

MADE IN THE USA

BY ALEXA BOSCHINI



Orian Rugs



Oliver Gal Artist Co.

U.S. manufacturers tout quality, national pride

AMERICAN MANUFACTURING is a hot topic of conversation this election cycle. But in an increasingly global economy, does the “Made in the USA” label still have value? According to home furnishings companies that produce some or all of their product in the United States, the answer is yes for a multitude of reasons, from greater quality control to pride in the American labor force.

According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the U.S. furniture manufacturing industry’s gross output and value added to the overall GDP have risen steadily since 2010, though not quite to pre-recession levels. The research on the value of American manufacturing to the consumer varies.

A 2015 Consumer Reports survey found nearly eight out of 10 U.S. consumers would prefer an American-made product over an import, and about 60% of respondents said they would pay 10% more for American products. But a 2016 Associated Press-GFK poll found that while nearly three out of four consumers would like to buy American, they think those products are often too expensive or hard to find. The majority of respondents said they would buy

a cheaper import over a more expensive domestic product.

Though imports remain a significant contributor to the home accents universe, domestic manufacturers say there are still plenty of reasons to take pride in making product in the United States.

“The Oliver Gal Artist Co. is known for its unbeatable quality,” said Assi Glikstein-Gal, CEO of Hollywood, Fla.-based wall art specialist Oliver Gal. “Made in the USA is a symbol of virtue which you cannot achieve when made in China or Mexico. We deliver high-quality and high-end finishes to retail, interior designers and the final customer. The United States is a symbol of high-quality products and a standard that makes us proud.”

AMERICAN MADE

The Federal Trade Commission regulates Made in the USA labeling. If a business chooses to advertise a product as Made in the USA, then the FTC requires that “all or virtually all” of that product must be made stateside. In addition to the product’s final assembly taking place in the United States, the FTC dictates that “all significant parts, processing and labor that go

into the product must be of U.S. origin,” and the product should only contain negligible “foreign content.”

“Our entire line can be manufactured in the U.S., but it’s all about what finish the client chooses to use,” said Marty Perrell, president and owner of Los Angeles-based art producer Daleno. “If they want hand-embellished product, 100% of our hand-embellished product is manufactured in the U.S. (We manufacture domestically) mainly due to the fact that I wanted to make sure the quality of the product was what the clients were expecting, so I’m able to ensure that by overseeing the manufacturing whenever it’s done in Los Angeles. Secondly, I wanted to support the labor staff in the U.S.”

Savannah, Ga.-based Lowcountry Originals uses imported crystals in some of its designs, but otherwise its lighting and other home furnishings are crafted by artisans from the Lowcountry region of South Carolina and Georgia using domestic materials.

“Our materials from the Lowcountry where we live form our product and inspire us,” said Becky Brackett, president of

Lowcountry Originals. “Oyster shell, marsh reeds, the talent of our artisans and our detail to custom work inspire our creativity as well as our hands-on approach to producing our handcrafted light fixtures. We live here, create here and are inspired by the ambience of the beautiful Lowcountry.”

Mark Gilmore, vice president of sales with upholstery specialist CR Laine, said certain raw materials are more difficult to process in the United States. Options for U.S. leather tanneries and velvet looms, he said, are few and far between. But the company manufactures all of its product in Hickory, N.C., and sources as many raw materials domestically as possible.

“Even if you can’t get all of your components, the question is from the very start to the very end are your products completely here,” Gilmore said. “Are human hands touching it and building it in the full process. We can say, ‘Yes, we are that.’ A lot of people cannot. So many companies have international sourcing for their product, especially in case goods. From the very front door to the very back door, our process is truly handmade product by craftsmen here in Hickory.”

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Several rug manufacturers produce at least a portion of their line domestically, including Capel, Mohawk, Orian Rugs and Oriental Weavers. Orian Vice President of Development and Design Jeff Hughes said the ability to control the supply chain from beginning to end helps the company with meeting its customers' needs, regardless of the timeframe.

