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# Top Drawer : 150 years of Bittners in theory and practice.

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TOP DRAWER: 150 YEARS OF BITTNER'S IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

By

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B.A., University of Louisville, 2009

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
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Department of Fine Arts  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

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A Thesis Approved on

June 17, 2016

by the following Thesis Committee:

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Peter Morrin

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John Begley

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Daniel Vivian

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful parents

Carol & John Spencer IV

You are my inspiration and my strength.

I would also like to dedicate this paper to my late grandmother

Mrs. Mary E. Webb

Thank you for your faith, love and support.

and to my dear friend

Andrew Kelly

Thank you for sharing your insight, wisdom and wit.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

### TOP DRAWER: 150 YEARS OF BITTNER'S IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Wesley E. Spencer

June 17, 2016

This thesis is a practical summary and theoretical analysis of the development and execution of the exhibition *Top Drawer: 150 Years of Bittner's*, held for public view at the Frazier History Museum in Louisville, Kentucky in November 2012. The thesis further discusses *Top Drawer* in the broader context of the regional, national and global contemporary museum environment, as well as its impact on the development of the Frazier History Museum's new institutional plan. These examinations are followed by a detailed practicum of the exhibition.

This thesis is divided into four chapters covering the areas of museum history, theory and practice, and concludes with a consideration of the institutional future of the Frazier History Museum.



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## INTRODUCTION INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION

With the significant social, demographic, technological and economic shifts that have been transformative of the global community in recent decades, museums around the world now find themselves facing a fast-evolving and highly complex environment. As Graham Black notes in *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century*: “We are living through a period of profound change in Western society, underpinned by a rise in new media and a fundamental shift in Western economies to a globally interconnected information economy.”<sup>1</sup> For museums, this repositioning has been marked by periods of rapid growth and facilities expansion, financial uncertainty, and even economic crisis.

Contending with issues of relevance, leadership and sustainability, museums in most developed countries are reexamining core missions and reevaluating their future. For some, the traditional museum model has never been more fundamentally challenged and in need of creative reimagining. For others, the call for reinvention is more a matter of modest adaptation. Regardless, one thing is abundantly clear: it is incumbent on cultural institutions to pursue structured initiatives in innovation and transformation in order to remain relevant in the lives of their audiences, meaningful to the larger culture, and responsive to the demands of their funders at every level of giving.

This call for change is by no means a death knell for the traditional museum

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Black, *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-first Century*. (New York: Routledge, 2012)

model, it is a call for a reawakening, a renewed opportunity to evaluate and adjust how they work to achieve their visions and missions, and by virtue of their function the vast majority of museums are positioned to have such stories of success, as Gail Dexter Lord correctly points out in the *Manual of Museum Planning*: “In our era, which is dominated by the communications revolution, museums have become highly valued outside the traditional cultural realm as providers of content, leisure destinations, community forums, magnets for knowledge workers, and brandable entities that can revitalize communities large and small.”<sup>2</sup>

Still, the role and value of museums in contemporary society, as well as their worthiness of sustained support, are the subjects of an ongoing and open-ended dialogue. In 2012, the American Alliance of Museums launched their first summary of emerging trends shaping the future of museums: *TrendsWatch 2012: Museums and the Pulse of the Future*. The purpose of this annually-issued summary is to provide background context for new dynamics and directions in the museum field; to discuss ways in which these are in evidence in the larger international context; to comment on their significance to society in general and museums in particular; and to suggest how museums might be better poised to respond to them in their planning and execution.

The public fascination and increased interest in large museums has changed the ways in which organization leaders regard existing and prospective sources of support. Museums are now being scrutinized for their potential as sources of popular entertainment and venues for social engagement. The recent history of capacity audiences and earned revenue derived from blockbuster exhibitions has created an

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<sup>2</sup> Gail Dexter Lord, “Institutional Evolution,” in *Manual of Museum Planning*. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2013), 25

unrealistic expectation that properly-managed museums can be sustained by paid admissions and memberships alone: a business model that places more emphasis on the institution as a form of diversion as opposed to one of higher learning and stewardship. Additionally, the idea of the museum as a public, social or festive gathering place, historically the purview of arenas, forums, town squares or cathedral plazas, is beginning to gain currency. Today museum leaders are championing this notion of the museum as a versatile multiuse public space as a new tool in their arsenal to attract and capture the interest of a younger generation of audience and donor. An event such as the Young Collectors Party hosted by the Guggenheim in New York is one good example: Catherine Dunn, Advancement Director at the Guggenheim, suggests that functions like these are essential to their public program in drawing new generations through their front doors, and in maintaining a consequential profile in contemporary culture.<sup>3</sup>

