

ProSales

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Jake Bolyard
Bolyard Lumber

John Monigold
Bolyard Lumber

Lumber's Grand Cru

Michigan dealer transforms itself
into an exclusive, high-end showpiece



A Grand Cru

Bolyard Lumber pulls out the product shelves and puts in a showroom (complete with wine cellar) that has transformed it into an exclusive, high-end operation.

2008
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Awards
Showroom

John Monigold says he has seen the transformation take place countless times before: A couple walks into Bolyard Lumber's showrooms expecting to buy \$20,000 worth of goods, sees what's available, and walks out committing to spend two or three times as much.

It's an attitude change that justifies Bolyard's own attitude change five years ago, when it intentionally stopped trying to be just another Detroit-area lumberyard and become a specialist known for its exclusive, high-end building materi-

als. The attention to detail shown during that transformation and the results from that change earned the Rochester Hills, Mich., dealership an Excellence Award for Showroom Design.

"[Upscale customers] need to see and feel and touch," Monigold says. "If they're going to spend \$1,200 for a walnut door, they want to see the walnut and touch it. They're very knowledgeable. They look at the door glides, the cabinet catches. It's been very helpful to show them these things. And with the help of the showroom, it's an easy upgrade to

show, for instance, what the stained interior of a window looks like."

White-glove service wasn't always the style at this \$14 million, 24-person dealer. Before 2003, Bolyard was an Ace hardware affiliate filled with aisles and aisles of paint, plumbing, electrical fixtures, hardware, and hammers. "At that time, we were still [moving] toward and breaking into the high-end market, but the inside of our showroom didn't reflect that, and architects and designers couldn't see that," Monigold recalls. "We had some stands, and that was it.



Jake Bolyard

John Monigold



The Suite Life: (This page, clockwise from top left) Jake Bolyard and John Monigold; the entrance to the wine cellar; inside the wine cellar; the showroom's reception area; a selection of exterior doors and windows. Opposite page: The pub-style bar showroom is lined in oak.



PHOTOS: COURTESY BOLYARD LUMBER, EXCEPT PORTRAIT PHOTO: TOM GENNARA / WWW.GENNARA.COM



Designing Men: (Clockwise from top left) architect Paul Samartino, far right, played a key role in developing the Bolyard space in conjunction with co-owners, from left, Steve, John, and Nick Monigold and Brian Bolyard; the interior door display features several varieties of the Harring brand, which isn't available anywhere else in Michigan; Bolyard's entrance will be the next part of the store to be revamped; both plain and fancy cabinets are displayed in the kitchen part of the showroom.

"We saw that whole transition taking place—the big boxes coming in, the Stock Building Supplies and others getting a handle on the tract builders—and that told us we needed to take a specialized segment of the market and go after that," Monigold says. "We broke off our affiliation with Ace, took \$200,000 worth of paint and hardware, donated it to Habitat for Humanity, and started the process."

Over five years and in that many segments, Bolyard took nearly 10,000 square feet of space in its store and turned it into showrooms. Several paneled rooms came first, showcasing the moldings that Bolyard always sold but that customers couldn't see, feel, or touch. The section also features a wine cellar with racks, a working door, and wood treatments in redwood and mahogany. The wine is real, making Bolyard a rare dealership that could use a wine expert on its staff.

An area for doors came next, followed by displays for windows, a sales estimating office, and some small cabinet displays. The last part of what added up to a \$1 million project went

in earlier this year.

Bolyard doubles its bet on the upscale home market by pursuing exclusive vendor relationships, and if it can't do that, it leverages its high credit rating to secure deeper discounts for it than any other dealer in Michigan. Its brand names include Harring and Tru-Stile doors, White River hardwood moldings, Azek trim boards, and windows from Marvin, Weather Shield, and Jeld-Wen.

"We try to create relationships with certain vendors where they aren't going to open up with 25 other lumberyards," Monigold says. "We really get on board with a vendor. We try to get some kind of exclusivity, and we try to get the highest level."

Given that Bolyard defines its builder audience as primarily "high-end residential guys who build one to six homes a year," it's no surprise that it also works hard to appeal to architects, particularly the handful whose work can be found across Detroit's wealthier northern suburbs.

"We're in constant communication with them several times a week, asking what's going on, who are they working

with," Monigold says. "They keep us in the loop on everything they have, everything they're working with. ...We asked the architects 'What do you want to see in the showroom?' A few architects helped us get involved and helped us lay out the showroom."

The main architect in that effort was Paul Samartino, lead designer for Dominic Tringali Architects, Bloomfield Hills, Mich. "We spent a lot of attention on the main desk, a U-shaped area in the center of the space," Tringali says. "We put in arches, and tried to put in as many elements so people could get ideas as they go through the space. When you walk in, the visual impact of the front desk is pretty stunning. Once

people walk in there, they realize they're at a different level."

Samartino says he believes Bolyard's space achieves his view that a showroom "should be about movement and how you experience the spaces. A showroom should draw you in and maneuver you through. Sightlines are important. You want to lead people to the next space, keeping people's interest and attention."

In Bolyard's case, he says, areas that present small lifestyle vignettes are those stationed in the four corners, so that people have different destinations

Samartino is now helping redesign the outside of the showroom. "People pull up to the store now and think it's no big thing outside," Monigold says. "Now, we need to make the outside match the inside."

Bolyard also plans to expand, but not at the showroom. Instead, it has acquired 10 acres near a rail spur where it is putting up storage sheds and will create a distribution center. That will be a strictly back-office place. The wine cellar will stay at the showroom. —Craig Webb