way information is shared and they don't know how to tell you, the result will be far worse. So how do we make clients comfortable with telling you that they are confused or didn't understand the job? Well, I can say that experience helps but even then that doesn't mean you will be successful. That is why setting expectations in the beginning is important. Stating a clear method for communication and being able to consistently check in and make adjustments with your clients helps-but it's not always failsafe and miscommunications happen even with the best of communication methodologies.

This is one part of the job that interior designers go through where they need the most support. Unfortunately, especially now, we cannot control our projects in the same ways we once did. Even if you are a master at the art of sales these issues are not

easy to overcome. Challenges with supply chains, product price increases and labor make our jobs harder because we cannot always be certain that what we expect to happen will. Even with the best communication methods, miscommunication with clients, suppliers and contractors are going to be harder to deal with. Designers have naturally thick skins-they can take a lot, but they also need support and understanding when these problems seem never ending. Clients are not quick to give that support especially when they don't understand the situation and why it happened. Strong willed designers and clients usually have moments when neither are able to see the other side. No one wants this to happen to them no matter what outside forces are at work. But unfortunately, these situations do happen and if they happen too many times then that is when our industry as a whole suffers.

The solution to this may sound simple, just like the design ideas in our heads, it isn't real until we convince someone else that it is. To do this we need to accept that even our best efforts may not be enough to solve the problem. Trust is often gained over time and when we lose it, it can take even longer to gain it back.

Great design involves a deep passion for creativity to emerge from an idea to something that can be touched and seen. We as designers are confident that we can deliver the best of everything to our clients no matter what the situation, and we work hard to do it. But when that doesn't happen, and we feel defeated or even hurt by what our clients say or do. It zaps our creativity and our joy. We need the support we get not just from our families but from our colleagues in the industry to be there for us when we are faced with these situations. Otherwise, our confidence in our ability to succeed on the next project is threatened and we lose all hope that we will ever be able to do what we are so passionate about in the future. And many interior designers leave the industry for this very reason.

Understanding that this is part of the profession and being able to handle any kind of situation is sometimes hard to explain to someone who themselves hasn't been there. What this means is that we are all human. And one thing I think we can all agree on is that we make mistakes, we all have different ways of communicating, but the biggest agreement we all need to accept is that we are not perfect. Although perfection is something we all thrive for and expect it is sometimes not obtainable. And that is just life. It's hard but if we agree that sometimes that is what happens for whatever reason it is easier to move past it. Also knowing that your colleagues who are not designers, but work in sales, construction and even installation, have your back goes a long way to helping you move on. Build those relationships and nurture them, so when it gets tough not only for you but anyone on your team, you have the strength and support you need to overcome these feelings of rejection and failure so that you are better prepared for success the next time a big idea enters your head.

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?

BFF PNEUMATIC SWIVEL CHAIR

MIEN COMPANY

Teachers and students both love this height-adjustable and easy-to-move task chair. Available in two sizes and a wide variety of shell colors, it suits any type of active classroom.



BASELINE® PRESCHOOL TABLE & CHAIR SET

CHILDREN'S FACTORY

BaseLine® Table and Chair Sets are durable and built to last with no exposed hardware and rounded edges. Protective boots help prevent sliding, reduce noise and prevent rust.



DESIGN STUDIO DESK SCREEN COLLECTION

UNIKA VAEV

The Design Studio Desk Screen Collection is designed to provide solutions that address privacy, safety and ease of installation. The collection includes solutions for top of the desk and above/below the work surface. Additional options include acrylic screens to provide additional social distancing solutions.



VERONA

NAVETTA

Verona is available in contoured plastic, upholstered seat, or upholstered seat and back. Seat shell and base are available in black, white, or red.

COGO ROUND TABLE

SAFCO SELECT

The CoGo™ Steel Outdoor/Indoor Table is UV and weather resistant, making it ideal for outdoor use as well as being easily adapted for indoor use. This durable table is made of steel with a powder coat finish for long-lasting chip resistance.



HOT MESH ARM CHAIR

BLU DOT

Chipper chair seeks derrières for at home enjoyment or café canoodling. Available in nine finishes: aqua, black, green, grey green, humble red, natural yellow, simple blue, off-white and watermelon. Stackable and suitable for use indoors or out. Pile them high and move in a pinch with the Stacking Chair Dolly. Also available as a barstool or counter stool.





Gemma Chair

Leland Furniture Launches Gemma, a Collection of Natural Versatility

Leland recently launched the Gemma Collection, a chair, table, and soft-tailored lounge piece that bring natural versatility to any space. Bigger than a specific inspiration, Gemma was created from a broader desire to open a new path for Leland, bringing forward the mid-century American values of optimism, expressiveness, and industrial experimentation.

Created by Altherr Desile Park for Leland, the Gemma Collection stands out with personable elegance and optimistic flair. Featuring a system of three veneers – oak, walnut, and colored birch – along with two base-types, the Gemma Chair has a soft, gentle geometry and crafted details emerging in every edge and surface.

Gemma Stitch brings sculptural and volumetric contrast to the light and laminar language of the chair, extending the col-

lection into informal lounge spaces. Finally, there's Gemma Tables, a circular tabletop with a choice of three base styles and heights –including one with added power integration – adaptable for relaxation or light work.

