

The Business of Furniture | January 30, 2019

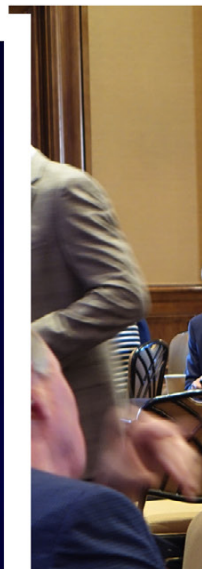
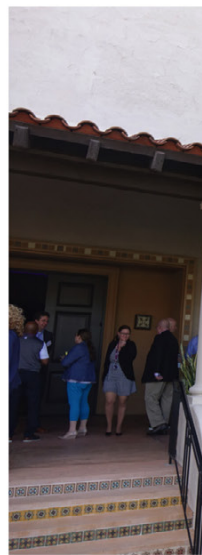
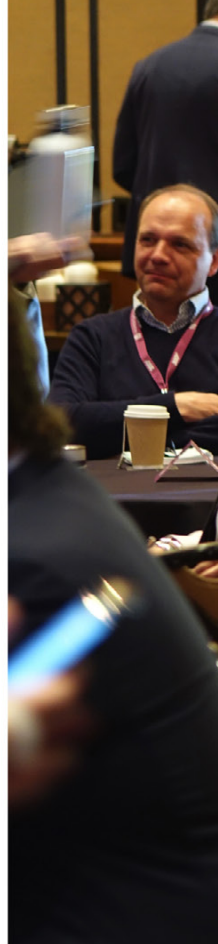
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The Business of Furniture

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HIGHLIGHTS

10 UPFRONT: Florence Knoll Bassett, Design Pioneer and Guiding Light of Knoll, Dies at 101

It is hard to imagine the office furniture industry without Florence Knoll Bassett.

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The survey showed the most frequently cited perceived threats to the industry's success are tariffs, travel, transportation and logistics costs

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Integra is a designer and manufacturer of high-quality lounge/soft seating and tables for the health care and education industries, specializing in high-volume use settings.

< The annual 2019 BIFMA Leadership Conference kicked off Monday in Scottsdale, Ariz. with two fascinating keynote speakers and the annual "speed dining" event to get the group of 200 or so industry executives mingling.



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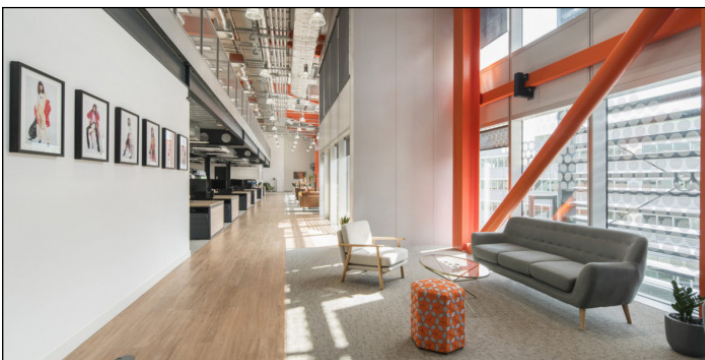
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The Business of Furniture



