



BITTNER, *Celebrating 160 Years of Design*

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“We are so fortunate to have America’s leading design firm, born and bred in Louisville in 1854, still bringing the Bittners’ touch of handmade American craftsmanship to homes across America.”

LAURA FRAZIER, CHAIRMAN
BITTNER

Behind the Design

with Laura Frazier

While walking through the front door at Bittners to meet Chairman Laura Frazier and President and COO Douglas Riddle, you begin to see why Bittners is so special.

The new urban garden immediately catches your eye. It is unusual and beautiful as well as unexpected in this historic setting. Comfortable and chic, elegant and young describe the multiple rooms that encompass the inviting showroom. The vignettes of style are timeless. This 160-year-old legendary and award-winning design firm looks as if it could be in New York or Paris.

Laura is very warm and welcoming. She talks with pride about how Bittners has grown and transformed into one of our nation's leading design firms. We walk around the showroom and settle down in the front sunroom overlooking Main Street.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO BITTHERS?

My parents were best friends with the Bittner family, so I grew up attracted to beautiful furniture while learning the importance of how space and color can affect the way you live. Bittners represented the finest in furniture and design, so it was a natural fit for me.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

I started out as an intern at Bittners in the summer of 1978. It was a great time to learn about this business. Then in 1981, my father Owsley Brown Frazier sat down with me and together we plotted the future of Bittners. In the fall of 1982, my father, my grandmother Amelia Brown Frazier and I became partners in purchasing this legendary firm. Then in June of 1983 I started my full-time career there and never looked back.

My initial work was buying china, crystal and silver. It was a great training ground for understanding how the firm worked from "behind the scenes." From there I became the store manager responsible for all purchasing, training, advertising and marketing. Two years later I became vice president and corporate secretary and then evolved into president

and CFO, responsible for directing the operations of all areas of the business. Today as chairman, I am committed to seeing the development of Bittners into its next 160 years.

WHAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF AT BITTHERS?

Seeing Bittners grow from a local design firm to a leading, award-winning national firm makes me so proud. We have grown in our residential design, working on homes from New York to Florida and from Washington, D.C. to California. Just last year, we completed a home in Australia!

Going back to our roots, our custom wood shop is flourishing. Our clients today have a great appreciation for handcrafted furniture. From dining room chairs and tables to bookcases, desks, sideboards and coffee tables, our master craftsmen can create it all. They sketch out life-size "architectural-like" drawings of a client's furniture piece. From there, the creative process begins. You should see how they meticulously work with the wood: first chiseling, then hand-carving with precision. They really create masterpieces that our clients hand down from generation to generation. What they can do is a true art form.

The growth of our downtown design campus is a point of which I am very proud. We have developed this location in the heart of Louisville to include renovations and expansions in our urban showroom, modern garden, Club 1854, our design resource center and the designers' offices for both residential and commercial design work. Expanding our design campus gives us the room to fill our growing client base's needs.

WHAT MAKES BITTHERS SO SPECIAL?

People not familiar with Bittners often ask me that question. "Why is Bittners so special?" I always answer that when you look at the history of our city, state, and even our country, there are so few businesses today that have stayed rooted in their mission while remaining a thriving business. Businesses have come and gone across all industries, but



Designed by Betsy Wall, Bittners



Master Craftsmen Hubert Schuway, Gary Head & Brian Keenan, Bittners

Bittners has stayed committed to its clients and their needs. Through the decades, Bittners has had a big impact on how people live, work and play. We take the responsibility of being a leader in cutting-edge design very seriously.

Bittners also represents the success of the iconic American Dream. Back in 1854 a German immigrant, Gustave Bittner, started a custom wood and design shop. A tradition was born. He made cabinets and furniture with an uncompromising commitment to quality that is still the hallmark of Bittners today. His impeccable taste and high-quality craftsmanship became our solid foundation.

Today Bittners is so special because of the influence and direction of Douglas Riddle, the president and COO. He has reinvented Bittners while bringing new creative energy and direction. His vision for Bittners has invigorated our design firm for future growth. He is a true gift to the Bittners team, our clients and to our city. We are lucky to have him.