Leland's renowned use of color on wood exponentially increases the opportunities that already exist with the varied materials and finishes available in the collection. "All these design options provide architects and designers a versatile system. With it, they can configure their own stories ranging from colorful and informal to natural and refined," said Nigel Scott-Williams, Business Development Officer at Leland.

Learn more and see the full Gemma Collection at lelandfurniture.com

We worked carefully and iteratively to create rounded shapes that are counterbalanced by flatter curves and surfaces,”

said Dennis Park in an interview.

“This adds slight tension and richness of form.”

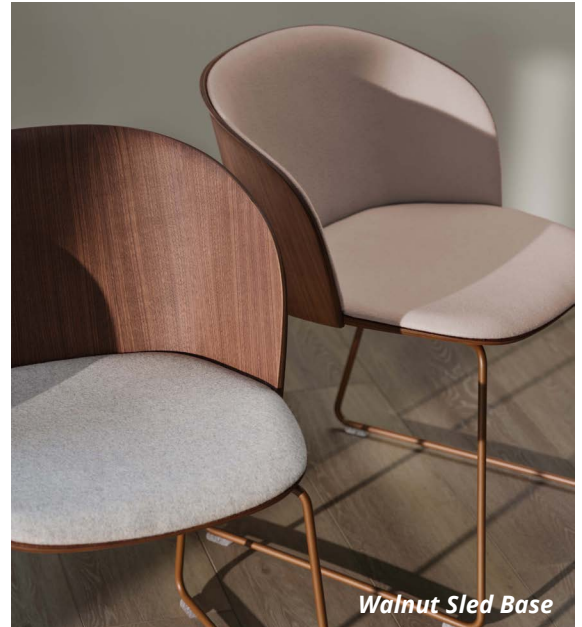


Wood Base Chairs

**LELAND FURNITURE
FEATURE**



Stitch Lounge



Walnut Sled Base



Gemma Totem Base Tables

Altherr Désile Park | Designers of the Gemma Collection

About Altherr Désile Park

Altherr Désile Park is the evolution of the long-standing Barcelona-based studio Lievore Altherr. The studio specializes in product design & development, strategic consulting, creative direction, art direction, and ephemeral architecture for internationally recognized design companies such as Burghard, Vibia, Noorth, among others.

Their approach develops projects using an established strategy: a creative concept integrating product design and its communication. This holistic approach, humanist character, and the search for the essential in their projects – combined with a sensibility that transmits harmony and balance – characterize the designs of Altherr Désile Park.

Zip
Vinyl



Alternative Design

A PODCAST ABOUT DESIGN +
THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

KIMBALL INTERNATIONAL ANNOUNCES SECOND SEASON OF THE ALTERNATIVE DESIGN PODCAST

Kimball International has been busy creating bingeable podcast content throughout 2021, and just last week announced that the fun will continue in 2022 with the second season of its *Alternative Design* podcast. Furthering the mission that season one established, the *Alternative Design* podcast is dedicated to empowering creatives and designers to improve the human experience through the spaces they design. New episodes will be released monthly featuring deep conversations that explore unapologetic, design-forward, and boundary-breaking design examples and approaches.

Each episode is hosted by Kaelynn Reid, a metro-Detroiter and former interior designer turned brand ambassador. Kaelynn is inspired by the forward-thinking concepts found in the margins of our design community. The content is created to engage designers, architects, creatives, and design enthusiasts. With deep industry knowledge and expertise, Kimball International employees and guests offer unique guidance,

inspiration, innovation, and motivation to listeners.

In the latest episode, Episode 9 entitled "*Actions That Open the Heart*", they explore The Burning Man Project, an architectural experiment in the remote Nevada Desert. The episode analyzes what Burning Man has to offer the design community concerning innovation, radical participation, and risk taking. Burning Man's Associate Director of Community Events, Steven Raspa, and City Planning and Placement Manager, Bryant Tan, give unique viewpoints on how the event tests the limits of participants and embraces a spirit of giving.



Kaelynn Reid

KIMBALL'S ALTERNATIVE DESIGN PODCAST

Every summer, Burning Man is hosted in a temporary city, called Black Rock City, that draws thousands of people to celebrate the ceremonial burning of a human effigy known as “the Man.” Many designers and urban planners see Black Rock City as a potential blueprint for local communities as it boasts an iterative design process that could address some of the greatest challenges of our time.

“In regular cities you have to go to the planning department and the planning commission... but some of my favorite spaces [at The Burning Man Project] are spaces that people have actually dedicated to prototyping.” - Burning Man's Associate Director of Community Events, Steven Raspa

This episode truly represents this podcast's commitment to forward-focused design innovation and is just one small example of the types of conversation starters you can find in their content.

To learn more about the podcast, visit your favorite podcast app or access the episodes directly at kimballinternational.com/alternativedesignpodcast.





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, positioning, and distribution.

With 25 years of industry experience on the dealer and manufacturer side of the industry, Michelle has been recognized as an innovator in selling to the Federal Government, State/ Local Government, Higher Education and Cooperative Purchasing. Her expertise includes: sales strategies, strategic planning, 3-5 year road mapping, targeted marketing plans, distribution development, hiring reps, and training for reps and/or dealers.

Michelle is known as a “serial networker” in the furniture industry and enjoys meeting people and making connections happen. If you’re interested in connecting - reach out at:

Michelle@strategic-catalyst.com, connect on [LinkedIn](#) or visit www.strategic-catalyst.com to learn more about her work.



