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# Samuelson Furniture Specializes in Hospitality



HOSPITALITY MAKERS

## Samuelson Furniture Specializes in Hospitality

THE COMPANY HAS A FIRM GRASP ON EUROPEAN DESIGN WITH THE ADDED BENEFIT OF LOW COST, HIGHLY TECHNICAL PRODUCTION.

BY ROB KIRKBRIDE



ness as a shipping clerk and later became a salesman at a fabric company. In the 1930s, when the Depression was at its worst, Lawrence Chalfin's grandfather was forced to close his business, but it led to bigger things.

"My grandfather approached (my Dad) one day and said, 'Sam do you have any money?' and my father had saved up \$500, which in those days was probably a fortune," said Lawrence Chalfin.

After learning of his son's saving, Lawrence Chalfin's grandfather asked his Dad if he wanted to go into business together, and the company was born.

The working capital was provided by Lawrence's father, and his grandfather provided the woodworking and chair making background. The company started out as the Invincible Parlor Frame Company (a living room was referred to as a parlor then) in the Bronx, New York, and stayed there one year. It moved to Patterson, New Jersey, in 1936, and the company has been there ever since.

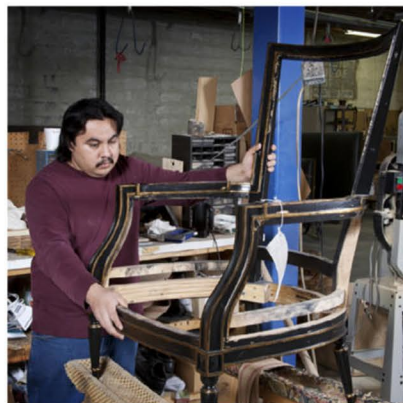
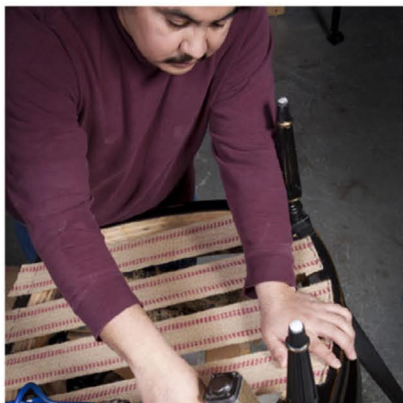
Sofas, chairs and accent furniture for the local furniture trade were the main products back then of the furniture industry that was centralized around New York, Philadelphia and Grand Rapids. There was no North Carolina furniture hub. Two club chairs and a sofa frame sold for \$6.75 for the three pieces. "They could make 53



piece suites a week so they had \$300 a week production, and he literally lost (business) over a nickel or a dime," Lawrence Chalfin said.

In the mid-1950s, Sam Chalfin began importing hand-carved furniture from Europe and selling it to fine furniture showrooms in New York. He also sold the white wood furniture as an OEM supplier to the manufacturers in North Carolina, companies like Baker, Henredon and Century. "So we were the largest importer of hand-carved, reproduction furniture, white wood product to the furniture industry at one time," said Lawrence Chalfin.

When Lawrence Chalfin joined the business in the 1970s, he went to his father and





said he thought the company could sell finished furniture products. Sam Chalfin gave his blessing with one condition: They could not sell products that would compete with their own customers.

“Design center showrooms were just starting to develop, and I saw an opportunity to sell to the interior design trade as opposed to the retail market, so we never really were providers to the retail market, and we began selling finished products to interior designers,” Lawrence Chalfin said. “We opened up a small showroom in the World Trade Center in Dallas, and we basically created a new genre of furniture ... hand-carved reproduction furniture finished in the finest finishes, upholstered COM, to the interior design trade (and) wholesale showrooms around the country.”

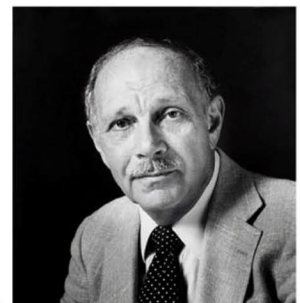
In the 1990s, when China started to come into play, he realized business as usual was over for the market and started to look elsewhere. “We always had a small component of our business that was hospitality, but I saw an opportunity, and in the early 2000s I started to focus on hospitality,” Lawrence Chalfin said.

Sam Chalfin passed away in 2003. As his name was Samuel, the company was re-branded as Samuelson Furniture, and it had a new focus: hospitality furniture. It took another five years to transfer completely out of residential.



Today Samuelson Furniture is 100 percent focused on the four- and five-star hospitality furniture market. Its roots of making and selling high quality furniture has made the transition easy. The company continues to focus on personal relationships and quality- and design-driven furniture at the upper end of the market. That culture hasn't changed from the company's founding.

“People are the most important thing,” said Lawrence Chalfin, adding some of his employees have been with the company for



*Sam Chalfin*