

# Coming up Roses

*Family has designs for old mill*

BY JOHN GOLDEN

[jgolden@westfairinc.com](mailto:jgolden@westfairinc.com)

In Yonkers, businessman Randolph J. Rose has a dream. It is part of a larger vision of an economically reborn city that is shared and pursued by public officials and private developers. His dream keeps Rose awake some nights hatching ideas to

he opened a shop in Manhattan and later converted part of a house he had bought in Yonkers into an art gallery.

The longtime business partners have two showrooms in Manhattan, Far Eastern Arts and Antiques and Pallisander, and another in Dania Beach, Fla. Rose has been joined in the business by his wife, Ellen, and their three sons. Their oldest son, Austin, a former



Randolph J. Rose with a bronze sculpture of a giraffe in his warehouse.

make it real.

"This whole town has taken off because rents have gotten so high in Manhattan," Rose said in his office at 500 Nepperhan Ave., where realizing his dream could be helped along by the tax breaks, exemptions and other financial incentives available to new and expanding businesses in the city's Empire Zone for economic development.

"I would think in 20 years you won't recognize Yonkers." Rose and his family hope to play a role in the city's commercial transformation.

Brooklyn-born Rose has been in the Asian arts and antiques business since 1972, when he joined founding partner Stephen R. Gano. While stationed in Thailand during Army service in the '60s, Gano began shipping back antiques he'd personally discovered in Thai villages to his aunt's antique store in Greenwich Village. Returning to civilian life,

stock trader, runs the family's garden sculptures business, The Rose Garden, in Dania Beach. Jordan Rose is vice president for the Randolph Rose Collection and Harlan Rose heads up IT for the company.

Pieces from the partners' vast Asian collection are included in a related business that Rose runs from Yonkers, The Randolph Rose Collection. "Bloomingdale's is my major customer," he said.

Home furnishings from The Randolph Rose Collection are featured in Bloomingdale's Time and Again antique shops at stores in Manhattan, Long Island and New Jersey.

Since their start 35 years ago, Rose and Gano grew their enterprise "into a fairly substantial import business," he said.

That seems an understatement after one tours their inventory of Asian imports at 500 Nepperhan Ave., a five-story, 170,000-square-foot relic in red brick from the heyday

of Yonkers as a manufacturing center in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

A collection that occupied 10,000 square feet of space in 1986, when Rose's business became a tenant in the former carpet mill and furniture factory, has grown into 61,000 square feet on three warehouse floors filled with handpicked pieces found in his partner's travels through China, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand and South Korea. They include antique Chinese altar tables and consoles that retail for \$5,500 and \$5,000, respectively; architectural wood carvings; antique Japanese dolls; iron water jars from India; Buddhist temple toys; terra cotta burial pieces from a Chinese dynasty dating to 800 to 1,000 years ago; and, from Thailand, contemporary bronze sculptures of life-sized animals and children at play and other activities, some of which have been sold for public display in Westchester County communities.

## BUILDING HISTORY

Rose bought the 125-year-old building in March from the family of its late owner, Nicholas Martini. For nearly a century, the building had been a part of the Alexander Smith & Sons Carpet Co. mills, the largest carpet manufacturing plant in the world, which at its peak in the early 1900s reportedly employed some 8,000 workers spread across 45 acres of floor space.

In April 1911, the New York Central Railroad issued a press release announcing the shipment of 1.5 million pounds of carpet from the Yonkers mill to San Francisco and the fast-growing Pacific Coast market in a special train of 60 freight cars. Valued at \$1 million, the shipment was the largest and most valuable "ever made in this or any other country," railroad officials boasted, "carpet enough to lay a width the entire length of the main line of the New York Central from New York to Buffalo, thence to Niagara Falls and across the Niagara River into Canada."

After supplying tents and blankets to America's fighting forces in World War II, the carpet company, facing increased competition from less expensive imports served by cheap foreign labor, went into decline. The Yonkers mill closed in 1954, when Alexander Smith & Sons moved it

Continued on next page

Continued

operations to the South.

Martini bought the abandoned building in the late 1970s, said Rose, and opened MGM Furniture there. The high-end furniture company had about 150 employees. The owner closed the business about five years ago. Before his death, Martini had envisioned turning the largely vacant mill into a design center, Rose said.

That is Rose's dream, too. He wants to turn his collection's private showroom for wholesale buyers into a public one for retail customers and turn the mill into a multi-tenant design center.

In the newly redeveloped Yonkers, "We want this to be a destination building," Rose said. "We want to do our own look, which would be a grouping of all kinds of people in the home furnishings industry, including antiques, fabrics, lighting, kitchen and bath, framed art, carpets. Anyone on the high end, good quality." Rose said he hopes to get a zoning change to open a restaurant on the premises.

"We want to give interior designers that are leaving Manhattan a reason to come up to Westchester County," said Austin Rose. "We want to start getting the word out, doing local grass-roots advertising."

#### 'HE TRULY HAS A DREAM'

Rose noted the \$3 billion mixed-use redevelopment plan for downtown Yonkers and the city's Hudson River shoreline proposed by SFC Yonkers L.L.C., whose partners include Valhalla-based Cappelli Enterprises Inc., as an example of the city's rebirth. "We want to join that and help people find unusual furniture," he said.

The Nepperhan Avenue building already has some elements of the design center its owner envisions. Among eight current tenants there are Casa Nueva Custom Furnishings Inc.; Custom Crafts Unlimited Inc.; Beyond Costumes, a maker of theatrical costumes; and, most recently, Alejandro Furniture Corp., a Bronx-based furniture importer.

Rose recently had the 600-foot-long building wired for fiber-optic cable. He has budgeted \$500,000 this year for building improvements and renovations.

Rose said he will work with the Yonkers Industrial Development Agency



Randolph and Austin Rose

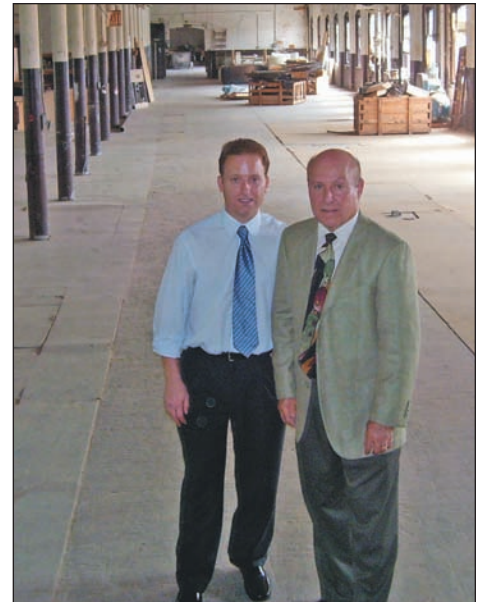
on his plans for the building. His business, which has eight employees, could hire more, he said.

Rose said inadequate parking in the area could be an obstacle to attracting design center tenants. "Parking's the key," he said.

The owner said a publishing company in midtown Manhattan recently inquired about renting space in the old mill as a backup office for 300 employees in the event of a terrorist attack in Manhattan. The company, though, needed parking space that the Yonkers location did not provide. But Rose, who is marketing the rental space through Friedland Realty Inc. in Yonkers, said he wasn't interested anyway in attracting major office tenants to fill the historic building.

"I really want to do my love, which is home furnishings," he said.

"He truly has a dream about this place," said Austin Rose. "He really wants to make it something special."



Austin and Randolph Rose