Delving into the Public Sector: Worth the Wait

We have talked a lot about planning and targeting contracts that your organization wants to be on, but as I was driving the other day I thought “what do you do in the waiting?” I will admit there is a lot of waiting in the Public Sector world. Sometimes the contract you have targeted does not come out to bid for a year, two years, three years, etc. Sometimes it could even be five years!! So, what should you be doing while you wait for the contract RFP to be released that would position you to have a better chance of being awarded when you actually get the opportunity to respond to the bid? To answer this question, I spoke with my friends at NCPA and OMNIA and have compiled their great advice below. Although I only spoke to these two organizations, the information can be adopted to fit any Cooperative, State, Local, Higher Education contract that you have your eye on.

1. Make contact with the organization that will be handling the solicitation of the RFP/the contract you want to be on

- a. Register: some agencies require that you are registered to do business on their website
- b. If you are not required to register but they have an email listed on the website for contact, reach out and see if you can introduce your company and products to start to familiarize them with what you offer
- c. Some agencies use specific platforms (some are free and some charge) to solicit their bids. Find out what the agency will use for their bid and make sure you are registered. Some of the most common are Bidnet and Bonfire
- d. Make sure you can respond to the bid. Some contracts are only for dealers, some only for manufacturer and some allow both.

- e. If the agency does their own solicitation make sure you are tracking the contract closely. I thought NCPA was not going to be out again until 2023 for furniture, but they informed me on our call that they would be releasing the RFP in June of this year!

2. Unique product opportunity

- a. If you have a truly unique product there is an opportunity that you could get a contract much sooner than you expect. Get in front of the correct people to develop the need for the product you have. The correct people could be the lead agency for the contract or the people that manage the contract. Be sure to cover all your bases.
- b. If the agency does not have a contract currently for what you offer you may suggest a separate solicitation for the category of products. A great example I have of this is the ergonomic contract with OMNIA. It did not exist until 5 or so years ago and was solicited due to a need by a lead agency to have this type of product on contract.

3. Do your homework:

- a. Know where the bid will be coming out so you can watch for it
- b. A lot of organizations, especially cooperatives, are required to publish the bid responses for the current contract holders. Get familiar with the language and what a successful response looks like.
 - i. Review the bid so you know what the response you will need to do will entail and you can prepare in advance
 - ii. Review the current contracts responses so you know what a winning response looks like

4. Strategically pursue end users that would typically purchase off the contract you are targeting.

- a. Part of any winning bid response will be references. Make sure you have references that are specific to the type of agency that would purchase of the contract you are pursuing

5. Partner with current contract holders

- a. If there is a way for you to partner with an existing contract holder while you wait, do it! This allows for you to have sales to the customers and build the brand recognition for when you are able to respond.

6. Tips for the contract response when the time arrives

- a. Make sure you are engaged, registered, and positioned to receive the bid when it is released
- b. Make sure you have done your homework and are ready to put together a winning bid response
- c. The award is based on preset criteria. Know what that is and make sure you spend time focusing on that in your bid response- don't leave points on the table!
- d. Don't leave any section blank. An example NCPA gave is the value-added services section. They shared that there was a manufacturer that was awarded a contract because of other products they could offer in addition to furniture that was of interest to them.
- e. If you do not have the team, bandwidth or ability to respond to the bid there are companies out there that specialize in helping furniture dealers and manufacturers with these types of contracts. Connect with me on LinkedIn and I will make an introduction for you.

The waiting can be the hardest part, but if you have a plan to position yourself for the best chance at success, I think it will be worth the wait!



SitOnIt Seating Delivers a Broad Yet Curated Tables Collection with Parallon

The return to work has started and is even accelerating in 2022. Businesses everywhere are welcoming more and more staff back to the office (safely, of course). As a result, the old familiar workplace is being updated, expanded and enhanced. With this drive to refresh comes new opportunities to rethink and redesign – to look at interior spaces not as individual rooms but as integrated experiences. Because, after all, that’s the workday everyone knows. People flow from their office or desk through meeting rooms, break rooms, training rooms, lounge areas and more. That’s why SitOnIt Seating set out to create a tables collection for all spaces. They realized that the day changing from hour to hour doesn’t mean design should change from space to space.

Everything to the Table

Parallon is a singular collection with a singular look that addresses three distinct applications. It centers on Training, Café and Occasional needs. Each design was developed entirely in-house to make space cohesion effortless — all with some of the quickest turnaround times you can find. There are 28 tabletop finish

options to pair with three different powder-coated base colors. All the ways to mix, match and customize means Parallon gives designers unlimited possibilities and unmatched value.

Parallon Training

In sports and the arts, the saying goes, “play like you practice.” Same is true for training. Businesses grow and improve when they invest in leveling up their employees, which makes training rooms some of the most important spaces at work – but not all training rooms are the same.

From stationary to mobile models, Parallon training tables offer a level of flexibility and adaptability that truly sets them apart. The collection, offering the most popular tabletop sizes, can be used to create fixed-top setups or mobile flip-top arrangements well suited for multipurpose areas. The flip-top training tables feature quick-release latches for easy nesting and storage – and the soft-close mechanism is a must-have. When deploying Parallon, the tabletop flips down oh-so gently, keeping fingers safe and rooms quiet. That’s right ... no loud clangs. The casters

**COVER STORY:
SITONIT SEATING**

make quick work of organization, too. Of course, even after all the tables are out, there's only one surefire way to supercharge learning, and that's with power/data.

