



## September - 2000 Archived Article

### Ethan Allen Opens New Store in Akron

By Elliott Maras

When Greater Cleveland homeowners think of Ethan Allen, they typically envision colonial furniture: bed frames with reeded panels and medallioned posts, rope-turned bedposts, chests with Ogee molding, and curio cabinets with beveled glass doors.

To get a more complete picture of today's Ethan Allen, northeastern Ohioans need to go to Akron, where the newest Ethan Allen store recently opened for business on Springside Drive in the Montrose Square shopping area, Akron's up-and-coming commercial district. There they will find more streamlined designs, such as ergonomic hardwood bed frames, cabinets built to accommodate state-of-the-art video screens, halogen floor lamps, and Sierra strip carpet treatments. They will also find an updated country theme.

The 19,250-square-foot building on Springside Drive is actually the second Ethan Allen store owned by Akron builder Bill Motsinger. The first is a somewhat smaller building he purchased in 1996 in Boardman, near Youngstown. But the Akron building is Motsinger's first Ethan Allen store to be built from the ground up, and it characterizes everything new about Ethan Allen.

Motsinger discovered the Akron opportunity while working for Ethan Allen's corporate business development group in Danbury, Conn. The company's trade rights in the Akron area became available when the owner of an established Akron store — located about 1,000 yards away from the new store — announced his retirement.

Motsinger, a 32-year retail veteran, was aware that Akron, like most of northeastern Ohio, was staging an economic comeback. "It's a very solid market trade area with strong growth potential," he said. As for Springside Drive itself, "This is really where the retail side of this part of Akron is."

The older Akron store was built in the traditional Ethan Allen style, with a mansard roof and smaller showrooms. Motsinger, having gotten a taste of remodeling in Boardman, didn't think the building was large enough to effectively present the complete line of Ethan Allen offerings.

Ethan Allen strives to be a complete home furnishings resource, providing a showroom and giving shoppers space to meet with designers on the premises. The company, which Motsinger describes as a "vertically integrated corporation," provides every aspect of getting furnishings to the consumer, from manufacturing to delivery. The store features solid-wood furniture, window treatments, bed covers, upholstery, and accessories. The only furnishings Ethan Allen does not provide are kitchen cabinets.

Ethan Allen initiated a new, more modern exterior for its stores in the early



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Bedroom Section



Living Room Display



One of the Archways of the  
Ethan Allen Interior

**Nineties as a way to attract the non-Ethan Allen shopper. The interior was redesigned in 1998.**

**"Ethan Allen is so well noted for being a colonial exterior store; it looked like a carriage house," Motsinger said. But the company's merchandise mix had evolved over the years to the point that the old model simply didn't do justice. Motsinger noted that 90% of the items on display in his Akron store were not carried 10 years ago. "We eliminated the things that aren't part of today's lifestyles. It's a totally new product offering."**

**"Ethan Allen knew they had to change to reach a broader audience," Motsinger continued. "We're still a solid manufacturer of today's desired looks without being overwhelmingly high fashioned."**

**Ethan Allen's corporate headquarters provides a basic design for its dealer-owned stores, as well as some guidance in the construction process. The company provides average cost information, specifications for building materials, and recommends suppliers. But an Ethan Allen dealer is nonetheless an independent businessman. And for a merchandising veteran such as Motsinger, the process of selecting a retail site and building a store on it represented a new endeavor. "Ethan Allen does not come in and provide the building," he explained. "You're really on your own, with a little bit of guidance. You still have to hire your own architect. You can't cookie cutter a code system for fire, utilities and building codes."**

**Having design guidelines to follow doesn't make the architect's job a snap. The architect must address the structural and zoning issues that are unique to the locale. "They give you the plans," Motsinger said. "Speaking with one voice is one of our buzzwords." The company wants to portray a consistent feel and image to its customers, but dealers have the freedom to make some modifications to their stores.**