Looking back, I feel fortunate to stand among those who have been able to lead this important local treasure.

us purchasing the design firm in 1982, we were passionate about taking Bittners to another level.

My father also challenged all of us to “raise the bar and keep it there” in our goal to grow Bittners. He was the foundation that kept us working together in a cohesive manner. Without his devotion to Bittners, it would not be where it is today.

WHAT TYPE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE ARE YOU INVOLVED IN?

Giving back is so important. My community service includes supporting the arts community and healing organizations. Health care research is also very important, specifically the work done by Dr. Suzanne T. Ildstad at the University of Louisville.

I am devoted to supporting cancer research, which can have a big impact on the quality of life for so many people. Cancer affects everyone. Not a day goes by in which this disease doesn’t devastate a family. Supporting cancer research can make a real difference.


With my passion to support those dealing with this disease, Gilda’s Club Louisville is also important to me. Its mission to help those with cancer find strength, gain knowledge and receive comfort is close to my heart. Hopefully my support will have a positive impact on both those dealing with cancer and their families.

My philanthropic work has been very important to me over the years. We have such a great city, so giving back is easy to do.

WHAT IS SOMETHING PEOPLE DON’T KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I love gardening. It is a time for stillness and comfort while enjoying nature. I love getting my hands dirty while planting and then seeing the seedlings grow and flourish. For me, gardening is creative and inspirational, almost like a living canvas.

WHAT’S AHEAD FOR BITTNER?

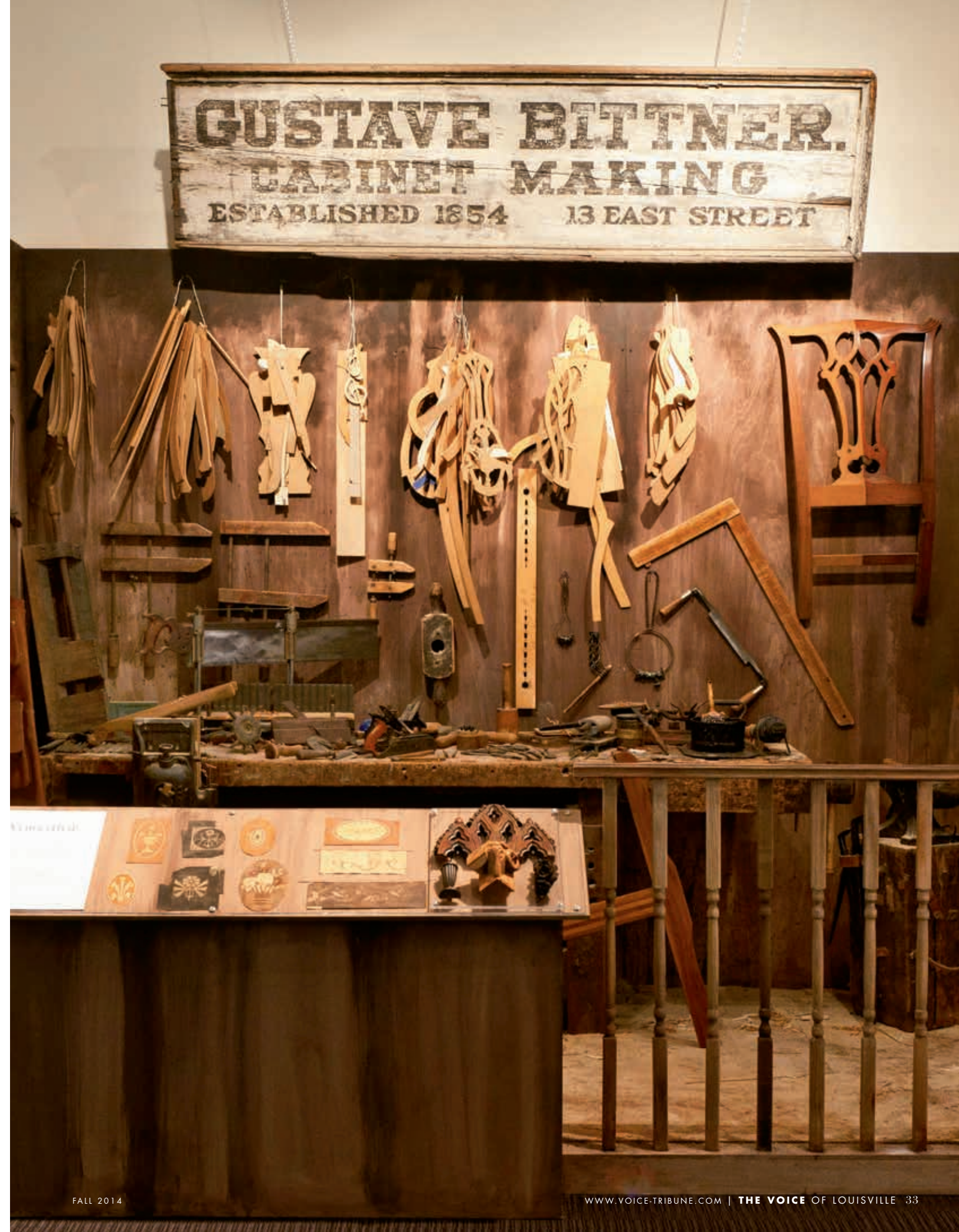
That’s simple. We at Bittners are committed to continuing our mission of being the leading design firm in our country. We listen to our clients. We understand how to create the lifestyle that best suits them. Our custom shop can create that special furniture piece that they can enjoy from generation to generation. Our strong commitment to being the best will propel us into our next 160 years. 