Parallon training tables provide multiple ways to connect. Power and data options work as standalone or daisy-chain configurations. On top, there's a tucked-away, easy-to-access outlet you can customize using three-prong outlets and dual USB ports. Additionally, the tables are compatible with a sleek cable management add-on to ensure there's no clutter.

Parallon Café

While training is essential, everyone needs to break away – even if it's to work. Parallon Café tables offer the perfect solution for the moments when you want to switch it up. These models share the collection's design DNA, featuring two tabletop shapes (round and square), three base heights (29", 36" and 42") and four tabletop sizes (24', 30", 36", and 42"). Bar-height tables are the tallest relatives in the family and pair well with multipurpose stools from SitOnIt Seating, creating a style that's even more seamless. But what if all you need is a quick take-five?

Parallon Occasional

A real cohesive collection requires connecting separate spaces with design that's consistent (and continuous). Parallon Occasional tables are perfect for smaller in-between areas or places that need to carry the design DNA. These could be lounge areas, maybe a place for welcoming and waiting — even a quiet corner of the office for an impromptu one-on-one. If Parallon Café tables are the big kid in the family, think of Parallon Occasional as the little cousin that goes with the flow and is just fun to have around. Just like Café, options include two tabletop shapes, two base heights — including mini-16" and -20" versions — and four tabletop sizes in all the same measurements. Of course, this model really stands out when paired with many of the most comfortable and well-designed lounge seating from SitOnIt Seating.

One Place. Every Space.

Many experts in the industry know about SitOnIt Seating. They're a leading manufacturer of commercial solutions in the U.S. – and #1 in task. From tables and lounge to screens and more, they've been the go-to destination for comprehensive, build-to-order solutions for almost 25 years. They combine award-winning design with some of the fastest lead times around. Their collections help turn product innovation into your space inspiration. What it all means is they can build almost any specification you want, deliver it when you need it, and offer a level of value no one can match. It's all part of their indie California spirit, and the all-new Parallon collection of tables carries this commitment forward as they drive to be the one place you go for any (and every) space.



Parallon Training



Parallon Training



Parallon Cafe



By Ashley Blevins

Ashley Blevins is the Director of Sales for GMi Companies who is a manufacturer of the brands Ghent, Waddell, and Vividboard. After spending over a decade in marketing, specializing in dealer relations, Ashley has been responsible for expanding the national sales footprint for the GMi family of brands.

Ashley is a certified presenter of CEU's and travels the nation providing presentations that train and educate dealers, architects, and designers on skills to educate their clients and close the sale

Ashley has found her passion in serving customers by providing value, earning trust, and turning customers into partners. Her philosophy for marketing and sales revolves around embracing change, trial and error, thinking strategically and using data to drive your next move. In her free time, you can find her enjoying the country air with her family or waving her Terrible Towel on Sundays.



The Great Boomerang

The Great Resignation has been a phrase we will continue to use as we study the implications from the COVID pandemic. It refers to the masses of employees who voluntarily quit their jobs due to forced shutdowns throughout the pandemic. This was caused by a lack in necessary worker protections, rising costs of childcare, and general cost of living and inflation. While this term will certainly be something our children will study in the future, let's focus our attention on the effects it had on manufacturers in our industry. There are two big indicators to discuss, the worker's market and the rising cost of goods/inflation.

In the beginning of the pandemic, manufacturers in the industry had a couple key decisions to make. The first being, do we shut down? If so, how long and what is the impact to the business and the employee? Or, do we stay operating? If so, how do we operate safely?

We needed to keep employees top of mind. Because the labor pool was challenging prior to the pandemic, we needed to do more to keep well-being at the forefront. **After chatting with fellow manufacturers below are a few best practices that were implemented to get employees back to work safely:**

1. Taking daily temperature checks at the door
2. Mask wearing
3. Social distancing
4. Increased cleaning services and disinfecting
5. Sanitizer stations
6. Staggering start times, break times and lunches
7. Tracking of exposures and employee quarantine schedules
8. Rapid Testing and company paid Covid Testing just to name a few

As we worked through those first few months it became apparent how important culture was for the organization. Change was continuous, culture needed to be secure prior to the pandemic to overcome what was ahead. Not only was the business being tasked with employee well-being, but also challenged on the product front. The work we did yesterday would be different tomorrow, we needed to flex and be agile. Cross-training if it wasn't in place became essential. Simply put, being in manufacturing was and still is hard.

While many in our industry had the ability to work remote, in manufacturing you simply need people to build the products the industry demands. We need people working together to create the quality goods we manufacture. As we look at the Great Resignation, are we really talking about manufacturing jobs? **Maybe it's just me but many people who resigned did so because:**

1. Talent won and companies were willing to pay for it.
2. Financial benefit when changing jobs meant less risk/fear in change.
3. Workers liked the flexibility remote work offered and could choose who and where to work.
4. Culture became the greatest advantage in retaining talent.

