

# Home Resource is all about modern

By Marsha Fottler, Correspondent

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Home Resource was founded in Sarasota in 1995 by a local designer. In 2002, when it moved to its present location on Central Avenue, the business was sold to a local businessman, a friend of Michael and Kathy Bush. That owner asked Michael to consult and turn the business around. In early 2003, the Bush couple purchased 50 percent of the business and in May, 2005, the remaining half. In the 7,000-square-foot showroom on Central Avenue the Bushes represent such brands as Herman Miller, Knoll, Kartell, Missoni Home, Seco, Van Teal, Dellarobia, Ligne Pure, Fritz Hansen, Thayer Coggin and more. Michael Bush says the business has held up well in these challenging economic times. From the peak in 2007 to the low in 2009, sales fell 20 percent. In 2010, business was up over 2009 by double digits, and designer Eric Cross joined the staff this year.



**Q:** Who are you customers?

**A:** Our customer base is broad, with an age group from 30s to 90s, a mix of both homeowners and condo owners, working and retired. Our clients recognize their purchases are investment decisions that will last for years versus the other end of the spectrum — disposable furniture.

**Q:** When buyers purchase their first investment piece what is it usually?

**A:** First-time buyers go for the Saarinen dining table, the Platner cocktail table and Noguchi table by Herman Miller.

**Q:** Do you sell furniture and accessories for second homes in Sarasota or primary residences?

**A:** We have a 75/25 percent split furnishing second homes versus local residents. But this percentage is starting to shift again as the local housing market stabilizes and the locals feel better about the economics of the city.

**Q:** What's your take on modern residential architecture in this part of Florida?

**A:** Kathy and I love the Sarasota school of architecture homes. It's natural to bring the outside in and to connect the environment to the architecture in Florida. We support the expansion of contemporary architecture in our area because of the history of Sarasota, but also to develop a balance between the Mediterranean style and the contemporary style. Sarasota has talented architects interested in modern design, and it's painful to see them relocate because business opportunities are not here.

**Q:** What types of other furniture styles can you successfully mix modern pieces with?

**A:** Some Old World pieces help balance the design scheme.

**Q:** What's your favorite piece of modern furniture in your own home?

**A:** We are constantly trying to find a way to get the Womb Chair to fit in the condo. Hands down, it's our favorite modern piece of furniture. It was designed by Eero Saarinen in 1948 for Knoll.

**Q:** If budget were no consideration, what other things would you buy?

**A:** The challenge is that we are constantly being introduced to new product lines. We leave for the Milan furniture show soon and "eye candy" starts all over again. But, on our wish list for home is the Womb Chair, a great Home Office desk and storage system, and a lacquered and stone storage unit for the bedroom. We recently put Dedon and Janus et Cie outdoor furniture on our terrace. It has really enhanced the space.

**Q:** What's the most expensive sale you've made?

**A:** We've had orders exceeding \$100,000.

**Q:** What country turns out the best modern furniture today?

**A:** The Dutch are doing amazing things in the design of contemporary furniture. It was always about the Italians, but the Dutch continue to design things that are just "wow."

**Q:** Do you offer design services to customers who purchase furniture?

**A:** We are not licensed interior designers. We help in color selections and space planning, but there are outstanding interior designers in town and we recommend clients to them on a regular basis.

**Q:** Is modern outdoor furniture a big seller?

**A:** We represent Janus et Cie and Dedon, among others, and we are starting to see an upturn in this category. There are so many knockoffs of Dedon that people believe that they can spend less and get the same quality. Not true. Quality outdoor furniture is expensive, but once a client understands the concept of taking the "inside out," the price is understandable. Also, there continues to be evolution in cushion construction that is more suitable for our area regarding sun and rain.

**Q:** Are glass and acrylic still important?

**A:** We do a lot of glass, and the sources for glass continue to grow. Mainly, glass cocktail tables and dining tables. As for acrylic, we sell the Philippe Starck chairs, but the interest in that product is limited.

**Q:** Are you a believer in white walls for modern furniture?

**A:** We've introduced color onto the walls in our showroom and in our home. We love the white-wall look but the right choice of a wall color will have a warming effect and still provide a backdrop to make the furniture pop.

**Q:** What's your opinion of IKEA?

**A:** IKEA has a place in this world and it serves its niche well. Home Resource and IKEA are serving the needs of different clients, and I would hope that IKEA looks at us serving the right purpose also.

**Q:** Who are your favorite furniture designers, past and present?

**A:** Today I am into Marcel Wanders, Marten Baas and some other talents from the Netherlands. But, it's hard to overlook other great designers from the past such as Platner, Eames and Saarinen.