WHO ELSE HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL TO BITTNER?

My father and my grandmother had a passion for the decorative arts and were instrumental to Bittners. They understood the impact Bittners could have on homes across America. With the three of



Hepplewhite style bow-front sideboard by Bittners





“Looking back from 1854 to today, Bittners will continue the climb, bringing our luxury brand to homes across the country. Our vision for the future is strong. The best is yet to come!”

DOUGLAS RIDDLE, PRESIDENT & COO

BITTNER'S

Behind the Design

with Douglas Riddle

As Douglas Riddle makes his way over for our interview, he stops and says hello to every employee and client along the way. He is warm and inviting to everyone he meets. It feels natural and comfortable talking to him, like reconnecting with an old friend.

He directs me to sit in a comfortable, handcrafted chair made by one of Bittners' master craftsmen from the custom wood shop, just on the other side of the showroom. He explains how such pieces are created. It begins with many hours of creative prep and architectural drawings, which then leads to the meticulous work done by Bittners master craftsmen. He explains how fortunate we are to have such a custom wood shop in Louisville.

His high energy and love of Bittners is very apparent. As we settle down to talk, he begins our conversation with asking how I am doing. Always the gentlemen, he is kind to ask. But I want to find out more about the man behind the vision of Bittners.

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO BITTNER'S?

After being in the fashion industry for 10 years along with an intense travel schedule, I was ready for a new challenge. The iconic American fashion designer Bill Blass could see that and suggested that I use my creative energy in the interior design industry. I loved the idea and learned more about this great local firm called Bittners.

From the time I first walked into Bittners, I felt its rich history and pride. Laura Frazier and the talented designers were very enthusiastic about Bittners' impact on their clients' homes. They spoke about its history, past growth and its future. I was immediately excited about joining this team and knew I could make a big difference. This great historic design firm in a wonderful urban setting just needed a new creative vision.

HOW DID BEING IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY AND WORKING WITH SUCH GREAT DESIGNERS AS CAROLINA HERRERA, CALVIN KLEIN, OSCAR DE LA RENTA AND MICHAEL KORS AFFECT YOUR VISION FOR BITTNER'S?

