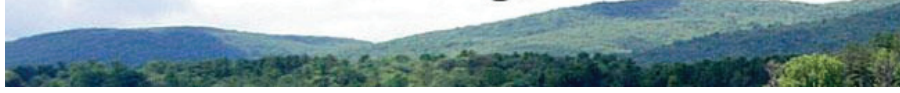


The Berkshire Eagle



Designer's new business looks at linen

by John Sakata, Berkshire Eagle staff

William Caligari has opened his third business, Linen, in Great Barrington

GREAT BARRINGTON -- The country was in an economic recession in 2009, but William Caligari refused to sit around and wait for the rebound. The designer and co-president of E. Caligari & Son Inc., decided to fly to North Carolina and attend a private academy to learn everything he could about linen.

Those lessons recently paid off when Caligari opened his third design business, called Linen, in Great Barrington to go along with William Caligari Interiors and the family's fabrication business, the Drapery Workroom.

Caligari also designed the new \$5 million state-of-the-art facility in Ashuelot Park in Pittsfield that Crane constructed to house its technical materials division. One of the county's leading employers, Crane officially opened the 30,000-square-foot, two-story structure, which contains work by several other Berkshire contractors, in February.

Caligari also has a 20 year working relationship with the prestigious Canyon Ranch health resort in Lenox, for which he designed the main building.

But right now Caligari is concentrating on his new venture.

With existing commercial and retail designing services tailored more for affluent customers, Caligari said it made perfect sense to add a third business to the collection of family-run firms operated by E. Caligari & Son, a corporation that William co-owns with his brother Jeffrey.

"People of means buy linens," William Caligari said, "and only people of means hire designers."

Caligari brothers were born into a family whose focus was on home improvement. Their grandfather, Eugene Caligari, was a painter. Their father, William "Bill" Caligari, opened the E. Caligari & Son paint store in Great Barrington in the 1950s, and Caligari Hardware in Lenox in 1961. William Caligari Interiors was founded in 1989, and the Drapery Workroom in 2010.

The Caligari's businesses also include Caligari Sanitary Supply, in Lenox and Taylor Rental of Great Barrington, which are also members of the family's corporation.

The majority of the profit from the Caligari's many businesses comes from the hardware and paint store, according to Jeffrey, but the design firm also does well.

'His work does not grow old'

Enid Zuckerman, who co-founded Canyon Ranch with her husband Mel, is a long time customer of William Caligari's. She says she has a "love affair" with his designs. Besides the resort in Lenox, Zuckerman has also hired Caligari to perform design work at Canyon Ranch's other location in Arizona.

"[William] moves with the times, and he can read what I need, and it's a great blend together," Zuckerman said. "His work does not grow old."

Zuckerman remains impressed with Caligari's work in redesigning Canyon Ranch's main building, the 19th-century Berkshire "cottage" Bellefontaine on Kemble Street that had previously served as a private residence, seminary and boarding school.

"He transformed it, but he kept the integrity and it just works," Zuckerman said. "He has an amazing eye for things."

Despite the range of products offered by the firms in the brothers' corporation, William Caligari said he carefully deliberates expansion opportunities, such as Linen.

Became an expert

As a designer, Caligari spent large sums on drapery projects. So he immersed himself in all aspects of that business, and became an expert in learning how linens differ in places like Belgium or the Czech Republic.

After attending three week-long classes at the Custom Home Furnishing Academy in North Carolina, he opened the Drapery Workroom.

He decided to open Linen to showcase his work from the Drapery Workroom, but he expects the new business to expose him to new markets.

“I see Linen as a venue now where we will come in contact with more clients,” William Caligari said.

Although Linen is his current passion, he added that “95 percent” of his time is spent on designs for commercial and residential real estate. William Caligari Interiors is currently involved with eight residential projects and 15 commercial projects that are part of six commercial accounts.

William is currently designing a new store for McTeigue and McClelland Jewelers, who are moving to a new location in Great Barrington.

His association with Crane’s building project began when he submitted plans to the company for the interior design of the structure. After viewing his ideas, Crane also hired him to do the exterior, he said.

Crane, the sole manufacturer of currency paper for the federal government, believed he would be a good fit because the company’s technical materials division has a number of Asian clients who are accustomed to extravagant designs, Caligari said.

He resisted the impulse to design the building in a more conservative manner, he said. His extravagant design was inspired by the European Union building in Belgium.

“Let’s just have fun with it and pull out all the stops with it,” is how he describes his philosophy.

The longevity of the Caligari’s family-run enterprises is due to the number of repeat customers, loyalty that extends across generations of family members, both William and Jeffrey said.

They stay abreast of new developments so customers will continue to enjoy their services.

“You have to constantly keep pace with the market and society,” William Caligari said. “You don’t want to be reacting. You want to be observing and keeping a step ahead. We do that in a very conservative way.”