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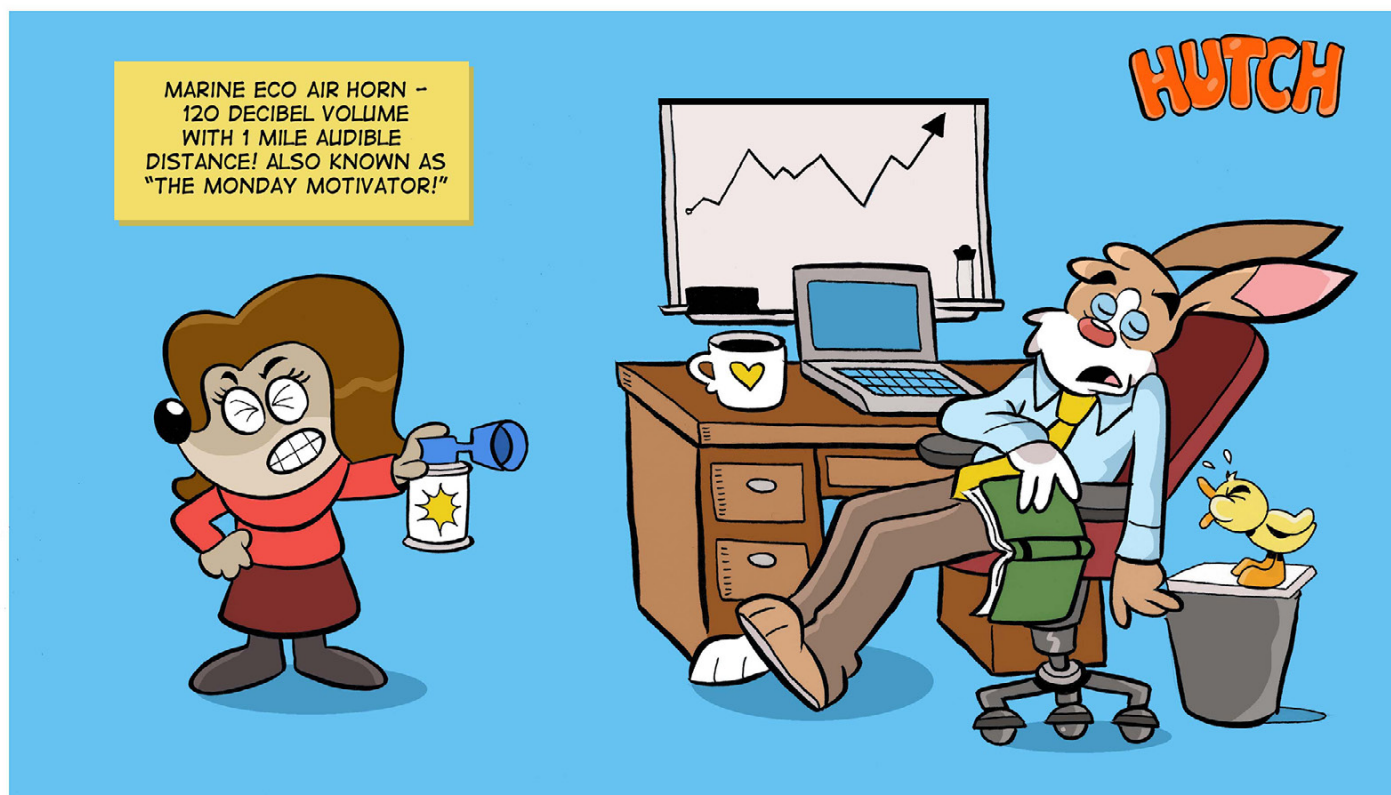
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run a better, more informed company.

ROB KIRKBRIDE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



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MAKERS

Integra Seating Expands Headquarters Which Includes New Showroom

INTEGRA IS A DESIGNER AND MANUFACTURER OF HIGH-QUALITY LOUNGE/ SOFT SEATING AND TABLES FOR THE HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION INDUSTRIES, SPECIALIZING IN HIGH-VOLUME USE SETTINGS.

BY EMILY CLINGMAN

Last summer, Integra seating expanded its facilities to meet its increasing customer demand. The expansion allowed for more production and more room to spread out.

“We were so maxed out in the existing space and trying to cram people in to see the products and have meetings — a lot of our space became really multi-purpose,” said Chandra Putnam, director of sales and marketing. “Now, we have a designated showroom, and that’s what we were most excited about.”

Integra is a designer and manufacturer of high-quality lounge/soft seating and tables for the health care and education industries, specializing in high-volume use settings. The company is expanding its lines to communal and collaborative spaces in corporate settings.



When a building across the street from its headquarters in Walworth, Wisconsin, went up for sale, Integra jumped on it. The state-of-the-art, renovated, 52,000-square-foot building, with lots of natural light, now houses all shipping and receiving operations. It includes twice as many sewing stations, a new computer numerical control machine and an innovative digital cutting machine that enables fabric for all the upholstered furniture components to be cut to the exact patterns in a faster and more efficient manner.

The 39,000-square-foot building that served as Integra’s headquarters and factory since 1993 now holds all product assembly and wood finishing operations, including Integra’s one-of-a-kind laser technology for precision tubular steel and metal cutting and Integra’s innovative seating suspension pulling machine. All executive, administrative and support personnel remain in that building.

The new showroom is 3,000 square feet and the crown jewel of the company.