Internationally, many of the larger museums have been created and sustained specifically in relation to their prominence in stature as architectural icons, public amenities and tourism attractions that support and stimulate regional and national economies and identities. Recent examples such as the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Northern Spain have realized the extraordinary potential of art museums to affect broad, profound and lasting economic impact, and bolster civic pride and international prestige. Articles published in *The Guardian* and *The Economist* detail the evolution of Bilbao's sovereign self-governing economy from one plagued by an ageing infrastructure and withering hard-industrial base to a service-oriented sector focused on banking, financial markets, communications, technology, international trade, tourism, and transit and

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<sup>3</sup> David Gelles, "Wooing a New Generation of Museum Patrons," *New York Times* (New York, NY), March 19, 2014.

housing infrastructure renewal. The construction of the Guggenheim branch in Bilbao was the emblematic centerpiece of this ambitious redevelopment, and its overwhelming social, cultural and economic success was in large measure responsible for a late-century renaissance of the entire Basque region. Visitor spending in the city for the first three years after the museum opened raised over \$100,000,000 in tax revenues for the municipality, added over forty-five hundred full-time jobs, quadrupled tourism, and attracted new industries and construction, all in what came to be known as the “Bilbao effect.”<sup>4</sup>

Over the following twenty years more than two dozen cultural centers anchored by museums are due to be constructed in various countries at an estimated expenditure of over \$250,000,000,000, according to a study by AEA Consulting of New York.<sup>5</sup> Other cities, notably in the Middle East and Asia, have followed with similar investments, most prominently Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi, home to new branches of the Guggenheim and the Louvre; and West Kowloon Cultural District in Hong Kong, which will house M+, a museum for Chinese contemporary art analogous in plan and scale to Tate Modern in London. Similar projects have also been advanced for venues in Australia, Albania, Ukraine and Brazil. These museums have often valued imposing architecture, donor memorialization, public relations and the quest for immediate cultural legitimacy over more conventional functions such as collections management, exhibition development, academic research, preservation and conservation. Though an in-depth analysis of these instances is beyond the scope, focus and purpose of this paper, they are illustrative of global trends in trade, demographics, mobility and wealth distribution that in some

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<sup>4</sup> Chris Michael, “The Bilbao Effect: Is ‘starchitecture’ all it’s cracked up to be? A history of citities in 50 buildings.” *The Guardian* (London, UK), April 30, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> The Economist, “Temples of Delight,” *The Economist* (London,UK), December 21, 2013.

smaller measure apply to, and will be incidentally addressed in, the case presently at hand.

The majority of serious-minded museums endorse the concept that their value is a function of sustained objectives and accomplishments, including the preservation of artifacts for future generations, and the development of ideas that demonstrably influence the present and the future. Despite pressures to direct further resources to urgent goals measured in annual attendance, most large fine, decorative-arts and history museums continue disbursing considerable sums of money on conservation, research and educational outreach, and these expenditures do not always immediately result in increased attendance or enhanced philanthropic revenues. Museum leaders today often deliberate balancing established priorities with the different set of universal social aims required to reach as many individuals as possible through primary experiences, public programs and collections presentation.

One of the mid- to long-term challenges for museums, particularly in the United States, is a projected changeover in demographics. In a field not known for its ethnic, racial or gender diversity in staff, audience or programming, museums must quickly adapt to serve new audiences or face the prospect of diminished pertinence. “ Many museums are white both literally and figuratively,” said Mr. Bell, former President of the American Alliance of Museums.<sup>6</sup> The United States Census Bureau projects that European-Americans will be a minority of the larger population by the year 2043.<sup>7</sup> The lack of ethnic diversity in personnel, programming and outreach in American museums is

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<sup>6</sup> David Gelles, “Wooing a New Generation of Museum Patrons”

<sup>7</sup> Michael Govan, *The Art Museum Today, in Discussion*.(Association of Museum Directors, 2013), <http://www.aamd.org>.



only one important measure of their unpreparedness for the future; biased collecting practices over generations is another. Mr. Bell points out that “a new generation, raised on pop culture, is not always eager to support niche collections.”<sup>8</sup> “If a museum’s core collections are antiquities, it is not so easy to find young people who are interested in supporting the organization,” says Robert Fisher of the San Francisco Museum of Art.<sup>9</sup> Facilitating revenue and audience growth and cultural relevance for our museums will depend on their ability to invest in and adapt to the emerging demographic exigencies of the foreseeable future.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond concerns over changing demographics and their relationship with museum collections is their effect on continued viability. The last three decades have seen an explosion in the number, size and popularity of museums; unfortunately, these developments have not been accompanied by a commensurate growth in sources of funding. In fact, the government as a provider of direct services has been in retreat since the beginning of the Reagan administration, and support from the commercial sector has been in decline as challenges poised by the global economy have depleted or redeployed their reserves of capital.<sup>11</sup> Historically, civic amenities such as museums attracted charitable giving for three primary reasons: high culture was perceived to enrich the social and national fabric; non-profits were presumed to operate dispassionately and in the best interests of their communities; and those availed of the means to give were motivated by generous tax advantages and the public esteem, recognition and goodwill