That is how I characterize most of what happened when we refer to the Great Resignation and how and why companies either succeeded or failed in the worker's market. When it comes to manufacturing, I'd like to introduce to you the notion of "The Great Boomerang." Much like what was outlined also effected production workers in both skilled and unskilled labor pools. Like many, they also realized financial benefits were available by moving companies. And they moved a lot... Many jumping from job to job in a matter of months then going back to the job they started at. Hence, "The Great Boomerang." What's important to note, is that each time they moved, their wages increased. Mainly because manufacturers need people and we had to pay more to get them. Not only that, if an employee did move on, what did they think of us, and will they WANT to come back?

John Becher, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at OFS spoke with me at length about the protocols they put into place to shift their mindset to ensure they retain and continue to hire new talent in production.



"We started by hiring new positions in human resources that revolved around retention, some roles are purely designed to implement and maintain "stay protocols" for our employees. We want to ensure we cater to all employees whether they have been with us for a few weeks or 20 years. Implementing stay interview processes keeps us informed on what is important to all our employees so we can offer meaningful programs and options. We never want to assume we know what people want from their employer."

Other initiatives OFS implemented to retain talent include bonus programs, lucrative referral programs with immediate eligibility, and more flexibility with options for when to work. "Millennials are not coming into manufacturing looking to work 60 to 70 hours a week, we needed to adapt to that mindset. We now give options that guarantee 40 hours a week in a variety of ways. Employees can choose from part-time positions, 4 day/ten-hour shifts with Friday – Sunday off, or a traditional 5 day/eight-hour shift. We also found value in having various start times to accommodate many schedules. Most recently, we implemented a pilot program at one of our production facilities that allows employees who want to opt into overtime the option to do so, but it is not mandatory. We hope to roll this program out to all facilities in the near future."

Kelly Keess, Director of Sales and Marketing with Spec Furniture, also chatted with me about the lengths they have gone through to retain both skilled and unskilled labor. "Something we are extremely proud about is our culture. The culture we had pre-pandemic is what helped us survive and come out ahead. We have a great team, some that have been with us for 20 plus years. We really relied on them to help us through this, but also come up with ways to ensure we keep those loyal employees." Like OFS, Spec is in the process of implementing "stay" programs to keep their employees needs top of mind. "Our referral program has been a huge benefit to finding new talent. Not only do we ensure it's a great incentive for the employee, but we also know that when employees bring in friends and family, it helps build an even tighter culture and feeling of belonging."

Like OFS and Spec, many manufacturers implemented similar ideas and invested A LOT of time, energy and \$\$\$ towards finding and retaining talent in manufacturing jobs. It wasn't that we weren't doing this before, but I feel the pandemic propelled manufacturers to increase their footprint on retention methods. The question then remains, how do you support the money being thrown into retention practices, the increasing

rates in wages, and the current disruption to supply chain and freight increases? Well, manufacturers had to raise their prices on products, makes sense, right? If manufacturers did not raise their prices they would threaten their own financial liability. And to make sure we stayed above water, sometimes there were multiple increases in a calendar year along with surcharges and more. While unheard of, it was needed to survive. Inflation is here because of this. While the economic landscape suggests inflation will level out at around 5 – 7% by the end of 2022, cost of everyday products will remain higher than post pandemic indefinitely. So, I'll leave you with this. The next price increase that comes across your inbox, think a little differently about why it's happening. Then use this information to better educate your own customers.

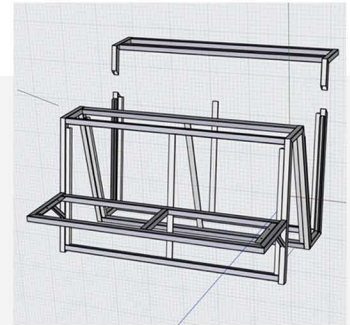
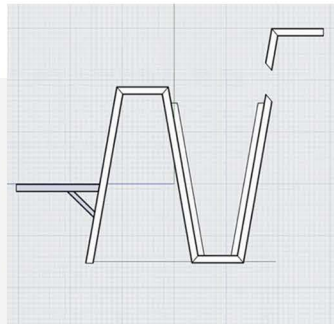
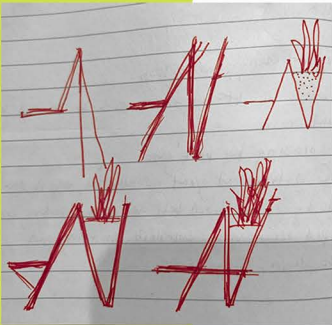
Interested in chatting about your own perspective on these subjects?

Message me at Ashley.blevins@gmicompanies.com for opportunities in sharing your thoughts in months to come.

If you can dream it, we can build it!

Visualising the creative process is a unique way to understand the artistry behind a design. Formaspace can take a product from concept to completion starting with a simple sketch.

Custom is the new standard at Formaspace.



A Love Letter to the Contract Furniture Industry



My 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 across the industry to tell us what they love most about our industry.

Let's just say, people got creative with their responses and we absolutely LOVE the results!

We have put these answers 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 this industry!

XOXO

Team My Resource Library

**LOVE LETTER TO
OUR INDUSTRY**



Kevin Baker
Market President
[BOS Tampa](#)

In June of 1980, I was given the chance to work part time at an Office Furniture Dealership, updating their massive library of both commercial and residential furniture. Getting to meet with manufacturer's reps, and helping our own sales reps select solutions for their customers turned out to be something I had a great affinity for.