“It’s not like the showroom is over-the-top or anything,” Putnam said. “It’s just that it’s so nice to have the space where we can set up several different products for people to sit in and try. They can look at the tailoring, see the patterns up close. It’s totally a hands-on experience now, like you’d see at Merchandise Mart. It’s tons of fun when people come in and try our really comfortable products.”

Integra was founded in 1982 by Chandra Putnam’s father Monroe Putnam. His first invention occurred at the age of 12, which was a machine to help his



father's business. His first patent on a chair occurred at 18 years old, which Putnam sold to Kroehler Furniture, the largest furniture manufacturer in the U.S. at the time. After an occupation in building high-end kitchen cabinets, inflation led to a decline in the construction industry, resulting in his career shift.

Monroe Putnam, the company's COO, is known for developing Integra's trademark tube and plug process — 16-gauge galvanized steel tubing cut to the width needed and put over nylon plugs attached to the arms, secured and strengthened even more with steel pins and hammered through both. Holes are bored out in the steel tubing to allow for seat and back units to be secured in place. Because of its simplicity, intuitiveness and strength, it's a design still used in 75 percent of Integra's products.

While there are many office furniture manufacturers in the lounge furniture space, Putnam says he's not aware of another company that builds its standard seating product to withstand a 2,000-pound capacity, has all re-

placeable or recoverable components and has the innovation and versatility of Integra to respond to custom needs.



Arlene Rock, director of administrative services at Western New England University has worked with Integra for almost 20 years. One of her first projects at the university in 2000 was to outfit a new dormitory complex.

“Monroe came out, showed us his products,” Rock said. “I said great, but we need to change it up a bit. He went back with my suggestions, made the modifications, and that’s what we went forward with for our purchase. That was very valuable to me because a lot of other places will charge extra money if you have to retool or create something special. Monroe did not do that.”

Rock oversees all the furniture specifications and design elements at the university. Integra is her go-to company because a lot of its products can serve multiple functions.

In a recent dining commons project, Rock reached out to Integra for a modification to a booth she had in mind. She wanted something mobile which could be used for other purposes. Integra came up with the perfect solution, and it’s now found on three floors of the building.



“So, the flexibility is what I feel is great,” Rock said. “They also have this look. They know how to change things up so the furniture is always current. Their products are like a pair of jeans or a little black dress — you can dress them up or dress them down. Integra can take their standard lines and make them more casual or give them an elegant flair by changing out the arms or legs or fabrics.”

Another element Rock loves about Integra furniture is its homelike feel.

“It doesn’t really feel corporate or dormitory,” she said. “That’s very important to me, too.”

Rock raves about the strength of Integra’s products. That dormitory furniture she first purchased in 2001 is still in use. And she appreciates an Integra rep, or Monroe Putnam himself, will come to the university from time to time to make sure everything is holding up and working right.

“I just see Integra as sustainable all the way around,” she said.

While Integra can claim 75 percent of the steel it uses is recycled, and 100 percent of the Medite fiberboard used is produced from recycled materials, it is the company’s sustainability story that is notable.

“Our products are made so well and designed to last a long time, that even though there are elements that aren’t recycled at all, like the foam, these



are 30-year pieces,” Chandra Putnam said. “We may recover them with new fabric and designs occasionally — because they are in high-use areas. The staying power of our product stands us out among many of our competitors. A lot of commercial furniture winds up in dumpsters in five to 10 years.”

Integra makes everything to order, so there is no leftover stock. It’s combination of environmentally friendly manufacturing practices, it’s state-of-the-art efficiency and attention to craftsmanship almost makes up the company’s package of greatness.

One more element makes Integra really special.

It’s a family business. Monroe Putnam’s wife, Deena Putnam, is co-owner and CEO. Chandra Putnam and her two siblings have also joined the company.



“If you would have told me when I was in college, that I would be in the furniture business working for my dad, I would have been like, no way,” Chandra Putnam said.

She did get into the furniture business because of her dad, but had 15 years of her own experience in dealership and design before going to work with him. She and her siblings are planning on sticking with Integra “for the long haul,” she said.

“It’s great to be part of a family-run business that’s been around for more than 30 years,” Chandra Putnam said. “That’s not too common anymore. Everyone has grown up watching them (Monroe and Deena) work hard and build such a great business and product. It’s hard not to fall in love with it.”

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