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<sup>8</sup> David Gelles, “Wooing a New Generation of Museum Patrons”

<sup>9</sup> David Gelles, “Wooing a New Generation of Museum Patrons”

<sup>10</sup> Michael Govan, *The Art Museum Today, in Discussion*. (Association of Museum Directors, 2013), <http://www.aamd.org>.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Dibkin Hall, “Historical Perspectives on Nonprofit Organizations in the United States,” *Jossey-Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management 2010*, ed. David O. Renz (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 3-30.

derived from doing so.<sup>12</sup> For close to four decades the volume of private charitable giving in the United States remained stable at around two percent of gross domestic product.<sup>13</sup> Recently, however, the status quo has been begun to retreat as a result of the withdrawal and shrinking pull of donors. As wealth becomes increasingly regressively distributed, and a younger, wealthier and arguably more self-interested generation develops new philanthropic vanities and priorities, many non-profit organizations are confronting what could ultimately evolve into an existential crisis.

“The generational shift is something a lot of museums are talking about,” said former AAM president Ford Bell, in an article written in the New York Times. “The traditional donors are either dying, stepping back or turning it over to their children or grandchildren.”<sup>14</sup>

With seventy percent of the world’s disposable income over the last forty years controlled by the post-World War II generation,<sup>15</sup> there is growing concern about the readiness, inclination and ability of their offspring to pick up where their parents and grandparents left off. The financial and leadership needs of today’s museums are more expensive and complex than ever before. As Kaywin Feldman, director of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts said: “We’re not just talking about replacing one generation with another, we’re talking about a new generation that behaves so differently than the

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Galvan, “The Role of Nonprofits in American Life,” in *Nonprofit Management 101: A Complete and Practical Guide for Leaders and Professionals*, ed. Darian Rodriguez Heiman (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011) 5-20.

<sup>13</sup> American Alliance of Museums, “Developing an Institutional Plan,” *American Alliance of Museums*, accessed March 28, 2014, <http://aam-us.org>.

<sup>14</sup> David Gelles, “Wooing a New Generation of Museum Patrons”

<sup>15</sup> David Gelles, “Wooing a New Generation of Museum Patrons”

last one.”<sup>16</sup> This new generation of donors is equipped with a different set of tools and priorities than those preceding them. According to the AAM, two-thirds of millennials expect specific information about the ways in which their dollars will effect the course of events. This demand for accountability and transparency is a mindset of growing concern for museums that have historically relied on unrestricted individual donations to support everyday operations and to build endowments. Mr. Bell says: “...younger philanthropists and donors today are looking for measurable results. It used to be you gave because it was the Metropolitan Museum of Art. But today younger donors have a lot of things they can give to. They ask what the impact is going to be and how are you going to measure that impact. The Rockefellers gave, but they weren’t looking for specific metrics.”<sup>17</sup>

Fueling frustrations is the unwillingness among millennials to give to long-term campaigns. Earlier generations of philanthropists understood the value of endowments, but in the present environment fiduciary trusts are looked upon by younger donors as buried money. Further complicating this issue is the protracted competition for the younger generation’s attentions and monies, as many among them feel that arts and cultural institutions are less deserving than social concerns, political agendas or public health initiatives.<sup>18</sup>

Compounding and concurrent to these dilemmas are a significant displacement and contraction in the distribution of personal wealth, with the result being that today there are simply fewer rich young patrons available with an ability to write large

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<sup>16</sup> American Alliance of Museums, “The Changing Shape of Giving: Philanthropic Trends for the Future of Museums,” *American Alliance of Museums*, accessed January 30, 2013, <http://aam-us.org>.

<sup>17</sup> American Alliance of Museums, “The Changing Shape of Giving: Philanthropic Trends for the Future of Museums,” *American Alliance of Museums*, accessed January 30, 2013, <http://aam-us.org>.

<sup>18</sup> American Alliance of Museums, “The Changing Shape of Giving: Philanthropic Trends for the Future of Museums,” *American Alliance of Museums*, accessed January 30, 2013, <http://aam-us.org>.

checks.<sup>19</sup> Dan Monroe, director of the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem Massachusetts, states: “There is a shrinking middle class. There’s a huge amount of wealth and philanthropic capability that is centered in a smaller number of people than was previously the case.”<sup>20</sup> Anticipating this changing of the guard, some museums are racing to pursue younger donors and trustees. Museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York are creating special public programs and donor circles geared towards this younger demographic. At the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, seventy-five percent of the board membership has turned over, and while this has brought new life to the organization and its policies, it has also meant the loss of stalwarts who could be routinely relied upon for large sums of money, high-profile networking associations and seasoned advice.<sup>21</sup>

Those who neglect or refuse to see the need to court these new generations of donors should beware, and many institutions that have chosen to do so have suffered for the decision. The Delaware Art Museum in Wilmington is facing a funding crisis, due in part to the erosion of individual giving by moneyed locals. In 2014, the museum at Randolph College in Lynchburg, Virginia was compelled to de-access a painting by George Bellows for \$25,500,000 to fund their endowment, a fiduciary responsibility traditionally undertaken by donors.