After about a year, I was offered a full time inside sales job and jumped at the incredible opportunity. The following year I was given the chance to go into outside sales. Again, I gladly accepted the position.

Throughout the next 24 years I bounced between Herman Miller and Haworth dealerships, having positions of outside sales, and senior management.

In 2007 I had an opportunity to open my own Haworth dealership, an opportunity I couldn't pass up. So in December of that year, I opened Florida Business Interiors – Tampa Bay with 3 employees. By 2010 we had grown to be recognized as Tampa 7th Fastest Growing Company.

In 2018 I accepted an offer to sell my company to BOS based out of Roselle, Illinois. It was a simple decision as BOS is an Employee Owned Company, and all of my employees would become owners. That felt right for my Team's futures. Best decision I ever made in business.

Here I am 42 years in...Like this industry? NO, I **love** this Industry!



Lara Murphy
Marketing Director
[Furniturelab](#)

Anyone who's covertly flipped a chair over in a public space to learn its maker? Hello, you're my people. I've always **loved** furniture, and I've been lucky to work in this industry for 17 years.

For a brief time between jobs in 2008, I re-finished some of my own furniture by hand. I scour books, blogs, and magazines like this one to learn, figure out what's coming next, and appreciate the gorgeous spaces we create together.

And if you're a fan of furniture like I am, the hard work and innovation in our realm never ceases to inspire. The furniture industry knows how to transform an empty box, or

raw lumber and steel into things of purposeful beauty. Everyone in our industry shapes functional and attractive spaces.

Terrible furniture can ruin your night, ruin your back. We want the chairs we sit in and the tables we dine at to be as comfortable, durable, and sustainable. Beyond that, furnishings should be pleasing to the eye. Picking a chair is like falling in love—you know the one when you meet it.

And everybody sits—there's no one on earth untouched by what we do. Our endeavors make the world a happier place.



Sandra Perry
Partner
[Allé Designs](#)

I never imagined partnering in a business, especially one that I had no experience with the industry! As an ancillary business, that supports Furniture Dealers, Architects and Designers, I had a bunch to learn. I am fortunate to have a strong curiosity, and I never seem to run out of questions. That has been useful. But the most helpful was the amazing human beings in this industry.

This industry is full of dreamers, big thinkers, and the most open-minded people I have ever encountered. I have received knowledge, authentic feedback and so much inspiration throughout these years from this very generous group of professionals. I **love** this industry because I get to work with and support the amazing people who are truly changing the way people live, play, and work. A big heartfelt thank you!

**LOVE LETTER TO
OUR INDUSTRY**



Tammie Alciatore
Director of Marketing
[Arcadia + Encore](#)

What makes the contract furniture industry unique, and what do you love about it? I think one of the things that sets our industry apart is the artistic element behind it. On the surface, most people would never realize how much thought was put into the shape of a table edge, or the pitch of a seat, or selecting colorways for a textile. There's a whole story that every product has to tell, and the imaginativeness and painstaking dedication to making every little detail special is something pretty magnificent.

What makes the people in the contract furniture unique? There's a reason everyone says once you're in the industry you tend to never leave. At the end of the day it really is all about the people. Knowing how to keep things in perspective and still have fun while remaining passionate about our work is key and that's a common ground that hasn't changed throughout the years.

What made you choose the contract furniture industry? I actually didn't choose the contract furniture industry so much as it chose me. I interviewed for a marketing coordinator position at Arcadia straight out of college and at the time, didn't even realize there was this whole industry that existed off the radar, for most people at least. It's been an interesting journey over the past 17 years and pretty amazing to see how workspaces and product designs have evolved so much in such a relatively short period of time.

How is the contract furniture industry like family? As challenging as the past 2 years have been, it's been extraordinary to see people in our industry lift each other up and really be there for one another, especially early-on in the pandemic. There were people I'd known for years as hard-edged sales types who reached out more than once just to check-in, not as a salesperson but just as another human being, which meant more than they could have ever known.



John Fischbach
President
[Decca Contract](#)

What I **love** about the contract furniture industry is the professionalism, creativity and mutual respect. In our niche of the industry, I consider myself fortunate to have the opportunity to work with highly professional people from all areas of the furniture and design industry. They are people that put their clients and employees ahead of themselves, they have a team environment and as a result they are proud of the way they run their businesses. Creativity, we are awash in creativity. From new product introductions, to graphic presentations, inspirational material combinations and beautiful showrooms, we excel at creating aesthetically pleasing

designs that provide problem solving functions. I have many friends in other industries that talk about competitors as the adversary. We compete and we want to win, as do all businesses; however, I do not see my competitors with a negative perspective. I see all of us raising the expectation bar and that moves us all to do our best. From time to time, we talk with our competitors and many of us will complement one another about a new product introduction, or a new showroom design. We have mutual respect that can result in the sharing of resources, or dining together occasionally and I appreciate that level of respect.



Trisha Chism
Marketing Support Executive
[Boss Designs](#)

"As a newcomer to this industry, what I **love** about this field is that it gives me the possibility to live and develop my personality as a marketer, as well inventing new aspects of it along the way. I learn something new every day, with my team encouraging me to push to new limits. What I also **love** is the commu-

nity of like-minded individuals in this industry. Being surrounded by people who share a passion for design makes me excited to be in a career to which I am able to contribute to. I knew as soon as I started, I would fall in **love** with this industry."

