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Shifman creates quality by hand

By David Perry

NEWARK, N.J. — An old-fashioned emphasis on quality and craftsmanship continues to drive venerable manufacturer Shifman Mattress Co. to new heights.

The company's skilled workers still painstakingly build every mattress and box spring by hand, spending anywhere from eight to 12 hours per sleep set. The mattresses are

hand-tufted, loaded with high-grade cotton garneted in Shifman's factory, tailored with almost 300 individual sewing operations, and nestled on eight-way, hand-tied box springs that are almost extinct in the bedding business these days.

The results, which retail from \$599 to \$5,000 in queen, are "the finest hand-made mattresses in the world," Shifman says.

Breaking ground on the expansion at Shifman are Wayne Pezzino, left, national sales manager; Michael Hammer, president; Marc Deckler, plant manager; Eileen Hammer, office manager; Nicholas James, production manager; and Bill Hammer, general manager.

It's a line suitable for a high-brow magazine like *Architectural Digest*, where the company's ads join those of Henredon and Cartier in vying to attract the attention of a well-heeled clientele.

A recent Shifman ad posed the question: "Why have Shifman mattresses been preferred by families for over 100 years?" The answer: "Comfort ... the result of uncompromising standards and an insistence on the finest materials available. Comfort is in the details."

Veteran bedding executive Michael Hammer, Shifman's president, has been seeing to the details at the company here since he bought it in 1985, capping a career that involved earlier stops at Simmons and Stearns & Foster.

Hammer has made a number of improvements in manufacturing procedures, but the beds are made essentially the same way they were when he bought the company. And that marks a continuation of a commitment to quality and hand craftsmanship that goes all the way back to the



Bill Hammer with pounds of luxurious fabrics destined for Shifman bedding.



Michael Hammer at the garneting machine in the Shifman factory.

company's founding in 1893, when brothers Abraham and Samuel Shifman established A. Shifman & Bros. Mattress Co.

"Today we maintain exactly the same uncompromising standards for quality and attention to detail as those of our predecessors," Hammer said. "While this approach may appear old fashioned, we remain committed to the superior craftsmanship invested in every mattress we make."

His son, Bill, who is the company's general manager, said, "Everything is about quality. Every material is the best grade we can buy."

The beds are so well made they last for decades. "Customers keep our beds for 20 to 30 years," Mike Hammer said.

The key is building quality in rather than taking quality out.

"It's very easy to save a dollar or 50 cents on materials," Hammer said. "Most

bedding companies today base their decisions on how much money they can save. Saving money is short term. When you cheapen the product you take the chance that someone can replace you with a better product and a better value. We want to make sure this company makes a product that will satisfy consumers. So far it seems to be working."

Shifman's top model is the Belize, which is cushioned with New Zealand wool and features a titanium support system. It retails at \$5,000 in queen.

"Belize is a tremendous value because of the comfort you will get out of it for 20 or 25 years," Hammer said. "That's just pennies a day."

Shifman, which sells through a select group of retailers, has averaged 19% annual growth since Hammer bought the business. A factory expansion which recently got under way will enable the company to triple its production, and further broaden its sales horizons.



Shifman expands facilities

NEWARK, N.J. — Shifman Mattress Co., at its current location here since 1918, is expanding.

The high-end bedding producer at One Mott Street has broken ground on a 23,000-square-foot expansion of its facilities, which include offices, a showroom, the factory and a warehouse. The expansion will increase the facility's size by 37% to 84,000 square feet.

Two new buildings are on tap. The larger will be a state-of-the-art warehouse, which will store finished mattresses in a three-tier racking system, with six truck bays for loading and delivery. The smaller addition will fill a courtyard and feature two truck bays for receiving raw materials.

The producer will redesign the layout of its factory to improve efficiency. With the additional space and the revised layout, Shifman expects to triple production. That will enable the company to add accounts to what has been and will remain a select group of dealers.

"The Shifman tradition of comfort, quality, value and exclusive distribution has created tremendous demand for our products by fine furniture and department stores across the country," said President Mike Hammer. "It is the support of our customers that has necessitated this expansion."

The expansion should be completed by summer 2004.

The building at left in this sketch will account for much of the new construction in the expansion at Shifman Mattress Co.