Many institutions and boards of directors, however, are adapting to this changing landscape. Donald Fischer, the late co-founder of the Gap and longtime board member of

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<sup>19</sup> American Alliance of Museums, “The Changing Shape of Giving: Philanthropic Trends for the Future of Museums,” *American Alliance of Museums*, accessed January 30, 2013, <http://aam-us.org>.

<sup>20</sup> David Gelles, “Wooing a New Generation of Museum Patrons”

<sup>21</sup> David Gelles, “Wooing a New Generation of Museum Patrons”

the San Francisco Museum of Contemporary Art, well understood this when he said to its board: “ We need to prepare for this generational shift and not nominate anyone over the age of 50.”<sup>22</sup> A similar storyline has begun to play out in museums across the country. In Boston, the Institute of Contemporary Art has undertaken an overhaul of its Board of Directors and begun construction of a new facility. “While we were erecting a new building, it was critical that we build a community to support contemporary art,” said the institute’s director Jill Medvedow. The Institute initiated a search to recruit young professionals in their community who were not serving on other boards; the move worked, and they were able to re-invigorate their aging board of trustees, increase their endowment, while also securing broad-based and enduring support for the organization and its collection.<sup>23</sup>

Transposing demographics in ethnicity and gender are also impacting cultural philanthropy. Women have more philanthropic clout than ever before, consistently outgiving their male counterparts by eighty-nine percent (among those aged 50 or older.)<sup>24</sup> It has also been observed that women of all ages appear to demand more effectiveness from their donations than men.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting and vigorous debate today amongst our leadership surrounds the reciprocative relationship between a museum and its audience, a trend manifesting itself across the country. One example can be found in the interaction

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<sup>22</sup> David Gelles, “Wooing a New Generation of Museum Patrons”

<sup>23</sup> David Gelles, “Wooing a New Generation of Museum Patrons”

<sup>24</sup> American Alliance of Museums, “The Changing Shape of Giving: Philanthropic Trends for the Future of Museums,” *American Alliance of Museums*, accessed January 30, 2013, <http://aam-us.org>.

<sup>25</sup> American Alliance of Museums, “The Changing Shape of Giving: Philanthropic Trends for the Future of Museums,” *American Alliance of Museums*, accessed January 30, 2013, <http://aam-us.org>.

between board members and the executive director at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, where the Dayton family, founders of the Target Corporation, have three generations serving on the board. Ms. Feldman, the director of the institute, recounts that when she speaks with Bruce Dayton about the best moments of the museum he immediately refers to their acquisition of a painting by Pierre Bonnard; when she speaks with his grandson Eric, his focus is on audience engagement and the museum's brand attaining recognition and attracting new and larger audiences.<sup>26</sup>

The museum as an institution once maintained unilateral rapport with its audience, one in which it spoke with an undeviating voice of didactic and educational authority. However, the forces of social media, and the socio-economic diversification of audiences, have created a mutually-dependent communications pathway between the two. Comments, questions and answers flow back to museums not only through on-site surveys and commentary, but through Facebook, Twitter, and the museum website. Audiences share interpretive roles with curators; in fact, the term curator itself is now commonly invoked to describe any person who selects to publicly present nearly any variety of pursuits and interests.<sup>27</sup> An example of this phenomenon, is the exhibition, *Boston Loves Impressionism* at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in January 2014. The exhibition was curated through crowdsourcing. Patrons were allowed to vote on what pieces were included in the show. Within this seemingly vast chaos of voices and perspectives there exist both obstacles and opportunities. It is frequently salutary to

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<sup>26</sup> David Gelles, "Wooing a New Generation of Museum Patrons"

<sup>27</sup> Michael Govan, *The Art Museum Today, in Discussion*. (Association of Museum Directors, 2013), <http://www.aamd.org>.

receive commentary and opinions from viewers through comment cards, online surveys, and direct mail surveys, but it can be equally disturbing to witness how quickly factual errors and misconceptions are free to proliferate. While many embrace this access to a universe of unedited perspective, others lament the potential loss of the museum's position of ascendancy. The external forces of the internet and social media, combined with the effort of museums to create augmented interactive educational and exhibitions programs, leaves no doubt that an interdependent relationship between a museum and its audience has the potential to reshape the institutional future in ways not yet envisioned or contemplated.

