



High Point Market gets positive response

Dealers writing orders, designers shop for active projects

By Cinde W. Ingram -- Casual Living, April 11, 2011 10:51:27 AM

HIGH POINT, N.C. — Orders were being written in nearly every showroom that offered outdoor and casual lines at last week's High Point Market. Despite chilly temperatures and strong winds, most manufacturers agreed it was a good show that promised better days ahead for the casual furnishings industry.

"Definitely the economy and fundamentals for doing business are better than they were a year or six months ago," Telescope Casual President Henry Vanderminden said. "Consumers are even more robust than we saw last April. The pent-up demand is continuing to grow. I think it's going to be a strong spring and summer season."

Those sentiments repeated through most of the more than 60 High Point showrooms that offered outdoor furniture and accessories.

"The market's been good and the season has started off good," said Clay Kingsley of Kingsley-Bate. "It's better than last year, which was better than the year before. We're seeing earlier business." Outdoor woven furniture in a light sea salt shade was gaining attention in addition to the teak furniture Kingsley-Bate is known for, he said.

"It's a much better show than we expected," said Sandra Marion, executive VP of sales, South Sea Rattan. "It felt like traffic counts were up a little over last year. The difference this time was everybody was writing orders."

Buyers for full-line furniture stores often commented they were "just here to look and learn a little bit about the outdoor business," Marion said. Once they explored, buyers wanted to know whether the manufacturer had product in stock and how quickly they could receive it. With warehouses on both coasts now, South Sea Rattan was among the vendors able to answer they can deliver it quickly. "I think we wrote more orders at the show than we've ever written," she said.

Eric Parsons, president of Gloster Furniture, said the overall market was a bit stronger than it has been the past couple of years. "The difference this time around is people have active projects," he said. "We're up over 50% on our trade and showroom business. We have had a lot of special orders, as we've always had. Our outdoor lounge has been a big homerun. It ended up getting on a lot of retail floors." Gloster's Cloud and Bloc collections were among the upholstered looks appearing for outdoor and covered porch uses.

Lloyd/Flanders President Dudley Flanders agreed demand has started earlier. "Our orders for the past six weeks are up significantly," he said. "The business is coming from all over the country."

Bill Markowitz of Veneman Collections observed the casual market has compressed. "They are ordering now and expect it in the spring," he said. "I think the pressure is on all of us to react quicker."

Lane Venture gained attention from the design community as it expanded the outdoor upholstery offerings in its WeatherMaster line at the High Point Market.

Acacia Home & Garden President Alex Te and his wife Lorraine were not only showing more upholstered looks but getting aggressive with color trends. A bedroom collection near the front of the showroom was displayed in pink while the WINOS line moved from its former bright colors to classic black and white. Leilani, a new outdoor sectional, featured a banana leaf peal frame and functional cocktail table that can also be used as a trunk.

Whitecraft was among the vendors who handled plenty of reorders and special orders in March, much more than during the months of January and February, Bill Herren said. He noted attendance at the market was better on Saturday and Sunday, compared to the October show.

Tami Newton, sales and marketing manager of Palm Springs Rattan & Garden Classics, said order writing started on the show's opening day. Large dealers began arriving on Sunday and new dealers were opening up accounts. Six new collections debuted. Upholstered seating was a major draw for both indoor and outdoor buyers.

"We're seeing more contract buyers," said Rick Price, president of Uwharrie Chair. "Hospitality is coming back quicker than retail. The economy is getting better. We can see it."

His daughter Rebecca Price Ly added, "In January and February, our contract sales were up 10 times over last year." The company's Glen Mere adirondack, combining stainless steel with treated pine, was gaining attention during the six-day show.

Harold Hudson, Summer Classics' VP of sales and marketing, said its IHFC showroom was drawing more traffic during the company's second High Point showing. "We've already written more at this market than in all of October," he said on the show's third day.

Allen Callzadilla, executive VP of Pelican Reef Wicker, added a high-tech incentive to make order-writing easier. Buyers who wrote orders with Pelican Reef during the show were given an iPad that was preloaded with the company's catalog. Sales reps work with their retail customers to train them on the iPad. Pelican Reef's order writing actually started strong on the Thursday and Friday before the official Saturday opening. Callzadilla said he thought that was because dealers knew the company now has a permanent showroom at the Merchandise Mart in Chicago.

NorthCape International attracted large full-line furniture dealers it would not normally have seen by exhibiting its licensed Southern Living collection in a shared showroom with Chromcraft-Revington, another licensee Kim Golson said. "It opened up the door," she said. "Obviously, we're in the South and Southern Living magazine is well-known here, but we're seeing dealers from across the country. It's our third season to be a partner in this license. We have four collections and they're all doing well."

Sales rep Jerry Montini agreed. "I'm pleasantly surprised," he said. "I've written a lot of orders and I don't usually see my people at this (spring) market because their floors are already set."

Alex Boyer, VP of sales and marketing of Furniture Classics, also noted changes in buyers' shopping habits. "It's been a great market," Boyer said. "Traffic patterns have been bizarre and totally unpredictable, but in the end buyers were writing orders. Our average ticket is up 30% and we continue to bring a lot of new dealers on board."

Showing its Two Palms outdoor division offerings in the showroom's check out area was intentional because it was where buyers paused to place orders, Boyer said. The company displayed its carved teak Italian chairs and a new 6-foot teak dining table extension to the Del Mar collection that debuted last fall.

Susanna Powell of Three Coins Castings described the show as slow in terms of attendance, but said she opened up some great new dealer accounts.

"Actually, traffic has been about the same as last year, but the people who are here are buying," said Renee Faljon, president and director of design, Padma's Plantation.

"It's been phenomenal from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.," said Bruce Hirschhaut, Seasonal Living VP of sales. "We're seeing designers, retailers and mainline furniture stores." The Halo Collection, designed by Louis A. Lara, was among the attractions as well as its eco-friendly product lines.

Showing for the first time in High Point, Oxford Garden President Randy Meek said he was doing business with full-line furniture stores, customers he wouldn't have met at other tradeshow. His showroom was located in the International Home Furnishings Center's Pavilion on Three along with other outdoor vendors including Caluco, Dimension 1 spas, EcoSmart, Fishtales and Jewels of Java, which had returned to the High Point Market after an extended absence.

Making its debut at the market was Source Outdoor, a wholesale outdoor furniture manufacturer that displayed high-end woven looks. "The show's been amazing," sales rep Isaac Shaftal said.

Showing for the first time in the United States, 11 exhibitors shared the Rattan Furniture Pavilion, a nearly 10,000-sq.-ft. space on IHFC's seventh floor. "The intention of the Pavilion was to feature indoor rattan, but most of the companies also produce for the outdoors," said Leonard Theosabrata of Accupunto. Most of the rattan designs can be produced in synthetic woven fibers or aluminum, he said.

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