

## the People 2020 issue

In the third annual People Issue, Furniture Today turns the spotlight on 33 people who are using their talents, drive and determination to make a difference in their companies and in the furniture industry. Some are high-level executives, some start-up entrepreneurs. All are creative and inspired.

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#### Which company will ink the next licensing deal with the Scott Brothers?

Find out in the Sept. 14 edition of Furniture Today.

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# the People issue

Celebrating the  
industry's movers and  
shakers, disruptors  
and changers



# 2020 People to Watch

They have big ideas, dreams, goals ... and they put them into action.

## Ankur Agrawal

founder, Inhabit

Subscription furniture company Inhabit just added two new cities, Phoenix and Philadelphia, bringing the total to 12 cities across the U.S. where the service is now available.

Founder Ankur Agrawal, who started the company in April 2018, hopes to be in 15 cities by the end of this year and 45 cities by the end of 2021. He said the pandemic has increased his business exponentially.

"At Inhabit, our growth plan is strategic because the focus on profitability is very important," Agrawal said. "We are already profitable in 30% of the cities where we operate and should be profitable in all of them by the end of this year."

Agrawal said there are several things that define the core values of Inhabit, with its main principle being sustainable growth, along with a focus on employees and the company culture.

"I come from a family that been in business for generations in India," he said. "We have built sustainable, profitable companies by supporting and growing our people. We believe it's important to bring on the right talent with a strong pool of employees who are incredibly committed and then create a phenomenal culture."

The company uses technology as an enabler to partner with local furniture retailers to help them move product through its subscription service. "We chose not to make our own furniture but to partner to help the local ecosystem and now we have hundreds of stores that know us and love us," he said. "We are creating a model where we provide the technology to help them move inventory and get more value out of it."

Inhabit also now offers the option of certified, pre-owned furniture. "Although we offer a lot of subscriptions, some people want to buy. It's a financial decision on the part of the consumer, so our angle is to offer freedom and flexibility," he said. "We find that similar to the car industry, having an individual warranty for a pre-owned piece of furniture makes a real difference."

The company has also recently partnered with a real estate company to help furnish 30% of their new buildings. Agrawal said the



initial response has been very positive.

"Tenants can move in immediately, since it is pre-furnished, and they can use augmented reality to see what all the options are before moving in," he said. "Realtors love it since moving is a huge pain for most people and then moving out when the lease period is up. This takes away both of those pain points."

The company made the decision not to lay off anyone due to the uncertainty caused by the pandemic and even hired some previous Wayfair employees after layoffs there late last year.

"You can't be cold blooded; people put their blood, sweat and tears into your business, and you can't leave them hanging during bad times," he said. "We want the people who supported us through the early days to always feel like we have their backs. That makes up a key part of our value system."

With the push for safety brought on by the pandemic, Inhabit has increased its sanitation measures and doesn't see that going away any time soon.

"This mindset will allow us to be more successful by keeping our focus on customers and building those relationships over time," he said. "We are also hoping to expand internationally with existing customers who have business overseas."

— Anne Flynn Wear, Associate Editor

## Dax Allen

vice president of marketing,  
Sherill Furniture

With a master's degree in biology, Dax Allen did not start out his professional career thinking about marketing, let alone marketing in the furniture industry.

"My master's thesis was looking at how juvenile blue crabs utilize their environment to escape predators," explained Allen. "And I looked at why it's important not to dig up the Cape Fear River because you're going to destroy environments and animals that are important to fisheries and so much more."

And while Allen's time spent studying North Carolina waterways may not seem even tangentially related to his marketing work over the past 20 years, Allen said that, much like the blue crabs and the Cape Fear River, it's all connected.

"That's really what my skill set is built around," said Allen. "Whether it's using the scientific method to ask questions or its looking at data and understanding how to pull insights out of that, I like looking at the details that build into a larger idea or goal."

With that interest at heart, Allen got his start working in a marketing firm where his uncle was a partner, learning the ins and outs of the business world, and finding new ways to use his very logic- and data-based perspective to work with clients like Lowe's while growing his more empathetic, creative skillset.

And so Allen fell for marketing, and after a recruiter contacted him to join Sealy in 2006, he found a passion in the furniture and mattress industry, moving from his assistant marketing manager position with the Stearns &



Foster brand to eventually lead Tempur Sealy International's marketing team as director of marketing. Then in 2014, he moved to Liberty Hardware for five years before coming to Sherill Furniture at the end of 2019.

"I love the people I've gotten to work with for years, and I like the product I get to be part of," explained Allen. "I like getting to market something that helps enrich people's lives, something that people save for months or years to buy to make their lives and homes better. Something they can be proud to have in their home."

At Sherill Furniture, Allen said he has felt that sense of pride grow as he has begun rethinking and growing the American-made furniture brand's marketing strategy and digital capabilities with the help of his new team.

— Adelaide Elliott, Associate Editor

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Dax Allen  
Sherill Furniture

A new generation of leaders  
brings fresh ideas and unstoppable energy  
as the industry's ...

# Rising Stars



## Joe Becker

The Great American Home Store  
Memphis, Tenn.

Becker joined the retailer, founded and run by his father Ron Becker, after he graduated from the University of Tennessee and spent two years there as marketing and operations project manager.

He moved on to World Cotton Traders, where he developed his marketing skills in a global environment, preparing him for his return to the family business in 2016.

Today, as director of financial operations, Becker has spearheaded an overhaul of the company's health insurance, restructured the accounts payable department and is streamlining its freight contracts.

Training in every department of the retail operations, Becker is being groomed to be the next general manager for the full-line home furnishings company.



## Madeline Brown

Sherill Furniture Cos.

Brown joined Sherill Furniture in 2014, initially as an independent sales representative for Hickory White and Lillian August. She went on to work as a retail store gallery liaison for the company and played a key role in the launch of Lillian August's outdoor division in August 2019.

From there, Brown moved into the corporate side of company operations and today is marketing manager for all eight divisions of Sherill Furniture, where she has increased social presence and activity on multiple platforms and revitalized the catalog structure and selling tools.



## David Carlidge

Corsicana

Carlidge is making his mark at Top 10 bedding producer Corsicana Bedding, where he is senior product manager. The bedding veteran, with more than a decade of design, merchandising and product development experience, joined Corsicana last year to develop customer-specific products. He oversees a large portion of Corsicana's bedding portfolio and tracks the success of new products.

Carlidge is applying his extensive background in furniture buying and merchandising to enhance Corsicana's mattress line by incorporating new designs and materials. He developed and expanded NightsBridge, Corsicana's affordable luxury brand.



## Nick Byers

Stressless by Ekornes

Having reached the 10-year milestone working in the furniture industry, Byers is currently a territory manager for Texas and Louisiana for Stressless by Ekornes. Recently, he became one of four reps in the U.S. to be named to the Stressless rep advisory committee. In addition, he has been a sales representative for Sleeptronic for the past four and a half years.

Prior to representing Ekornes, Byers had been a territory manager for Leggett & Platt, Bassett Furniture and a senior marketing specialist for Ashley Furniture. He began his career at Nebraska Furniture Mart in 2010, working with his stepfather Steve Riley and becoming a top salesperson.

Byers has a bachelor's degree in Marketing from University of Nebraska at Omaha.