Finally, dynamic conditions in the communities surrounding museums continue to fracture shared experience into more regional and local frames of reference. The rise in the variety of types of museums—contemporary and historical, non-collecting and collecting, private and public, those with largely touristic audiences and those more regionally based, and those with specialized or encyclopedic collections—has prompted a scenario of increasingly mixed priorities and programs. The broadening and diversification of membership has led to the idea of inclusiveness now being a central tenet of museum management, and with this amplification in practice and definition museums as a group will require far greater breadth in programming. It has become incumbent upon cultural institutions to reach a consensus on common practices and shared goals that reach beyond core beliefs and special collections.

While these issues impact the industry in general, they are also reflected at a micro scale in small to mid-sized institutions across the country. This thesis is an

examination of how one mid-sized history museum in Louisville, Kentucky has been challenged by many of these same issues and has worked to move its mission, programs and exhibitions forward in the present-day environment. This paper focuses primarily on the ways in which the Frazier History Museum has handled a prolonged period of institutional planning, and how their collective response has given rise to a new and diverse exhibitions program. Specifically, this thesis describes and explores the organizational restructuring and development of the museum's inaugural decorative arts exhibition *Top Drawer: 150 Years of Bittners*, and its impact on the museum's short- and long-term exhibitions program. Included in this paper will be a detailed explanation of the Frazier's updated five-year strategic plan, and how the museum's planning process and execution compares to standards set forth in the *Manual of Museum Planning*. Additionally, this paper will present a detailed practicum for the exhibition development of *Top Drawer*, a description and analysis of the local impact of the exhibition and its role in the development of new models for the museum, as well as the immediate legacy of *Top Drawer*. The paper concludes with a qualified discussion of the Frazier History Museum as a microcosm of the contemporary American museum industry at large.

The principal subject and intention of this thesis is how issues challenging the industry at large have affected one certain specific institution at a local level, and the ways that organization approached restructuring itself to adequately meet the perceived needs of its industry, and its own particular community and audience.



## CHAPTER ONE

### GLOBAL IMPACT ON THE FRAZIER HISTORY MUSEUM

#### Challenges Facing the Frazier

Changes in the museum industry occurring on a large scale have affected local and regional institutions. As with many of the museums mentioned in the introduction, the Frazier History Museum has been shaped by the changing global environment since its inception. When the museum was founded in 2004 by local businessman and philanthropist Owsley Brown Frazier, the vision was to create an institution, in collaboration with the British Royal Armouries, that would feature one of North America's greatest collections of arms, armour and related historical artifacts. The collection spanned over one thousand years of history from the Middle Ages in Europe to the Gilded Age in the United States. While Frazier envisioned the museum becoming a world-class tourist destination, the ultimate reality was far different. When the Frazier Historical Arms Museum (as it was first called) opened to the public in May of 2004 it was met with indifference. During the initial planning phases museum leaders and consultants estimated the institution could draw crowds of up to 500,000 visitors a year.<sup>28</sup> This number was based on the annual attendance numbers of the Louisville Slugger Museum, which served over around 350,000 visitors a year and is located a block away from the Frazier. Unfortunately, in its first year, the museum only managed to serve

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Shulte, "Frazier International History: Awareness, Image and Usage Study." (Horizon Insight , 2006)

42,000 visitors.<sup>29</sup>

By 2006 the museum was in a crisis-- attendance numbers had plummeted, and community awareness and involvement bordered on being non-existent. In an effort to save the failing institution, the Board of Directors moved to hire a new Executive Director, and began the process of re-branding the institution. Under the new Executive Director, the organization overhauled its entire image. The newly named Frazier International History Museum established an exhibitions and collections department which undertook the task of developing a temporary exhibits program that focused on heavy history in an international context. Up to this point the museum had targeted efforts on the promotion of its permanent collection, and had done so in the absence of programs or plans to update or rotate the artifacts on display. As a result, there was no full-time curatorial, collections or exhibitions staff to steward the collection or oversee the exhibit spaces. The permanent collection storage area was thoroughly neglected, and those items within the collection on display were not properly accessioned, catalogued or publicly presented. Routine maintenance and care for the vitrines, viewing cases and artifacts contained within them fell by the wayside. Due to a lack of a comprehensive collections management system and collections policy, many items of significant historical value languished in storage, unbeknownst to and unaccounted for by both the museum and its public. In fact, at that time it was the prevailing sentiment of the Board and others responsible for the museum that operating and staffing a collections department was not a requisite expense. It was a shared belief that the items on display and the reputation of the collection alone would be sufficient to draw visitors and garner

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Shulte, "Frazier International History: Awareness, Image and Usage Study." (Horizon Insight , 2006)

long-term support.

