

How this material man drapes himself in success

Fabricland owner knows what his clients want, and where

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STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Curtain samples and bolts of drapery fabric run from floor to ceiling at Fabricland Interiors on Route 22 in North Plainfield, and so do the prices.

Bruce Heyman, owner of the 70-year-old business founded by his grandparents, makes a point of carrying the full spectrum of window treatments, from ready-made curtains at \$10 a panel to custom draperies running thousands of dollars per room.

It is a formula Heyman will export to Manhattan later this month, when he opens Metropolitan Window Fashions on Amsterdam Avenue on the Upper West Side. The company's other New Jersey store, Nassaus Window Fashions in Paramus, will get a name change next year to Metropolitan, the name Heyman has chosen for the chain's future.

"But we'll keep the Fabricland name here in North Plainfield, and just add Metropolitan," Heyman says. "The Fabricland name cannot go away. It is too powerful."

The brilliant hues of more than 1,000 fabrics envelop shoppers at the 22,000-square-foot Fabricland Interiors store, which also showcases Hunter Douglas blinds. Shoppers can order custom draperies, choose ready-made curtains or buy a few yards of decorator fabric and go home and sew their own; the store also stocks a wide selection of hardware and trimmings.

Heyman says his selection of apparel fabrics makes the store the largest fabric retailer in the state, and Fabricland also sells sewing machines.

Fabricland has 30,000 regular customers between its Bergen and Somerset County locations. The retailer has 100 employees, including 10 interior designers who are on the road working with shop-at-home customers. Fabricland also works with 500 independent interior designers.

Having largely penetrated his base in northern and central New Jersey, Heyman saw Manhattan as the next logical step.

"The custom-drapery business is



FABRICLAND

History: Founded in 1934 by Philip and Ida Heyman as Chain Decorators, the name was changed to Fabricland in the 1950s. Second-generation owners Jay and Gertrude Heyman tripled the size of the store, to 22,000 square feet, in the 1970s, and their son, Bruce Heyman, took control in 1990.

Expansion: Nassaus Window Fashions, a second-generation family business in Paramus, was acquired in 1999 and this month, a third store, Metropolitan Window Fashions, will open in Manhattan.

our fastest growth business, and we felt that Manhattan would be the best fit," Heyman says. In New York, he expects both the ready-made and the custom businesses to flourish side by side, just as they do in New Jersey.

"If you're 25 years old, working at your first job and have a ready-made

budget, I'm happy to sell you a curtain," Heyman says. "In five years, you may have a better job, and you'll be ready for custom draperies."

In June, Heyman wrapped up a three-year term as president of the Window Covering Association of America, the Missouri-based trade group of decorators, designers, workrooms and installers.

"He was very instrumental in helping us grow the association," says Mark Nortman, executive director. He says membership rose to 1,100 from 700 during Heyman's tenure.

"He has a very large business that has expanded twice in the last few years," Nortman says. "And he has been quite effective in growing the custom-drapery side of the business."

About 80 percent of the company's business is window treatments and 20 percent is apparel fabric, sewing machines, bedding and table linens. The company doesn't disclose sales figures.

Heyman says he also is considering opening stores in Morris and Monmouth counties, but he has no definite date in mind.

Expansion is critical if Fabricland is to continue to thrive, Heyman says.

"The chances of staying in one location and increasing your business by a significant amount every year to handle the increase in costs is very, very difficult," Heyman says.

When he took control from his parents in 1990, "this was already a mature company doing a lot of business."

Plenty of big retailers sell curtains, including the department stores, mass merchants and specialty chains such as Bed, Bath and Beyond. But Heyman says Fabricland sets itself apart through its strong commitment to custom design, a business that demands a high level of customer service.

Hence the decision to expand geographically.

"In the past 15 years, we have seen much more competition come into our market," Heyman says. "We can't just sit here and let others chip away at our business — we have to go out and get more business."