

 RETAIL
STARS

The Best & The Brightest

BY SUSAN DICKENSON

Home Accents Today is proud to present its 11th annual **50 Retail Stars** list.

The Retail Stars list recognizes independent brick-and-mortar retailers of home accents, including furniture stores and interior design boutiques, that are creative in their merchandising, contributing to their communities and distinguishing themselves from the competition.

Half of the stores on this year's list have been doing just that for at least 15 years, and 12 have a retail presence that spans more than three decades. The oldest stores on this year's list are Barbara Stewart Interiors, Bowling Green, Ky., founded in 1952, and Massachusetts-based Circle Furniture and Bethesda, Md.'s American Plant, both of which have been in operation since 1954.

Six of the stores on this year's list

are based in Florida, four are from the states of California and Texas, and the rest represent the cities and towns of middle America, both coasts, north and south.

Social media is vital to this group of stores. For the second year in a row, all of the Retail Stars have a Facebook page; several told us they've even opted to use Facebook in lieu of a website. Thirty-five retailers are on Instagram and Pinterest, 32 are on Twitter and half are on Houzz. Twelve of the retailers are active on YouTube, 15 have Google+ listings and 17 are on LinkedIn.

As a group, the most noticeable attribute may be this year's sales numbers. Seventeen stores are ringing up annual sales in excess of \$3 million (six of those are at \$10 million plus), making it our highest-selling list to date.

And even though a quarter of this year's stores operate in multiple

locations — City Furniture and HOM Furniture top the count at 15 locations each — the average sales per square foot number is \$388. Twelve stores are at \$400 and above, with seven of those selling well above \$700 per square foot.

While these numbers are representative of a small subset of our industry's retailers, it's a subset with no geographic, social and economic borders, so we're taking it as evidence that consumers are spending their hard-earned dollars on home furnishings, and brick-and-mortar retail is alive and well, though many of the Stars also say they are selling online, too.

Our 2015 Retail Stars' stories also proved to us that it takes a lot more than great product to outsell the competition, whether it's the big box stores, the online sites or the shop across the street. And it's not just the shoppers who are paying

attention. One of the vendor referrals we received this year provided a great example of how an extraordinary retail experience sparks excitement in others when he wrote, "Kuhl Linscomb is by far the best retail store I have ever been to in the USA ... Dan and Pam Linscomb are extraordinary merchants. Their merchandising concepts are inspiring. They give back to their Houston community. ... Their store consists of five 1950 buildings, each with their own department. No one else in the country is doing anything like this..."

We'll be sharing more of our Stars' success strategies, innovations and ideas in upcoming issues of Home Accents Today. In the meantime, we hope the photos and summaries on the following pages will inspire you to visit the 2015 Retail Stars' websites, shop their stores and engage with them on social media. ■



**To be irreplaceable
one must always be
different.**

— Coco Chanel

The hopes and dreams you have for your business in all likelihood match those we have for ours at AmericasMart Atlanta.

- To create a product mix that will delight the senses with everything new and next.

- To make the shopping experience efficient, affordable and truly memorable.
- To innovate...and never imitate.

This is what drives your continuing success, and ours. I suspect that these qualities so vital to your growth match those of the business innovators you're about to meet.

Each is a star. Each has found a way to win — and continue winning. And each is shining example of what can happen when ingenuity, creativity and

hard work intersect.

We are amazed by their stories. And we are pleased to join you in celebrating and applauding their extraordinary accomplishments.

Jeffrey L. Portman Sr.

Vice Chairman, President and
Chief Operating Officer
AmericasMart Atlanta



Bountiful



Blue Raccoon Home Furnishings

BOUNTIFUL

Easton, Md.

1 Store

Estimated 2014 Total Sales: \$3 million - \$4.9 million

bountifuldecor.com

Home furnishings specialist, founded in 2000. Offers upper-middle to high-end lines in 14,000 square feet of selling space. Total sales per square foot, \$275. Has 21 total employees, including 12 salespeople. Offers interior design services. Home accents accounted for 20% of 2014 total sales; accent furniture, 10%; furniture, 60%; and other merchandise, 10%. Home accents include accent furniture, lamps, lighting fixtures, wall décor, decorative pillows and throws, top-of-bed, permanent botanicals, area rugs, tabletop, garden and patio accessories and decorative accessories. Key vendors include GJ Styles, Sarreid, Modern History, Somerset Bay, Stanley Furniture, Hooker Furniture, Lillian August, Palecek and Uttermost for accent furniture; Dash & Albert, Surya, Loloi and Company C for area rugs; Chelsea House, Arteriors, Global Views, Creative Co-Op, Uttermost, Raz, Fortunata, Shira-leah, Beatriz Ball and Napa Home for decorative accessories; Currey & Company, Visual Comfort, Avala, Couture Lighting and Lamp Works for lamps;

Matouk, Pine Cone Hill, Legacy, Company C, John Robshaw, Tourmaline Home, Villa Home Collection, Bandhini, Elaine Smith, Fresh American and Saro Trading for soft goods; and Wendover Art Group, Spicher and Company, Trowbridge, Uttermost and Paragon for wall décor. Attends trade shows in Atlanta and High Point. Special events include large parties and small workshops focused on a specific area of interior design. Events include a free luncheon and wine with Bountiful Bucks, discounts on merchandise purchased that day. Says the staff is continually merchandising and re-merchandising, layering vignettes with multiple product categories, creating dense and appealing displays. Believes what sets them apart from others is based on their one primary goal, "A store that is fun to be in and meets a wide range of home furnishing needs." Bountiful's best retail ideas are centered around transforming traditionally slow months for furniture retailing into vibrant money-makers. The first event is its annual holiday kickoff, partnered with a local nonprofit where 20% of purchases are donated. The others are two sales held each year, the Blue Moon sale, which takes place over a weekend in August, and the First Ladies Day Sale, which takes place in February when other stores are having President's Day sales.