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Stefanie Schwalb: Why BDNY Matters More Than Ever to the Contract Market

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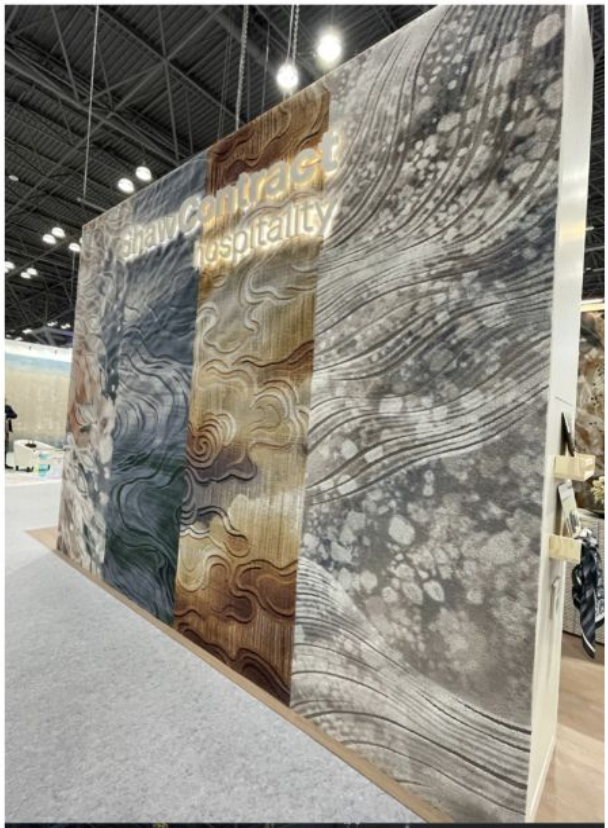
AS HOSPITALITY TRENDS RIPPLE OUTWARD, DESIGNERS ACROSS OFFICES, MULTIFAMILY, AND MIXED-USE ENVIRONMENTS ARE EMBRACING A SOFTER, MORE EXPERIENCE-DRIVEN AESTHETIC.

by Stefanie Schwalb

It's All About Authenticity Too

We'd be remiss not to mention the importance of authenticity in brand storytelling too, and a visit to Samuelson Furniture really brought that home for us. Fourth-generation, family-owned Samuelson, which celebrated its 90th anniversary this year, marked the occasion with curated booths (hospitality and senior living) that took visitors on a tour through nine decades of the company's innovation and most recent product launch. The museum-style setup showcased the company's evolution in a memorable way with original chair concepts, patented technological enhancement development, and current launches of the Muriel Reclining Chair and the premiere of the Happy Chair, a new wall-hugger recliner developed to help seniors get in and out of the chair with ease. "This [presentation] is like love letter to us. We pulled out pieces that are archival, and some of these items that you're seeing are 50 or 60 plus years old," says Samuelson President Michael Chalfin. "It speaks to a heritage and different items we created and brought to market over the last 90 years. We have French traditional represented, Art Nouveau, arts and crafts, and modern." One of the things that makes the company so unique, he adds, is that they are manufacturers as opposed to many competitors who are buyers and sellers. "So I think this particular setup has really drawn a lot of people," he adds. "I see people gravitating towards the furniture and saying, 'Is this a new model?' And I tell them actually it's not. We can make it for you, of course. I think people aren't used to seeing us present this way.

Most people are used to seeing us with a heavy case presentation." Along with a different presentation, the museum feel definitely piqued visitors' curiosity. "We have podiums and write ups that are telling our story as it's woven through the booth, which I think is really the self-selling moment. People are coming in and they're able to get the vibe of what we're all about and what we brought to the table through self-exploration. We've had a great reception to the whole thing."

For contract furniture professionals, BDNY 2025 offered more than hospitality inspiration, it provided a preview of the broader market's trajectory. Experience is no longer an add-on; it is becoming the baseline expectation across every sector. As hospitality brands push deeper into sensory storytelling, wellness, and material nuance, their influence continues to ripple into commercial interiors, workplace strategy, multifamily amenities, and even residential product development. BDNY's 2025 edition made one thing unmistakably clear to us: The future of contract design is increasingly shaped by hospitality thinking, and the brands that embrace this convergence are positioning themselves ahead of the next wave of client demand. **BoF**