



Rocker Room is stocked with bowback, Boston and colonial rockers for adults and children



Village Hutch manager, Jim Hopkins (left), and brother-in-law Dave Larue, co-owner, line up some of the hundreds of

custom shelves, mirrors and toys that cover the walls of their shop

# The Observer & Eccentric **BUSINESS** (DORSET-12A) Thursday, March 18, 1976

## **Village Hutch:** *Where unfinished furniture* *abounds for do-it-yourselfers*

By: NANCY KAREN LIESE  
Photos: DOUGLAS BALMAN

Wandering into the Village Hutch Rocker's new unfinished furniture store is like walking into a lumberyard. But here the lumberyard pieces are already assembled, ready for would-be craftsmen to finish themselves.

The long, one-story building, nestled among older homes on Main Street is filled with 25 styles of tables, numerous chairs, bunk beds, lamps, hutches, toys and even a crib. And everything is in smooth, uncolored natural wood.

Shelves, mirrors and coat racks line the walls, and another smaller room is devoted just to rockers, adult-size and miniature.

Tending the store behind a wooden counter in the rear are Dave Larue, 26-year-old co-owner, and Jim Hopkins, 25-year-old manager, and Larue's brother-in-law. The other co-owner, Jim Weerly, works in the store part-time.

Larue just opened the store last November, but he is no neophyte to the business.

At 18, he started working for an unfinished furniture store in Northville. Two years later, he was retail sales manager, a position he held for one year, until the store was sold to new owners.

AFTER TEACHING the new owners the

trade, he set out on his own, moving away from the competition to Rochester.

Right now, he says business is good, better than expected.

Part of that success may stem from his experience with furniture manufacturers, allowing him to get furniture orders faster than new business owners.

The manufacturers are behind in orders, he says, and may delay up to a year. If they don't know you, he says, it's particularly tough.

Unfinished furniture has really developed in the last five years. Wholesale places are behind in the shipping," he says, pointing to a shipment ordered last fall that arrived last week.

Much of his furniture comes from the same people who make finished furniture. They just stop the process before getting to the stain.

"There used to be a stigma attached to unfinished furniture, that it was just crates," Hopkins says.

"You can't hide anything in unfinished furniture," Larue adds. "Scratches or imperfections you might miss in the finished product would be right there, undisguised by filler, stain or varnish."

And if a furniture maker uses plastic in side a table, camouflaging it with a wood top, you could tell, he says.

UNFINISHED FURNITURE is not in

expensive, but it is reasonable. At Village Hutch, the best ladder-back chair sells for \$60. Others range as low as \$20.

How expensive this type of furniture is depends partially on the housing industry, Larue says. The more wood cut for commercial use, the more cut for furniture, making it cheaper to buy.

Furniture-grade wood comes from the inside of the tree and must be kiln dried for 11 days before using, he says.

But customers don't just come to Village Hutch to save money.

"We either get young people starting out who want to save money or older people doing it for a hobby," Larue says.

Either way, the two young men have plenty of personal tips on staining plus a card outlining all the steps necessary to get a finished product.

The furniture is ready to stain, Hopkins says, needing only spot sanding.

Larue drives daily from his home in Northville to open the store at 10 a.m. and remains until 7 p.m. Although the city has issued him a temporary occupancy permit, he hopes the shop remains in Rochester.

Switching from selling furniture to owning his own store was easy for him, he says. "All this was just a move, it was really nothing new."

And when asked about the success of his venture, he says, "We feel good."



Two popular hutches, a colonial style and the contemporary windowed style, are in

stock, ready for do-it-yourselfers itching for a new project



Mugs come in a variety of shapes and designs. Personalized mugs are among the more popular.

## **The way America used to be** *Shop owner loves mingling with people*

By: KAREN S. HERMES  
Photos: DOUGLAS BALMAN

She gave up 25 years of debt, debit balances and credits—a secure career—for something, uncertain as an accountant.

Charr Bagnall left her position as chief accounting officer for a high-fashion dress boutique in Detroit and searched Grosse Pointe, where she found a small shop to rent. Finding none, she came to Rochester where she found what she was searching for in the Little Mall on Main Street.

In the downtown mall, she opened the Mug Cupboard, her very own novelty shop.

Why did Mrs. Bagnall risk starting a business from scratch when she held a secure, profitable position as an accountant?

A VIVACIOUS PERSON with an affable smile, Mrs. Bagnall explains, "I needed a change and I felt I had nothing to lose."

She did have reservations, though. "I wasn't sure I would be able to deal with the public after working for 25 years behind the scenes," she says.

"I've heard saleswomen complain about customers and I thought to myself, I wouldn't be able to stand it for an instant."

But, Mrs. Bagnall says she has adjusted to selling beautifully. "It pleases me when someone finds what they've really been looking for," she says. "It's personally satisfying."

And opening a small novelty shop is Mrs. Bagnall's idea of getting back to the way America used to be. "People who work in factories never even get to see the people who buy the car they've helped assemble," she says. "They never get the sort of feeling that comes with meeting customers personally."

Mrs. Bagnall finds the Mug Cupboard more relaxing, too. "As a housewife, I sometimes sit up all night searching for one penny. But, that was my job and there never were any rewards in it."

Yet, Mrs. Bagnall's decision does have

as drawbacks. At times this winter, while driving all the way from Grosse Pointe to Rochester, I'd think, "What have I done to myself?"

And it isn't as glamorous as Mrs. Bagnall imagined it might be. "I thought to myself, 'Wouldn't it be nice to be able to fly to California, maybe even Germany and pretend for my shop, meanwhile charging the whole trip to my expense account?'"

EVEN WITH the few disappointments opening the Mug Cupboard brought her Mrs. Bagnall says she enjoys what she is doing now much more.

"You wonder if you're doing the right thing," she says. "And, unless you try something else, you never know. Although the shop is small and storage space is limited, Mrs. Bagnall tries to keep a large variety of stock. She keeps a list on her desk of some her customers' wishes, but which she doesn't have. When the gift shows in Detroit are held, Mrs. Bagnall says she searches high and low for items on the list.

Her latest selling and most popular item is name mugs. Between Oct. 18 and Christmas, Mrs. Bagnall sold 600 name mugs.

"I was having nightmares," she says, laughing. "All these names were running through my head. Like Harold and George." "I said, 'Harold' to one day. Then some for weeks. At first no one wanted 'George' mugs. Then, in two days all the 'Georges' were gone. I felt like throwing them out."

MRS. BAGNALL has hand-painted mugs, a large collection of mug mugs, crystal, pewter and bone china mugs. She suggests inscribed pewter mugs as gifts from bridesmaids to their sisters, a set of mugs for a shower gift, or a mug filled with candy or cookies for a friend in the hospital.

German steins are available at Mug Cup-

board or may be specially ordered. A large selection of bicentennial mugs are available in observance of America's 200th birthday.

Any name mug may be specially or-

dered and inscriptions may be printed on

prayer mugs.

Bicentennial opened and printed was and col-

lects are sold at Mug Cupboard to accom-

pany matching teapots and teacups.



This mug is part of a collection featuring birds.