**LOVE LETTER TO
OUR INDUSTRY**



Serena Panetta
Marketing Coordination
[Borgo Contract Seating](#)

I have always felt that what makes the designing process special is the integration of science and engineering with art and aesthetics. I believe that the key to each project is to ensure that every design is purposeful, efficient, and inspirational. Since entering the contract design industry as a marketing coordinator at Borgo, I have come to appreciate that sophistication and creativity is not only found through the vastness and complexity of combining various patterns and textures, but it can also be established within the directness and clarity of simplicity.

we do more than just manufacture furniture; we are tasked with adding value and meaning into a space, whilst transforming an environment into something exceptionally comfortable and highly functional. A truly great design evokes the senses to inspire creative thinking, maximize productivity, and promote a sense of well-being.

I believe that innovation can be found in the most unlikely of places; we only need the courage to open our minds to great possibilities and new opportunities.

To quote Lorinda Mamo, "Every great design begins with an even better story." At Borgo,



Liz Sworden
Marketing Coordinator
[BioFit Engineered Products](#)

Dear (Delve) Diary,

It's no secret that I've long been an admirer of the commercial furnishing industry - and certainly not from afar! I've worked for scientific and technical ergonomic seating manufacturer BioFit Engineered Products for, well, let's just say since the last time office cubicles were phased out!

On a related note, I've been absolutely enthralled by the commitment and adaptability of our industry during the pandemic to quickly bring solutions to market in the way of products, accessories, new finishes or components to aid caregivers, scientists, educators, students and all workers who rely on seating and casegoods.

Some of the things I **love** about our field include the seemingly endless innovations brought to market. The evolution of functionality, upholsteries and construction techniques that have transformed yesterday's chair from a ubiquitous piece of workplace furniture into a highly complex yet easy-to-use machine that helps enhance user and environmental well-being while making tasks performed by today's professionals so much simpler.

Finally, Diary, I cannot truly express the love I feel for the people in our business, and specifically, my coworkers at BioFit. Those counterparts I've come in contact with over the years have (for the most part!) been fun, caring and creative.

Until next time,

Liz Sworden



J.D. Ewing
Chairman & CEO
[COE Distributing](#)

"Growing up in this industry, in a family owned business, I've grown to **love** so many things. The dealer community is a tight-knit group and I **love** helping them 'win' by providing unique, forward-thinking quality products. At COE, we have a large focus on Quality and Innovation. Collaborating with others and putting our Core Values to work in order to benefit the industry is something we **love** to do.

The people both at COE and in the dealer community are an exceptional group that I couldn't be prouder to be a part of. Being in a family business, it's hard not to think of my colleagues as family. I'm invested in helping them improve their skills and in turn their lives, both at work and at home. We are one big office furniture family! Sometimes, your office furniture family even becomes your real family. This industry brought me the love of my life over 30 years ago. It doesn't get any better than that."

**LOVE LETTER TO
OUR INDUSTRY**



Susan Claus

Director of Marketing
[GMI Companies](#)
([Ghent, Waddell,](#)
[VividBoard](#))

I am the first to admit I did not see myself working in the commercial furniture industry for a company that specializes in whiteboards, glassboards and mobiles when I graduated with a marketing degree. Most would think that marketing a generally white object that also generally hangs on a neutral wall is not that exciting. But those everyday objects that are often an after-thought for the users of our products are what I **love** the most about working in this industry. Just as the passion for chairs, tables, monitor arms, writeable surfaces, and lounge furniture (to

name a few categories) runs deep with architects, designers, dealers, sales reps, and manufacturers, so does my personal **love** of whiteboards. There is not a person I have interacted with who is not bringing their best every day. My job is to market communication and collaboration, but never did I think I would find those attributes in a company or a network. To the industry I have fallen in **love** with, I cannot wait to see what our next passion project is and how we continue to revolutionize the way people work.



Ben Jayson

President
[Bendheim](#)

What I **love** about the office industry today is that it has empowered all of us – from manufacturers and design professionals to building owners – to create workspaces that not only support productivity but also deliver extraordinary, next-level user experiences. We help architects, designers, developers and building owners get in touch with their creative side by showing them how they can use glass to brighten spaces and layer functionality with unique design elements. We help them by reengineering the way specialty glass can be used by designing systems that minimize installation and maintenance costs,

while delivering enhanced aesthetics. By streamlining and simplifying the decorative glass specification and installation processes, we enable our clients to live our passion for bringing art into architecture... I believe that, while office spaces may shrink in the coming years, they will continue raising the bar of design. Designers will seek out those materials which can multi-function, such as naturally hygienic glass surfaces that lend a sense of openness and connectivity, while providing privacy as needed. This is an inspiring moment for the industry.



Eric Arnold

President
[Arnold Contract](#)

Sawdust in my blood? It seems possible. In 1962, my father's brother and his cousin founded Arnold Contract in Newark, NJ. They began with a few specialized products, and over the next six decades, the company evolved into the firm that we are today. As a teen, I swept the factory floors, then moved up to sanding duties. It wasn't glamorous, and still often is not, but there's no denying my **love** for the contract furniture industry.

ers, and forward-thinking for the needs of both tomorrow and years ahead. The mantra "No Challenge, No Change" might sum up how many have come to feel. Manufacturing colleagues, rep groups, A & D firms, dealers and end-users have faced challenges together that have strengthened our collective fortitude. I was brought up in a furniture family, but the support, advice and laughter gained from industry connections has built another form of family.

