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A photograph of four young professionals in a retail store. From left to right: a man in a light blue polo shirt with 'Josh' on it, a woman in a blue top and black jacket, a man in a blue t-shirt with 'All Seasons' and a baseball cap, and a man in a dark blue button-down shirt with 'Tyler' and 'All Seasons' on it. They are standing in front of shelves stocked with pool supplies. The man on the far right is wearing a dark blue button-down shirt with 'Tyler' and 'All Seasons' on it, khaki pants, and brown boots. The man in the center is wearing a blue t-shirt with 'All Seasons' and a baseball cap, jeans, and sneakers. The woman is wearing a blue top and black jacket, and jeans. The man on the left is wearing a light blue polo shirt with 'Josh' on it and dark pants. They are all smiling at the camera.

## THE NEXT Generation Issue









# Inspiration for a Retail Destination

“Destination store”  
retailers share the  
secrets behind their  
dazzling showrooms

BY KATHRYN HOWARD



**YOU'VE HEARD IT** countless times: If you want your retail store to stand out from the competition, you have to make your store into an experience that customers can't get elsewhere.

Easier said than done, right? It's hard to take that sentiment and turn it into actionable steps. But you can start today by learning from those who stood in your shoes — and eventually mastered what you're trying to achieve.

With that in mind, we spoke to two retailers who successfully turned “shopping” at their store into an experience that keeps drawing customers back. Here, they walk us through the inspiration behind their showrooms and offer tips on how to get great results.

↑ Kolo Collection draws customers from surrounding states with its diverse product mix.





## Blackthorne Pools and Spas

Blackthorne Pools and Spas (Salinas, Calif.) has been in business for more than 25 years, most of which was spent with a store layout familiar to industry pros:

“You’d walk in and see a line of hot tubs sitting on a low, industrial carpet. The walls were painted blue. Track lighting. It was a very typical store, with a counter in the back and a wall of chemicals,” says Owner Malina Breaux. “But we were there for 25 years, so it wasn’t like it didn’t work for us.”

Then, in 2013, they moved to a different location. At first it was just a good business decision, but it turned into a *great* business decision: With an inviting and dynamic new layout, their sales have increased by double digits every year since.

“The layout gives us the opportunity to quickly build a relationship with a customer because it’s so different from every other store that they’ve been in,” Breaux says.

Walking into Blackthorne today is like walking into a backyard. Spas rest on AstroTurf, lending the appearance of grass. There’s even a “pool” — blue flooring in a kidney shape — edged by rope lighting. Brown carpet surrounds the “water” in the same way a concrete deck would an actual pool. Wood fencing sits near the pool, which furthers the backyard connection (and helps hide supplies from customers).

Breaux’s late husband, Herbert, designed the



Customers walk on water with a giant “pool” in the middle of a backyard-themed showroom.

concept.

"I was just standing in the middle of this huge floor and I was like, 'How can we make this huge space work as we need it?' I just looked across the street and there was a fence and I thought, 'Oh, a fence!' My husband took that theme of the fence and ran with it."

"He was really creative that way," says Sales Manager Rob Robinson. "He could see something and it just became something."

"We really try to make the showroom feel like it's accessible to everybody as opposed to being 'spa spa spa,'" Breaux says. "The experience of coming into our store is more welcoming than a lot of stores that I've been in."

Small gestures go a long way toward creating a welcoming atmosphere. Guests are offered complimentary bottles of water, for example, and a candy dish awaits customers at the register.

"People love those little things, you know?" Breaux says.

But the biggest consideration when designing a showroom should be the customer's experience, she adds. "Poolers who've been in the business for

a really long time, or people who see hot tubs every day, they don't take that step back and say, 'What would I want to feel when I walk into the store?'

"We get so into the day-to-day stuff that that doesn't come up."

## Kolo Collection

As an outdoor furniture store, Kolo Collection (Atlanta, Ga.) has a leg up on e-commerce websites. "The internet doesn't allow you to sit in furniture," says President Greg Martin. "So that's always an advantage."

Kolo Collection is an award-winning outdoor furniture retailer with two locations in Atlanta, Ga. Last year, both locations saw significant change: The West-side store was redesigned, and the store in the Atlanta Decorative Arts Center was expanded and redesigned. An architect was brought on board to help achieve an ideal look and layout.

"Even though we live in these stores on a daily basis, we felt like it was worth the money to bring in an outsider to give us that fresh perspective," Martin says. "He said, 'You have a lot of different



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Outdoor furniture retailer Kolo Collection hired an architect for a fresh perspective when redesigning its showroom.



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furniture lines, a lot of materials and a lot of styles; it can be confusing to the customer. We want the store itself to have a calming effect.' The idea was to create consistency with the design within the store so that the furniture can still stand out."

The new look includes a consistent color scheme of green and white with wood panel accents — a departure from the past design, which included an array of distracting colors and shapes on the walls. The result is a serene space that supports the furniture on display by not competing with it.

Martin's favorite aspect of the showroom is the open feel. Unlike other showrooms, it's not partitioned in any way, which creates an inviting store flow. As guests wander through, they're encouraged to keep going to see what's next.

"A lot of showrooms tend to have walls throughout because they feel like they have to make these hard breaks to put their furniture against or put their accessories on," he says. "We try to create our vignettes to stop your eye, and then you move through the showroom according to how the furniture's set up."

Kolo's locations may have large footprints, but lots of space isn't a prerequisite for retailers looking to get into the outdoor furniture category.

"We're not sitting on a whole bunch of stock in a warehouse. We're selling off our floor an example of what XYZ furniture company has to

offer, and then we order from there," Martin says.

(This is also why manufacturer catalogs can be handy — if a customer likes the style of a chair, but is more interested in a chaise, for example, the catalog immediately offers some options.)

Despite the prime location in a renovated warehouse district and Atlanta's reputation as a shopping center, pulling local traffic is still tricky. Atlanta is spread out, and what might normally be

a twenty-minute drive in another part of the country can take a lot longer. Martin gets better luck with traffic from other parts of the surrounding area, including neighboring states.

"We get designers from Savannah, Charleston, Nashville, Birmingham, all over the southeast," Martin says. "We always say we get more people in from Alabama than we

do from the suburbs north of here because they'll come to Atlanta to do all of their home shopping. This is where they have access to many more options."

The key to drawing these far-flung visitors, Martin says, is variety.

"People come in our showroom and they're always blown away by the product mix," he says. "The lines we carry are the thing that makes it stand apart from other showrooms. The way we pulled it together and the manufacturers we have are the reason we're successful. People come into your showroom and come back to your showroom because you have the best mix of products." ~

"People come in our showroom and they're always blown away by the product mix."



Showroom design elements spill out into the storefront for consistent branding.