

JANUARY 2019

interiors+sources



Bobby Berk
opens dialogue
in a fractured
society

CUTTING EDGE
LIGHTING
TRENDS TO EXPECT
UNIQUE SURFACING
SOLUTIONS



32 Report The Scandinavian Invasion ▼

New to the design scene, Scandinavian Spaces wants to shake up the way offices are designed – and it involves a lot of color.

By Kadie Yale



38 Profile Bridging the Political Divide ▶

Bobby Berk, interior designer and one of the Fab Five hosts of Netflix's hit show *Queer Eye*, uses interior design to have hard conversations.

By Kadie Yale

50 Product Evolution 80 Years and Still Counting ▼

Throughout its long history, Samuelson Furniture has remained a family-owned business and continues to provide high-end case goods and seating for a wide range of hospitality projects.

By Adrian Thompson



“Once someone can relate to you, once someone sees you as a person, as a human just like them, they have the ability to have more empathy towards you and understand your plight and not just their own.”

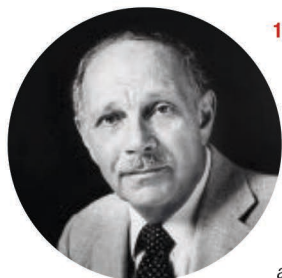
— Bobby Berk

80 Years and Still Counting

With a long and rich heritage, Samuelson Furniture continues to thrive as the only fourth generation family-owned business in hospitality.



One of Samuelson Furniture's latest introductions to the hospitality furniture market is the Smart Chair. Crafted in antiqued leather, the Smart Chair has a convenient charging port inside its arm.



1935 - Father and son duo, Harry and Samuel Chalfin, founded Invincible Parlor Frame Company in The Bronx, NY. At the time, the company produced only unfinished frames for local upholsterers and was one of dozens of similar companies in the metropolitan area. For perspective, two club chairs and a sofa frame - known as a "three-piece suite" - sold for \$6.75. Samuel would often lose orders over a nickel or dime. In 1936, the Chalfins moved Invincible Parlor Frame Company to a 55,000-square-foot facility in Paterson, NJ, where the company still resides today.

1950S - For about the first 20 years, Invincible Parlor Frame Company continued to produce only frames, no finished pieces of furniture. In 1955, Samuel started to import goods from Italy, such as hand-carved reproductions, tables, chairs and accent furniture.

"That elevated the company to another level," remarks Larry. The Chalfins began selling their frames to the finest workrooms in New York, as well as big, up-and-coming furniture manufacturers in North Carolina, including Henredon, Baker and Drexel.

1974 - Larry Chalfin, son to Samuel and grandson to Harry, graduated college and entered the family business, still named Invincible at the time. Larry shadowed his father for two weeks before Samuel told him, "Go sell." Larry traveled to states like Texas and California and through his travels and visits saw an opportunity to sell a finished product, rather than just the frame. Taking his son's word for it, Samuel gave the approval to start creating residential furniture.


2002 - After China shook up the residential furniture market in the mid-90s, Larry had to figure out a new strategy to propel Invincible forward. He began looking into the hospitality market, and in 2002 attended Hospitality Design (HD) Expo in Las Vegas. "I walked around,

At Samuelson Furniture in Paterson, NJ, much has changed over the course of the company's 80-plus years in business, yet much has also stayed the same. Passed down through the family for four generations, the hospitality furniture company originally started as a framing business for residential furniture when it opened its doors in 1935. Operated at the time by Harry Chalfin and his son Samuel, it began developing finished furniture when third-generation family member, Larry, joined the team.

Full of ideas, Larry set out across the United States developing key relationships with manufacturers that could help put Samuelson Furniture on the residential map. It wasn't until his son, Michael, entered the business in the early 2000s that Larry saw opportunity for Samuelson Furniture in a different and growing market: hospitality design. Understanding the importance of creating positive relations and with his son able to handle things back home, Larry began traveling to China where Samuelson Furniture started to expand both its products and production facilities.

"What I found in our business is that relationships are the most important aspects," says Larry. "Relationship with your supplier, relationship with your customer, relationship with your employee. At the end of the day, it's the relationships that really carry you through to the next place that you need to be. When times get tough, those relationships count more than ever."

Larry learned this from both his father and grandfather, who often spent time with their Italian and Spanish suppliers in their own New Jersey home during the company's early years. Today, Samuelson Furniture continually works to uphold their values, which is reflected in its dedicated personnel, some of whom have been with the company for decades.

"We have a no-asshole policy," Larry laughs before continuing on a serious note. "Samuelson is a family business in every way. Not just because we are a family ourselves, but because we feel like a family here... We operate as a team. There is no one superstar. Everything that we do well is a result of the cooperation of people focused on the end result." 



While recently looking through an issue of *Architectural Digest*, Larry came across this iconic swan dining table (left) that was an awards finalist for a resources council in 1983. The hand-carved wooden swans create a perfect pedestal for the glass table top. Larry notes that seeing the designers in Long Island, NJ, who were featured in the magazine for repurposing the table as a focal point in their living room, is one of his favorite moments in Samuelson history.

looked around and I said, 'Well, instead of being the company that always gets knocked off by everyone in hospitality, what if we're the company that actually is in hospitality and sets the pace in the industry?'" Larry returned to New Jersey, told the company the new direction he thinks it should go in, and step by step began to build the business in the hospitality sector.

to travel to China and secure close partnerships with factories, which enabled Samuelson Furniture to continue to expand in the hospitality market.



2004 - Larry's son, Michael, began to work at Invincible. Around this time, as the fourth generation enters the family business Larry honors his father with the corporate name, Samuelson Furniture. With his son now helping, Larry had more opportunities

2005 AND BEYOND - Samuelson Furniture was given the opportunity to furnish Rosen Shingle Creek, a 1500-room hotel in Orlando, FL, including all the guest room furniture, suites and 90 percent of the public area. "We did that project and that put us on the map in Orlando," says Larry. "From that, we wound up opening the door with Disney. We did the Disney Animal Kingdom, the boardwalk, Port Orleans Alligator Bayou Lodges, and more. We (furnished) 17,000 or 18,000 rooms for Disney in the last 12 years." Since the major Florida installations, Samuelson Furniture has continued to grow and provide high-end case goods and seating for a variety of hospitality projects.