As a fashion executive, we focused on the newest and best, from fabrics and textures to innovative, creative styles. Being on the cutting edge of fashion design was a must, or you would be left behind. We worked hard and smart, bringing to the clients only the best collections. It was tough work, but I loved every minute of it.

Looking back, the extensive travel to high-fashion collection shows in Paris, New York and Milan gave me the opportunity to meet great people. Their passion was infectious and taught me to stay ahead and lead in design, not follow others' creative vision. This has transferred over into my vision here at Bittners by working with a creative drive that other design firms just do not offer.

SO ONCE YOU JOINED BITTNER'S, WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST GOAL?

My goal has always been to make Bittners our country's leading design firm. We have an outstanding group of designers, world-class master craftsmen, the largest collection of design resources, a committed and dedicated support staff and the best service, bar none. Every employee understands that we truly "design for the way our clients' live." We like to fly under the radar because it is always about our clients.

When I arrived 10 years ago, our established clients, who had been using us throughout their lives, knew a lot about Bittners and what we can do. My focus was to bring in the new, younger clients who were not familiar with Bittners. By repositioning our strategy, we were able to continue to provide the traditional design for our current clients while transitioning to a more modern design for our younger clientele. This was a great example of how looking back at our history moves us to the future.

When visiting our showroom, our clients always comment about the positive and high-energy atmosphere that they experience. They can walk into our custom shop and see our master craftsmen at work. They can experience the multiple layers of our showroom and see numerous lifestyle options. They can see each employee at work, passionate about getting the right design that fits their lifestyle.





Bittners' Designers Chad Cobb, Libby Rush, Amy Cimba, Lori Andriot, Ron Wolz, Douglas Riddle and Betsy Wall



Designed by Amy Cimba, Bittners

I am so appreciative of our loyal clients and strive every day to assure that we bring them the highest-quality design and service. Our clients are educated professionals who expect a great deal from us, and I accept that challenge every day, both from our team and myself.

WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU?

Bittners has always been a team effort. My first years at Bittners were highly impacted by Owsley Brown Frazier. He was a mentor and a true friend. He told me once that we both liked to set the bar high. He furthered that comment with, “I expect you to keep it there!” No one, especially myself, would ever want to disappoint Mr. Frazier. I am forever grateful for having him in my life.

Bittners has had great influences through the years, from our former master craftsman Hubert Schuwey and our former CEO Claire Alagia to our current Senior Vice President of Residential Design Ben Small. Their dedication contributed to the Bittners brand.

have collaborated to create the best in timeless design.

WHAT HAS BEEN SOME OF YOUR MOST RECENT CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS?

There are so many. The first that comes to mind is working with a great young couple that owns an apartment on the Upper East Side in New York City. Our goal was to create a warm and chic place to raise their young twin boys. We had so much fun working together on that project.

Locally, collaborating with Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson on their farm, Hermitage, was a great highlight for me. Our focus was to transfer their love of art into the design theme for the house. After the renovation and design work was completed, we had our first-ever showhouse where “two great legends came together” at the historic farm in Oldham County. It was a great event with over 500 in attendance. It was so rewarding working with Laura Lee and Steve. They let our creativity soar!


Last, it was special to work on The Frazier History Museum exhibit, “Top Drawer: 150 Years of Bittners.” This unique exhibit featured Bittners through the decades, showcasing over 4,000 square feet of Bittners’ handcrafted furniture. With the collaboration of our clients and our employees, it was a huge success!

WHY ARE YOU SO DEVOTED TO OUR COMMUNITY?

Our community is made up of many great people. Working side-by-side with our community leaders and those people who want to make a difference helps in making our city a better place for all of us to live. I am strongly committed to philanthropy through Gilda’s Club Louisville as well as our local arts such as The Louisville Ballet and The Speed Museum.

WHAT’S IN BITTNER’S FUTURE?

Well, I can’t tell you all the details, but some very exciting things are coming in our future.

We will continue our mission that started in 1854: to design for the way you live. Building on our rich history and our creative vision, Bittners will continue being one of our nation’s leading design firms. I am very excited about our future. The best is yet to come! 



