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Janet Lyon and Susan Ladner Casden
Janet Lyon Interiors

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The Workroom that Grew Up

From basement workroom to full-service design showroom, Janet Lyon Interiors took several small steps to reach its ultimate goal.

by Howard Shingle, Photography by Andrew Wagner

A customer walking into Janet Lyon Interiors' showroom in East Longmeadow, MA, today would get quite an eyeful. The 4,600-square-foot showroom features mini-room-setting vignettes showcasing furnishings, custom window treatments, bedding, upholstery, accessories, trimmings and wall coverings. There's a gallery of artwork, a gallery of clocks and a gallery of lamps. What the customer would not get is even an inkling that this mother-and-daughter business began just eight years ago as an in-home (read that: *basement*) custom wholesale workroom.

This exceptional growth was achieved through a series of smaller steps—and moves—all aimed at reaching the ultimate goal of becoming “a one-stop shopping store for all design needs,” says Janet Lyon, Allied ASID, who partners with her mother Susan Ladner Casden. Going from basement to showroom actually took several moves and a few business adjustments along the way, adding workroom and sales personnel and dropping most of its designer clients. “Basically, I'm the designer now,” Lyon says. “We've really caught on, and we just don't have the time or

energy to do other designers' work.

“We focus mostly on residential designing from start to finish,” she continues. “We are suited for this as we started as a workroom, so we know the business from the ground up.”

As this two-person workroom grew into a five-person furniture/accessories/window treatment retail showroom, it has seen its income grow as well. “From starting out at about \$5,000 our first year, we feel we are closing in on \$1 million in gross sales this year,” says Lyon.

FEELING AT HOME

Many factors contribute to Janet Lyon Interiors' success. Among them are that it is a family-run business, offers top-notch customer service and quality products, relies on multi-level marketing and has its own on-site workroom.

“Our customers enjoy knowing that we are a family business, it makes them feel very secure that we will be here for a long time,” Lyon says. Her husband, Mark, handles all of the company's installations. He also fabri-



Far removed from the company's original basement workroom, its new spacious showroom features mini-room vignettes showcasing a wide range of interior décor options.

cates the hard corners and supervises the workroom and deliveries. "He has a talent for tools and works well with the customers," she says. The two hope someday to invite their twin boys into the business when they are older.

"People appreciate that we're a family business," says Casden. "They come in and are pleasantly surprised that we're a mother/daughter/husband/father kind of business and that the people we employ are all people that we've known for many years. I think they feel comfortable that they're working with what we hope will be a third-generation business.

"There's no customer who comes in that isn't personally greeted," she says. "We try to make them feel quite at home. Janet has a nice way of working with the customer. She's very open and honest with them. We try to keep the customer feeling very comfortable."

In the workroom, Diane Boghosian, manager, and Carolyn Correa, seamstress, create all of the custom treatments Lyon designs. "We keep our two girls very busy there, and we have an upholsterer that we work with very closely," Casden says. On the showroom floor, Jim Mailolo meets with customers and helps Lyon and Casden with sales.

Among the company's top suppliers, Lyon lists Hunter Douglas, Kirsch, Robert Allen, ADO, Conso, Thibaut and Seabrook. "Reliability of product, consistency and quality are very important to our clients and us," Lyon says.

"What we've tried to do is take the best of the lines available to us and utilize them in our work, because it's easier to use the best and not have to work around a lesser quality," Casden adds.

OLD AND NEW

Many of Janet Lyon Interiors' customers are repeats, but the company has been successful at attracting new clients as well. Direct mail marketing was the company's first form of advertising and it remains the backbone of its efforts today. "We find names in a local business magazine that lists new homeowners in the region, and we go by the towns that we service offering a free in-home consultation," Casden explains. "We use a weekly newspaper that is very well read in this area, and we advertise extensively in that."

But the company relies on several marketing avenues and networking opportunities—some of which are inexpensive, yet successful and even fun. Trunk shows, for example. Lyon will invite some of her fabric reps to come into the store and show new lines to invited guests.