"The strength of Orian is we can turn the ship really quickly for special requests; things happening in the industry," Hughes said. "We can meet with our yarn folks, finishing, shipping and manufacturing. There are no special meetings where someone has to change their schedule; we can meet and execute it quickly."

Oriental Weavers' parent company is based out of Egypt and it also has weaving operations in China, but stateside, it operates a vertically integrated facility in Dalton, Ga. Senior Vice President Jonathan Witt said being able to manage every aspect of the process is a key driver to Oriental Weavers' success. Among the advantages it offers is the ability to react to spikes in demand and customers' needs, and the fact that the product doesn't have to be transported via ship.

"The vertical integration of our production domestically and abroad has always been one of the hallmarks of our success," Witt said. "The ability to control the quality and consistency of the product from start to finish is a key differentiator for our company compared with other manufacturers domestically and abroad."

Lowcountry Originals and Oliver Gal offer a wide range of custom product, and Brackett and Glikstein-Gal both said manufacturing domestically allows them to complete client requests more efficiently.

"When our creative team comes up with new products and finishes, it takes a lot of resources and time for the overseas manufacturers to get the products right and up to our quality standards," Glikstein-Gal said. "Our in-house production team is able to produce one-of-a-kind or mass-production art pieces perfectly and in shorter lead times. Most of our production is made-to-order and several of them are customized

based on our clients' requests, allowing them to tailor every part of their order to their liking or according to their project. That makes us the go-to source for interior designers. Our made-to-order business model would not be possible with overseas manufacturing."

Gilmore said one of the greatest benefits to manufacturing in the United States is the consistency it allows, from quality control to faster delivery and responsiveness. But adapting to rapidly-changing consumer demands is a challenge, he said.

"If you aren't adapting in the way that you do business, you're not going to prosper as a company," Gilmore said. "What that requires is a lot of effort. Making changes in manufacturing is not easy. We're a fashion industry. It changes consistently and you have to adapt, and continually up your game in what you're producing."

The Associated Press poll is indicative of another critical challenge American manufacturers face – the production costs, and thus the

price of the final product, are typically more expensive than many imported alternatives.

"The greatest challenge to manufacturing domestically is the cost," Daleno's Perrell said. "That's obvious to all of us. That's our greatest challenge, and to find a labor force that's willing to work for the pay scale that's even provided in the U.S. ... The greatest benefit to it is the quality of the product. U.S. manufacturing is far above any other country in manufacturing when it comes to quality."

CUSTOMER DEMAND

Lowcountry Originals has manufactured its products in the United States since its inception in 2008 amid the turbulence of the Great Recession, a fact the company's customers relish.

"Our customers seem to be loyal to this type of product and proud of the made in the USA (approach)," Brackett said. "Since the recession the decision was made to create a company that produces a product that does not require a same-look, pump-it-out product. Our product attracts a discriminating, high-

end designer clientele. They are complimentary of made in the USA. We are proud of it."

While Daleno's clients like the idea of buying artwork from a U.S. artist, Perrell said in his experience domestic manufacturing is more of a bonus than a requirement in the wall art category.

"I think that movement is something that is an added benefit and that people like to hear, but I don't think it's much of a topic of conversation any longer the way it was (after the recession)," Perrell said. "I think because the quality of overseas manufacturing has really increased, they don't feel like they're receiving a subpar product."

Glikstein-Gal attributes Oliver Gal's success to a variety of factors, including the fact that its products are made in the United States.

"Oliver Gal art sells very well in Japan and can be found in most high-end department stores all over the country," Glikstein-Gal said. "Made in the USA is definitely not the only reason for our success but I am almost positive we would not sell as much if the art was made in Mexico or China. I'm not sure if the demand gets stronger over time but it is consistent. At trade shows, attendees are always pleased to hear that our products are made in America."

Gilmore said he sees a tremendous pride among CR Laine's distribution partners and end consumers for U.S. manufacturing, and he doesn't foresee that demand diminishing.

