

Fresh shapes, colors distinguish upholstery

Sources aim to shake dealers out of their summer doldrums

By Gary Evans

LAS VEGAS — Upholstery vendors are bringing an abundance of new products and taking new directions at the market here in hopes of shaking dealers out of the summer doldrums.

"The mood is going to be that you better have something special or they're going to walk on by," said Casey Fisher, owner of Los Angeles-based Haute House Home Furnishings.

"I think dealers will buy unique stuff," he said. "It's the bread-and-butter stuff that doesn't seem to be selling. The real specialty items, things with a twist, the things that are showstoppers — that's what the buyers will use to get consumers into the stores."

Following his own advice, Fisher is introducing a collection of moderne upholstery — described as "International meets Parisian" — in plush textured velvets. Sofas will retail from \$2,000 to \$5,200.

"It's an extension of what we've been doing. We do very well with our looks and we're evolving them to a new place. And that's done through shape, scale and new textures," Casey said.

From Mike Cims Inc., which has a new line of theater seating, to Nathan Anthony's entry into the upholstered bed category, manufacturers are

looking for the magic ingredient that will pique dealers' interest here.

"Any time you have a soft retail business climate, the more exciting we can make the product, the more we'll be able to get the excitement back into the industry and get people motivated to do the advertising they need to do — and to aggressively look for items that are fresh," said Eddie Schroder, vice president of design and merchandising for Hiatt Furniture.

"That's how (retailers are) going to catch peoples' eyes, even in a soft retail environment," he said.

Besides posters highlighting its work in providing furnishings for the season finale of the television series "Extreme Makeover Home Edition," and celebrating the company's 60th anniversary, the Hiatt showroom features about two dozen pieces of new product, including a strong effort in the upper-end Couture collection and in Gen H, its kids' furniture line.

Couture includes a number of pieces that "are really deep, longer and lower to the ground," Schroder said. "Sectionals might be as much as 60 inches deep."

Douglas Furniture is showing 14 new motion sofas and loveseats, four domestic dining rooms, two new oak tilt swivels, a breakfast nook and

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three new import metal groups. Douglas also will hit a new price point with a motion sofa to retail at \$599.

"This is probably going to be the largest introduction we've had in some time," said Tom Gates, vice president of merchandising.

Gates said that the two markets in Las Vegas have "been very good writing markets; as a matter of fact, some of the best in our 108-year history. We think attendance may be less than it was (at past markets), but we don't expect it to be soft. We hope dealers have cleaned out their pipelines because they're certainly not buying much now."

He added, "We know this: When we come out with a lot of new items and we give the customer a reason to buy, we have an excellent market."

Ashley Furniture has "a ton of new product" at the show here, according to Kerry Lebensburger, president of sales for the company's upholstery division.

"We're just trying to be as

sharp and aggressive as we can be. That's what the dealers are coming for. If they're coming all that way, we're going to make sure they find what they want," he said.

Lebensburger said that he expects "attendance (from) east of the Mississippi is not going to be as strong, and attendance west is going to be stronger. I think part of it is because of business (being soft). The majors always come and then the rest of the people, they don't really need to come. I think they're going to try to conserve some money," he said.

AICO is introducing two upholstery groups and two case goods collections reflecting the company's opulent traditional look.

"We've pretty much gotten away from contemporary and focusing on what we do best," said Laurie Phillips, director of upholstery merchandising.

"This is really only the third (Vegas market) and only the second at mid-year. I have to hope it would be well attended

based on April's dismal attendance in High Point," she said. "We've had two very good markets (here), July and January of this year, so I'm hoping we continue to see that kind of response."

"We have quite a few dealers who are West Coast- and Canada-based and that will help also. Somebody who sells more to the East Coast may not have that kind of attendance. I think it should be fairly decent," she said.

Integrity Furniture is introducing five groups of contemporary upholstery, a departure from its usual traditional line, according to owner Rachel Falorina.

"We're trying to bring in something new," she said. "Unless one of our customers requests a contemporary-looking style, we don't do it. It's just not part of our line. If nothing else, we're telling them that just because you don't see it, it doesn't mean we can't do it."

She said that business has "dramatically slowed down in the industry. In comparison to last year, it is really slow. A lot of people are just looking for a price point." But Vegas is Vegas, she said, "and a lot of people are anxious to go there. It hasn't worn out its welcome."



The Cheyenne sofa is from The Couch Company by Lazar, which is showing for the first time in Las Vegas.

Nathan Anthony is offering a new line of upholstered beds in Las Vegas, including this Adam model in queen, California king and Eastern king.