Between 2004 and 2009, eighty percent of the museum's total income derived directly from Mr. Frazier, eleven percent was earned income (admissions revenue), three percent came from in-kind donations, two percent was from foundations, and events, sponsorships, government grants, individual gifts, and board and staff donations each contributed one percent.<sup>30</sup> Based on these numbers, the museum was very clearly unsustainable without the benevolence and generosity of a single individual, the eponymous Mr. Frazier.

The re-branding that occurred in 2007, along with the mounting of several minor temporary exhibitions, increased interest in the museum to a degree; still, attendance numbers were far from where their needed to be, membership was at an historic low, fundraising and development were altogether absent, and the community at large was indifferent. The organization was entirely too dependent upon the financial support of its founder and patron. Once again, the Frazier was in crisis, and facing the very real threat of having to close its doors.

Even in view of such a bleak scenario, the museum's Board of Directors seemed mystified by the failure of their continued struggle to gain legitimacy and support. As a collective decision-making body, the Board felt strongly that having spent nearly \$80,000,000 on the construction of a state-of-the-art museum complete with customized display facilities and unique historical dioramas should have been enough to secure the museum's foreseeable future. The Board was perplexed as to why visitors were not flocking through their doors, the community was turning a cold shoulder to its latest

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<sup>30</sup> Karen Wunderland, "Frazier International History Museum: Earned Income Pie Chart." (Wunderland Group , 2010)

cultural attraction, and funders were failing to materialize. The answers and solutions were not simple, but they were illustrative of issues that many museums across the country were struggling to fully appreciate and contend with.

The Frazier, as with so many other similarly missioned institutions, was conceived and constructed during an unprecedented period in time. The building boom for cultural facilities that occurred from 1994 – 2008 outpaced spending sectors such as infrastructure and healthcare.<sup>31</sup> This was a period of accelerated economic growth based on service- and technology-sector expansion, regulatory easing, favorable monetary policy, and derivative capital speculation. Disposable income in both real and notional terms increased, and accrued in part to the benefit of the world’s cultural institutions. Within this atmosphere of apparent prosperity, many institutions felt compelled to build or expand their facilities to meet a perceived demand.<sup>32</sup> Many of these projects were based on an assumption that new or improved facilities would increase both audience size and earned or donated income, and at least indirectly aid in the realization of institutional missions. More than \$16,000,000,000 was expended by cultural organizations during this period, some inspired by the hope that such initiatives could do what a Frank Gehry-designed museum building did for Bilbao: transform a small decaying city into an international cultural destination.<sup>33</sup> The Frazier was developed under this same set of assumptions. Mr. Frazier believed that a world-class institution in Louisville, Kentucky, partnered with an internationally recognized institution would draw visitors from around

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<sup>31</sup> Joanna Woronkiewicz, “Set in Stone: Building America’s New Generation of Arts Facilities, 1994-2008.” (Presentation at the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, June 2012.)

<sup>32</sup> Joanna Woronkiewicz, “Set in Stone: Building America’s New Generation of Arts Facilities, 1994-2008.” (Presentation at the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, June 2012.)

<sup>33</sup> Robin Pogrebin, “For Art Institutions, Thinking Big Can Be Suicidal,” *New York Times* (New York, NY) June 28, 2012.

the globe, thus placing the museum and Louisville itself on the map as a must-see destination. Like many institutions during this period, the Frazier mistakenly conflated desire with a need, and misestimated actual interest and potential. As we see in the case of the Frazier and many other similar institutions nationwide, erroneous suppositions led to severe financial difficulties that transformed these cultural centers into economic drains and empty echoing spaces rather than cultural boons.<sup>34</sup> The reality is that actual as opposed to predicted attendance does not follow a scientific formula or desired eventuality.

The Art Institute of Chicago is a good example of this phenomenon. When their expansion project began it was estimated to be a \$300,000,000 venture that would raise annual operating costs by approximately \$4,000,000, and necessitate an added \$87,000,000 in fund-raising to capitalize their endowment. When they opened to the public in 2009 attendance initially spiked, but soon thereafter retracted to earlier, pre-expansion levels. A precipitous decline in their endowment income led to pay cuts, furloughs, a salary freeze and two rounds of layoffs.<sup>35</sup> Instead of the anticipated budget increase, the Art Institute was forced to labor under a set of unanticipated and limiting constrictions.

Another example of this kind of denouement is the American Folk Art Museum in New York, which was forced to close its flagship building in midtown Manhattan and move to a smaller location on the far less-desirable Upper West Side. These are cautionary tales of poor planning, complacency, fiduciary negligence, economic volatility

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<sup>34</sup> Joanna Woronkiewicz, "Set in Stone: Building America's New Generation of Arts Facilities, 1994-2008." (Presentation at the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, June 2012.)