"We have dealers who come to meet us in our plant and see our people building furniture for them," Gilmore said. "When they're doing that, they're seeing a human element, that these people have a pride in what they do every day. They're supporting their families and they're supporting their communities. There's such a pride that's connected to that. We put a lot of effort and money toward getting dealers here to witness that. It's something I can say with assurance that I'm very proud of our people and what we do. Maybe some people don't care, but when you witness it firsthand, you can't help but care. It makes a huge impact." ■

Thomas Lester contributed to this report.



Lowcountry Originals

Wild Thing

BY ALEXA BOSCHINI

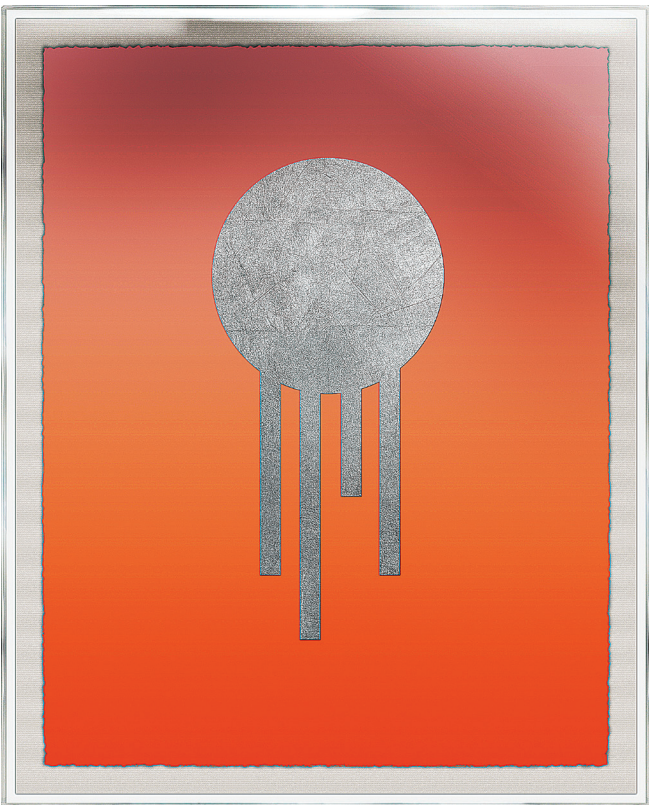
Made in the United States, this assortment of accents reflects a vibrant, playful spirit with its bold colors and dynamic patterns.



CR Laine updates a classic silhouette in dramatic fashion with the Wells chair from Tobi Fairley, shown here in whimsical Little Rock Cobalt upholstery.



Shades of blue, pink, white and black intermingle in an explosion of color in Twisted Delight by **Bad Dog Editions**, presented on paper behind glass in an ebony frame (\$89).



A metallic silver geometric design anchors Catcher I by Bobby Berk for **Leftbank Art**, printed on bright orange jagged-edged paper over a linen canvas.



Eastern Accents adds the Taylor Collection to its Niche bedding line this season, defined by vivid pops of pink and orange for an adventurous look.

Global inspirations abound with the Poppy kilim rug by Genevieve Gorder for **Capel**, machine-woven of 100% olefin for indoor or outdoor use.

Neutral Territory

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The tranquil neutral trend extends to American-made accents this season, from crisp white to smoky gray to tried-and-true beige.



Deep button tufting infuses the Savannah sofa by **Pasha Furniture** with a timeless quality, shown with luxe upholstery in a smoky gray hue.



Crystal geodes and sea life specimens are soldered to a vintage balustrade to create this arresting accessory by **Jamie Dietrich Designs**.



A concentric rectangle design adds depth and dimension to the Symmetry chandelier by **Framburg**, shown with a polished nickel and matte black finish.



Available in multiple sizes, this hand-embellished giclee print by **Daleno** depicts a pensive woman in a flowing white dress against a light, airy background.



Looped fringe surrounds the Rita pillow by **V Rugs and Home**, adding a pop of visual interest to the versatile beige tone.