**"We were simply handed drawings from the most recently completed location they wanted it to look like," said Mark Diekmann, the building's architect, who works for Hasenstaub & McCarthy Architects in Akron.**

**Motsinger began looking for an architect shortly after acquiring the land on Springside Drive. In the meantime, he took over the older store, mainly to develop the staff that would be needed in the new store.**

**One challenge Diekmann noted was incorporating a warehouse without having a warehouse look to the building. The warehouse was built in the back, out of view of the main parking and entrance areas.**

**"It was a very detailed job," said Brian Baker, the Project Manager for D-A-S Construction Co., the general contractor. Baker noted that the building was not a typical retail project. "Specialty ceilings, distinctive entrances, customized wall coverings, all for display purposes were required," he commented. "Each room is different and is finished in a unique way." This involved wood columns, coffered ceilings, high-end wall coverings, wainscoting, and crown moldings.**

**Baker said particular credit is due Akron Consultants Inc., of Akron, who performed the drywall and carpentry, and Tri County Painting Inc. of Broadview Heights, who performed the painting and decorating.**

Generally speaking, such details are usually seen in professional offices, and only in a few rooms, Baker noted. The Ethan Allen store includes many such areas. "The architect did an excellent job bringing everything together," he said.

After consulting with Diekmann, Motsinger decided to add additional windows to provide natural lighting, which challenged corporate guidelines. The design process took three months, and the drawings went out for bid in early October of 1999. The bid process provided still another aspect of Motsinger's education as a developer. Four bids came in from different construction companies, all within six percentage points of each other.

"I was surprised that four separate general contractors were so close together in their bids," he said. The decision to partner with D-A-S Construction Co. in Garfield Heights was made after reviewing samples of the bidders' work. In 1997 D-A-S Construction Co. served as General Contractor for the Boykin Lodging Cleveland Airport Marriott renovation at West 150th and I-71. This project encompassed similar construction, specifically an exterior insulation finish system, which assured Bill Motsinger that D-A-S was knowledgeable in this type of construction. Matt Ambrose, Director of Business Development for D-A-S worked closely with Motsinger to ensure intricate details encompassed in the drawings were implemented correctly. "One of the most challenging objectives was meeting critical deadlines so the store could open on time", Ambrose stated. Ambrose was able to speed the process by piggybacking onto orders for materials that had already been placed for another D-A-S client. By doing this, he was able to quickly expedite materials that normally required a very long lead-time and a reduction in construction costs.

The six months during construction were fascinating for Motsinger, who was on-site almost every day. He was particularly impressed with D-A-S Construction's Superintendent, Sean Jones' who expressed a vast knowledge of various crafts involved on the job: excavating, roofing, electrical, etc. "He was very knowledgeable of all aspects of the business," Motsinger said.

The only geological challenge the team confronted was the soil, since the area had previously been a swampy farmland. Much of the site had to be stabilized and recompacted with premium fill materials, Baker commented.

Motsinger was more than pleased with the results. The lobby of the store immediately introduces visitors to a sampling of the various sections within the store: family room, bedroom, upholsteries, and indoor/outdoor furniture. To the right is the casual furniture section, which features most of the newer Ethan Allen offerings. These include new designs called Horizons and Elements, for younger homeowners.

The casual section leads to more country looking styles, under the name Country Crossings.

The design center is located in the middle of the store, where refreshments are also available. A skylight directly above the design center allows shoppers to view an assortment of designs under different lighting schemes. "This allows our designers to show it to the customer both ways: through natural lighting and from the skylight," Motsinger explained.

**The Classics section, located left of the entrance, carries more traditional and formal Ethan Allen pieces, such as Mahogany and Georgia Court.**

**Motsinger has been overwhelmed by the community's response to the new store. "We've had a significant number of new customers who weren't aware that Ethan Allen was here." In the next two years, he hopes to open another Ethan Allen store in the same trade area.**

**"It's really an unexpected shopping experience to come to the new Ethan Allen," Motsinger said with pride.**

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