<sup>35</sup> Joanna Woronkiewicz, "Set in Stone: Building America's New Generation of Arts Facilities, 1994-2008." (Presentation at the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, June 2012.)

and wishful thinking.

The Frazier's founding Board and leadership failed to conduct the necessary feasibility surveys to determine whether or not the community was willing and able to support such an institution as theirs. By 2009, the museum was facing a fate similar to the one that befell the Higgins Armory Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts that same year. Like the Frazier, the Higgins was an institution dedicated to arms and armour. Originally opened in 1931, the museum estimated that it served over 58,000 visitors a year, though by 2009 the museum was seeing as few as 4000. The Higgins was forced to merge with the Worcester Museum of Art after failing to raise enough money to sustain its endowment and balance its budget. In recent years, deficits hovered between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000, according to tax filings on Guidestar. This forced the museum to draw on its endowment, reducing it to just under \$3,000,000. An effort was made to set the museum on a new path to a sustainable future, but the museum needed a cash infusion of almost \$15,000,000 to remain viable. Unfortunately, a museum dedicated to medieval arms and armour is a small niche, and finding primary donors in Massachusetts to support their endowment was a virtual impossibility.

The Frazier was faced with similar discussions in 2009, when the museum was struggling to bring in 10,000 visitors a year, and was being managed by a Board that harbored the baseless expectation that the museum's founder would bolster their endowment from \$2,100,000 in 2009 to over \$60,000,000 upon his death. There was no sense of urgency or need to undertake a fundraising campaign to help the ailing institution, which by 2009 had an annual operating budget of \$4,275,000 and annual

operating deficit of close to \$3,000,000.<sup>36</sup> Historically, Mr. Frazier supplied the necessary income to cover the museum's deficit, a provision that would end abruptly upon his passing.

In 2009, the Board and the museum's Executive Director began conversations about the Frazier's future, and like the Higgins Armory, there were discussions about closing the museum's doors and selling off or donating the collection to another institution. Similar to the Higgins, the Frazier was faced with a collection that appealed to a very specific and fast-disappearing audience, one that was primarily Caucasian, male and over the age of 60.<sup>37</sup> As stated earlier, museum membership was at an all-time low and admissions were effectively nil. Due to the name change in 2006, the community at large was confused as to the purpose and mission of the museum. There was a widespread failure to understand how an organization that claimed to be a history museum only displayed antique weaponry. Adding to that confusion and dismay was the Royal Armouries Collection itself, which although rare and unique, told history from an English perspective and highlighted obscure British figures of the nobility and military. Visitors were impressed with the collection, but did not have an affinity for or a visceral connection to it. As discussed in the introduction, there is a danger inherent in niche collections, especially in light of today's social demographics.

Returning to the discussion in the Introduction of challenges facing cultural institutions today, we can now understand how the Frazier came to the verge of collapse. As audiences became more discerning, and demand increased for museums to serve not only as cultural hubs but centers for entertainment, it is not difficult to see how the

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<sup>36</sup> Karen Wunderland, "Frazier International History Museum: Strategic Plan." (Wunderland Group , 2010)

<sup>37</sup> Paul Shulte, "Frazier International History: Awareness, Image and Usage Study." (Horizon Insight , 2006)

Frazier could be left to fall behind. With an idiosyncratic collection, small temporary exhibitions, limited number of public programs and little-to-no fundraising interests, the museum was highly vulnerable to disintegration. The story the museum told was one from an Anglo-American male interest and perspective, and with industry trends leaning towards a younger and more diverse demographic, the museum was in immediate danger of utter non-pertinence.

In an effort to turn the tide, museum leadership made the decision to develop a strategic plan. It is within this period of planning that the seeds for *Top Drawer: 150 Years of Bittners* came to fruition. The exhibition would become one of the first temporary exhibits designed under the museum's new strategic plan, and it would serve as a catalyst for a continuing exhibitions program that would lead the museum into a new and better future.



## CHAPTER TWO

### MUSEUM PLANNING

The planning of a sustainable museum is in many ways about achieving and maintaining a balance between the needs of the organization and its collection and the needs of its audience and community. As mentioned earlier, a number of museums have responded to the challenges discussed in Chapter One by undertaking large-scale renovation, construction or expansion projects. Unfortunately, we learned that certain excesses in this most recent round of escalation contributed to an imbalance between capital investment and operating funds, and brought some organizations to the brink of financial ruin. The Frazier was a product of this time, conceived and constructed under the assumption that the larger the mass of a thing the greater its gravity. Like so many similarly conceived museums, the Frazier did not have a strong strategic plan, and over time it has been subjected to declining financial resources and revenues, increased audience demands and shifting demographics. The question is raised as to whether sufficient due diligence was taken in advance of the decision to build or expand these kinds of organizations, or whether heedful deliberation was trumped by incautious optimism.