Lyon also hosts seminars in the showroom and has given presentations for women's groups and community programs in which she and her mother are actively involved. "I have a passion for color; I do a lot with what the new colors are that are coming up and with all the new fabrics," Lyon says. "We've done wall coverings in the past, and we shown window treatments and different blinds."

Lyon and Casden especially like public television and radio and have volunteered to staff the bank of tele-



Lyon, right, has a "nice way of working with customers." Every client is greeted and made to feel comfortable.



On the showroom floor, Jim Mailolo helps a customer with a custom top treatment.



In the workroom, Casden and Lyon work with manager Boghosian on the start of another custom treatment. The on-site workroom sets the company apart from the competition.



The in-house workroom is a part of the company that would “never change.” Here, seamstress Carolyn Correa begins work on a rod pocket.



Janet Lyon Interiors’ new home is in a landmark market the company helped rehab.

phones during station pledge drives.

Twice a year the area holds a home show that attracts 100,000 people. “We are a feature booth in both of those shows,” Casden says.

These home shows are successful because their service area, just outside Springfield, MA, continues to grow with many new, larger homes going up. “We have a really great location,” Lyon says. “East Longmeadow is a growing town. They’re building petite mansions, and we’re in a really great spot in the center of town. We sit alone.”

These new homes are a “major source of income,” Casden admits, but it is satisfied customers who keep coming back that make up the bulk of sales. “We’re at the point now in our retail and design lives that we’re

getting people who have sold homes that we’ve done and are now moving into condos. So we’re redoing homes for the second and third times for some of these customers. That’s a nice plus for us,” she says.

Lyon says customers are choosing fancy rods and hardware for their homes and pinch pleated draperies pulled off to the side. “For a while we were doing a lot of sheers with valances,” she says. “Now I’m seeing calls for longer draperies— complete window coverings. I’m seeing fancy hardware.”

Even if the current building boom doesn’t continue, business is likely to remain good for Janet Lyon Interiors. With customers less likely to travel these days, they are taking a closer look at their homes. “We’re hearing people come in saying, ‘Instead of using our money to go away, we’re going to do more in our house. We have the vacation money set aside, but we’re going to redo the family room where we all can be together,’” Casden says. “We’ve heard it many times in the last several weeks. People are digging in a little more, but they want to fix up the house to make it comfortable for the family.”

STEP BY STEP

A workroom has always been at the heart of Janet Lyon Interiors. “Having a designer-supervised workroom has always been a plus to our business—a part we would never change,” says Lyon. “We are distinguished from our competition because we offer custom window treatments and upholstery done in our own workroom.”

That is, of course, where it all began in 1993. Lyon and Casden worked for a single designer back then, making window treatments and other custom orders. In January 1994 they moved out of the house and relocated to Palmer, MA, and into 300 square feet of space in a facility that also housed a paint store. By August of that year they had outgrown the shared space and headed to Wilbraham, MA, where they moved into their own 600-square-foot space.

About that time the two formed a business partnership and hired additional employees. Over the next several years, Lyon completed her interior design degree from Bay Path College in Longmeadow, MA.

Soon the company was on the move again—this time into 1,000 square feet, and for the first time it added a retail component to the business. As Janet Lyon Interiors’ reputation in the local community grew, so too did the company itself. A jump to a 2,000-square-foot store was next, and eventually the workroom was moved to a separate location as several more employees were added to the payroll.

Janet Lyon Interiors found its current home in January of this year. With a total of 8,600 square feet, the building allows for a 4,600-square-foot showroom plus 4,000 square feet of workroom and storage under one roof. “In this last move, we helped rehab a building that had been a landmark market in town that had closed down,” Casden explains. “When we decided to rent it, we designed it the way we wanted it, and the owner followed our design. We have a classic design, and it’s really very pretty, so people come because they see the store is open and they’re drawn into it.” She adds that it is her belief—hope, actually—this last move will be permanent.

Lyon, too, seems ready to stay put. “It has been a long time, and we’ve achieved our big goal by achieving a lot of smaller goals,” she says. Asked about further business expansion, she answers, “We’re where we need to be.” ❖