

Industry News

Carlitz buys Eastman House

By David Perry

NORTH BRUNSWICK, N.J. — Bedding veteran Stuart Carlitz has acquired the Eastman House mattress brand from a private equity firm and says he plans to build the brand across the country.

In addition to owning bedding brand Eclipse International, Carlitz, who is based here, also is a Therapeutic licensee.

Carlitz's acquisition of Eastman House changes the business model that the brand had been pursuing. Last fall, Eastman House said it planned to produce its line domestically from components imported from China. But under Carlitz's ownership, the brand will focus on U.S.-made materials.

"We have made a special deal with Leggett & Platt on some unique constructions and components," he said. "We also hired a marketing and advertising firm, which was given directions to focus on tradition, quality and lifestyle."

The Eastman House brand, which dates back to the 1860s, still resonates with consumers, according to Carlitz. He relaunched the brand at the recent Las Vegas Market.

"Eastman House offers an ultra-premium mattress brand with a continuation of the company's longstanding tradition of quality and value," he said. "The brand



Eastman House executives Don Balsavich, left, and Matt Connolly demonstrate spring units that show the company's coil-on-coil construction.

will be sold to select dealers on a limited distribution basis."

He said the line features coil-on-coil construction using the heaviest spring unit in the industry. The box spring features a 20-slat frame with each row of offset coils supported by an individual slat of lumber.

In addition, he said, the line offers a green story with soy-based foams and pure latex. Many of the quilts feature pure cashmere, silk and Joma wool. Several of the fabrics feature organic cotton or high-cotton contents. The fire-resistant materials have naturally inherent FR properties. The line retails from \$799 to \$5,000.

There are currently three Eastman House licensees — Carlitz's Eastman of New Jersey company, Eastman of Ohio, headed by Ken Wilschek and Nathan Pollock, and Eastman House of

Michigan, headed by bedding veteran Don Balsavich.

Wilschek and Pollock also market the Eclipse brand. Balsavich's factory, Clare Bedding of Escanaba, Mich., also produces Restonic bedding.

Carlitz is CEO of Eastman House. Wilschek is president and will run the day-to-day operations of the company. Balsavich also will take an executive position with the company. Matt Connolly has been named national vice president of sales.

Carlitz said interest in the Eastman House brand is strong.

"We have many interested factories, including plants in Texas, northern and southern California, Idaho, Iowa and Tennessee," he said. Two other Eclipse factories in the United States, and several overseas, also are considering producing the Eastman House brand, he said.

Editor's desk

One 'newcomer' who really gets us

Until this guy came along, it was generally accepted that newcomers to the furniture business, especially those from the financial community, never really "got us," much less made a difference.

But that was before Bill Colgrove, the general manager of Furniture Values International, the distributor for Aspenhome, arrived on the scene in 2001.

At that time, Bill saw what he called the raw ingredients for growth. In a very short time, especially for our often sedentary industry, Colgrove and his team transformed the company from what had been a home office specialist into a full-line manufacturer and importer active in entertainment furniture, occasional furniture, case goods, leather and more.

Today, while scores of home furnishings executives are wearing ashes and sackcloth, Colgrove optimistically sees our market as a pie that is showing measured, but steady, growth.

"A few years ago, the industry did \$81 billion. Last year, we did some \$84 billion and this year, we are on tap to do in excess of \$87 billion," he says. "The pie, in my mind, is getting larger each year, and it is there for anybody with an appetite to earn a slice."

While the growth may be limited but constant, Colgrove admits that when targeting consumers, there has been a big change, primarily in where they are buying furniture.

His job as the head of the hunting team is to find the new watering holes where the customers are gathering. And to do that, Colgrove said, you have to focus on who is on your team.

"With the right people, you can do anything. But you can't get the right people without a vision and you can't have a vision without opportunity," he told me.

Even so, good product alone won't make you successful, he believes. "If product is king, then process has to be queen," Colgrove said.

Oh, and just so you don't think this is all blue-sky babble, under Colgrove's watchful eye, the company has enjoyed compound annual growth of 30% for the past five years.

Now that's what I call putting your money where your mouth is.

Ray Allegrano
Editor in chief



ADL to honor industry leaders

NEW YORK — Two industry leaders and a top retailer will receive the Anti-Defamation League's home furnishings industry honors at the ADL's annual ceremony here June 5.

Michael Amini, founder and CEO of AICO/Amini Innovation Corp., and Atlanta-based retailer Haverty's, led by President Clarence Smith, will each receive the American Heritage Award, presented for "unwavering commitment to humanitarian goals and dedication to the community." Smith will accept the award on behalf of Haverty's.

Sharing the dais with them will be Hymie Itzkovitz, founder of Primo International, who will receive the Lifetime Humanitarian Award for "living and teaching others to live by the principles of good citizenship and devotion to community."

For more information on the event, contact Judy Master, ADL's director of corporate development, at jmaster@adl.org.



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