Custom handcrafted table made from reclaimed wood by Bittners

Today, Laura Frazier’s commitment and passion for Bittners pushes me to continue to make Bittners better. Her involvement is instrumental to its future growth. Also, each and every employee inspires me. When I enter Bittners every morning, their dedication for our mission is uplifting. Bittners represents a long history of creative, innovative minds from all of our departments that



Designed by Libby Rush, Bittners



Designed by Ron Wolz, Bittners

BITTNER'S, A Rich History Since 1854

In 1854, a tradition was born. A determined German immigrant, Gustave Bittner, became the catalyst for the development of Bittners, a legendary design firm. His uncompromising commitment to quality is still the hallmark of Bittners today.

Born in Pratzan, German Silesia in 1829, Bittner was influenced by the Old World craftsmanship of furniture making. He soon became an apprentice, learning the craft of cabinetmaking and creating custom handmade furniture pieces. With chaos erupting along with the deprivations of central Europe caused by the continental revolutions of 1848, Bittner took his future in his hands and decided to immigrate to the United States. He boarded a Bremen Liner steamship named "Copernicus." The ship docked in New Orleans on Nov. 18, 1852. Bittner debarked, cleared customs and was soon looking for work.

His travels brought him to Louisville, Kentucky. It was here that Bittner opened his custom furniture shop at 415 Brook St. Years of hard work and dedication paid off. Bittner became one of the foremost cabinet and furniture makers in Kentucky, a formidable rank achieved in the competitive and affluent society of his time.

A devoted family man and community leader, Bittner married Magdalena Breitenbach. They had eight children. Their youngest son, William C. Bittner, who was born on March 22, 1872, would have a big impact on Bittners' future.

Gustave Bittner passed away in 1895. He was honored for being one of the finest craftsmen of his era. After his passing, William C. Bittner succeeded his father as president and general manager of Bittners. In 1909, the business moved to 427 S. First St. William C. Bittner established a larger workshop, showroom and offices to accommodate his growing clientele. He had a passion for repurposing wood, decorative elements and traveled throughout the world for unique furniture inspirations.

When William C. Bittner retired in 1953, Cletus C. Schneider became President. His dedication to the art of woodcrafting inspired him to hire a master craftsman: Hubert Schuwey. Under Schuwey's guidance, Bittners offered the country's only apprenticeship in cabinetmaking at that time. Many young apprentices


came to Louisville to learn under the highly skilled Schuwey.

In 1961, Bittners moved to its current location at 731 E. Main St. This new location offered much more space for expanded showrooms, a larger custom wood shop, a refinishing room, a design resource library for the in-house designers, and warehouse capabilities. Over time, the name "Bittners" became synonymous with only the finest in handmade furniture.

In 1968, Cletus C. Schneider retired and handed over the reins to his son William Bittner Schneider. During this time, Bittners continued expanding its services throughout the region.

Owsley Brown Frazier, a leading philanthropist in Louisville, sat down with his daughter Laura Frazier in 1981 and saw great potential for Bittners. Together they plotted a future with Bittners. In the fall of 1982, Owsley, Laura and Amelia Brown Frazier, Laura's grandmother, purchased this Louisville landmark.

During this new period, Bittners grew and expanded its brand into homes throughout the United States. Their on-site master craftsmen continued the tradition of building and creating beautiful custom-made furniture. New designers were brought on board. The commercial design division was developed. Their vision and quest to "design for the way you live" resulted in Bittners being positioned as the leading design firm in the area.

Bittners legacy continues on today, led by Laura Frazier, chairman and Douglas Riddle, president and COO. Through their commitment and leadership, Bittners' workshops have maintained the highest quality old-world standards of custom furniture making along with the ancient tradition of apprenticeship. This allows Bittners to bring to their clients timeless, innovative residential and commercial design along with exquisite handmade custom furniture. These handcrafted masterpieces will continue being handed down for many future generations to come, carrying on the Bittners' legacy. 

Bittners
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