On the whole, this industry has much to look forward to. We have all pivoted in multiple ways over the past two years, but look at what we have accomplished in that! It has resulted in better technology, added value in our connections, problem solving superpow-

So why do I **love** the contract furniture industry? It's about the engineered solutions, craftsmanship, forward motion, and of course, family.

**LOVE LETTER TO
OUR INDUSTRY**



Brittani Saint
Senior Sales Director-
East Coast
[Clarus](#)

My ever-changing industry,

From sunrise to sunset, no day is ever identical, no surprise is ever the same, and no dream is too big for you. Each day, I get to work side-by-side with you creating, influencing, and making a difference in the world. We get to take spaces that were once just ideas, and make them realities by providing collaboration spaces to optimize clients' abilities in. Together, we influence the future where every single project is a call to adventure, and we get to bring sparkle and magic to life. We get to push the boundaries of possibility, and never say never!

But more importantly, you make me better. You help push me past my comfort zone by

encouraging me that nothing is impossible. When the days are hard, I am reminded that the rewards are so much sweeter. My potential is never wasted with you, but only furthered with every high and low. You encourage me to continue my determination and dedication in the strive to be my best.

Together, we are a force to be reckoned with, and we change the world- one idea at a time.

With **love**,

Brittani Saint



Claire Redsun
Brand Manager
[Formaspace](#)

For most people in this industry coming from the design side such as myself, **love** of the industry started like most meaningful relationships. Getting to know it and developing a deep respect for it through the eyes of my design professors who taught about the timeless and legendary role models the likes of Charles and Ray Eames, and Frank Lloyd Wright. The countless hours and sleepless nights spent trying to understand what it takes to succeed as a designer simply made the **love** grow, and the desire to succeed stronger. That kind of **love** becomes part of your identity. It's part of your everyday experience of literally everything.

However, my **love** of the industry started way before design school. My grandfather purchased a company long before I was born called Paoli Chair Company, later known as Paoli furniture. My father helped build Paoli for 25 years. All my early memories were watching how hard he worked and admiring the love and respect he had for his customers and employees. He showed me what it means to **love** the industry for the challenges, the lasting relationships, and of course the fun! The industry is truly family to me and a lasting family legacy.



Getting To Know MRGSE

MRG Southeast started in 1998 with a clear mission – to be a valued partner to our manufacturers and to be the best resource in the industry to our dealers, design firms and end users. Today, MRG covers the Carolinas, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi with local team members in each market. We view everyone at MRG as an integral part of the team and are lucky to have great people within our organization. **Our Mission** — MRG strives to be a valued partner with our manufacturers, a resource to our dealers, A&D firms, end users and serve our communities to the best of our abilities. **Our Vision** — To be the best Firm in our Industry while Aligning ourselves with the best Partners in the Industry. We don't Sell products, We Bring Solution

Q: Tell us a little bit about how your rep group got started?

A: Originally, we started in 1998. In 2011, MRG Southeast was born from the original firm. Our main goal was simple – we wanted to be the best resource to design firms, dealers and end users while maintaining a valued partnership with our factories. We started with some fresh ideas and wanted to bring a good mix to our territory. There weren't any other groups around that had a good blend of A&D products and products that are dealer friendly. To me, dealer friendly products are ones that look great, have nice design aesthetics, are reliable, built with quality and have amazing customer service.

Q: How has the company changed over the years?

A: MRG Southeast has had very successful growth in all aspects of our business, from growing our team to improving the overall back-end processes that come with running a business. I am so proud of our expansion and the team that makes up MRG.

Q: What do you think is the secret to your rep groups longevity and success?

A: Keeping our principles front of mind. Being a resource to our industry partners, working with integrity and helping better the communities we live in and serve.

REP GROUP FEATURE
MRGSE

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

A: The PEOPLE. I grew up around the business, worked for a dealership in sales after college and started working for our original firm in 2007. The contract design industry people are passionate about what they do and that drives me.

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

A: I look forward to our continued growth. I am a firm believer that we are always learning and with learning comes opportunity of growth. We will keep our principles strong and we will continue to surround our firm with great people.

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

A: Resource



MRG SOUTHEAST / CONTRACT INTERIORS



KEEPING CONNECTED

With the challenges that 2020 and 2021 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!



Level Reps

Level Reps is more than just furniture. They believe in putting people first and consistently innovating to positively influence change that enhances the industry. The Level team covers Illinois and Wisconsin markets offering solutions from Hightower, 9to5 Seating, Enwork, JSI, Takeform, Loftwall, Arcadia, Encore, Source International, ESI Ergonomics, MPS Acoustics, Muraflex, Silen, BOLD, and Venue Industries.

Level is showing some love to the interiors community this Valentine's Day by delivering homemade sweet treats baked locally by Anna Valsecchi (@dessertfirst_chi).

To stay in the loop with Level, head over to levelreps.com and follow them on Instagram at [@levelreps](https://www.instagram.com/levelreps) to see how their team continues to stay connected with the community.

delve^{MRU}
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