What could these organizations, including the Frazier, have done differently to ensure their success from the beginning? The answer is as simple as placing the horse before the cart: the institutional plan precedes and informs all that follows it. By

engaging in formalized long-term planning, these organizations would have been in a position to conduct feasibility studies, market analyses and environmental scans to determine the practical viability of their vision for the communities they hoped and intended to serve.

While the Frazier may have been created without an institutional plan, it was unlikely to survive for long without one. In 2009, the board of directors with the administrative team made the decision to formulate an explicit strategy to configure the museum's mission, vision and purpose. The programs created from this process and ensuing document were intended to usher the organization into its future.

#### Frazier's 2010 Institutional Plan

The Frazier's Board of Directors and administrative staff recognized that without a defined course of action the museum would not survive to see its tenth anniversary. The goals of the new institutional plan were as follows: (1) to create programs that would integrate the museum into the community, (2) expand its exhibitions and programs to better suit the preferences, interests and needs of visitors, (3) secure the future financial sustainability of the institution, (4) identify, address and engage emerging demographic groups, and (5) build stronger audience involvement.

In late 2009 the museum hired two consulting firms to help them navigate the planning process. The Wunderland Group, specialists in institutional planning, was hired to lead the planning process, and the research firm Horizon Insights was brought in to conduct surveys to expressly determine how the general public, community, and standing museum membership viewed the museum.

The process began with two types of institutional analysis, internal and external. Internally, the Board, executives and staff conducted a S.W.O.T analysis of the organization, identifying, as per the acronym, what they viewed as the museum's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. At the same time, Horizon Research conducted confidential interviews with a wide range of stakeholders to collect diverse perspectives about the history of, challenges facing, and hopes for the museum's future. This initial segment of the process was conducted through visitor and member surveys, environmental, educational, benchmarking and programming analysis, and Board member self-assessment.

What do these different assessments mean? In the *Manual for Museum Planning*, Gail Dexter Lord discusses these types of analyses and explains their impact. According to Lord, external assessments such as the visitor and member surveys, and environmental, educational, benchmarking and programming analyses, help organizations discover what populations outside the organization think of the museum. An environmental scan analyzes the manifold factors of change that impact the museum, such as trends in technology, demographics, psychographics and economics.<sup>38</sup> Benchmarking compares and contrasts a museum's performance to like and unlike institutions in relation to certain indices and criteria, and internal assessments pinpoint issues in structure and function.<sup>39</sup> All of the suggested surveys were conducted by Horizon Research during the pre-planning phase; below are selected highlights from those surveys.

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<sup>38</sup> Gail Dexter Lord & Barry Lord, "Strategic Planning," *Manual of Museum Planning*, (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2013) 25.

<sup>39</sup> Dexter Lord & Lord, *Manual of Museum Planning*, 25.

## Highlights from the Surveys

Study participants shared their perspectives about the museum. Whether from an internal or external point of view, the overriding expectation was that the museum would realize its potential to become a cornerstone cultural institution in Louisville.

### *External Issues*

External issues identified by interviewees created a critical backdrop for the entire planning process. The following issues revealed opportunities for the museum to carve out a significant role in the community, including:

- National and local economies influence the consumer, donor, and investor, and put pressure on museums to find new solutions and business models that will be sustainable through all cycles
- Drastic cuts to local school systems force teachers and administrators to function with fewer resources while meeting demands to achieve a higher levels of student performance
- The ethnic diversity of Louisville presents both extraordinary opportunities and unprecedented challenges in presenting a story that is representative and respectful of all perspectives
- The rising cost of living often drives decisions about participation in cultural activities, especially when they are in competition with the necessities of daily life
- Efforts to coalesce a unified vision for Louisville are underway, placing a new emphasis on collaboration to make the city stronger and more vibrant
- Louisville is demographically diverse in many respects, yet social, political and economic segregation remains a balkanizing factor in the community overall

### *Priority issues facing the Frazier*

The priority issues identified by survey participants cover an array of key topics, including:

- The need to come together in a unified vision and direction
- Attracting, expanding and nurturing audiences is central to future prospects
- Permanent and temporary exhibitions are dated and require reorientation toward participatory, multi-dimensional and dynamic visitor experiences

- The obligations of the Board in shaping contemporary governance practices to better reflect and represent its community
- Financial sustainability requires new rigor in building a diverse donor base and durable revenue streams
- The organizational culture requires an infusion of fresh energy and renewed focus to guarantee the changes required in years ahead
- Complex collections issues need to be addressed in order to ensure their care for future generations

Perhaps the most compelling piece to come out of this survey process was a brief handwritten note left behind in a visitor's questionnaire. A child who had visited the museum wrote "you need more stuff for girls". This single slip of paper became a rallying cry for the museum's exhibitions program, and would ultimately lead to *Top Drawer*. The marketing survey template of visitor awareness, image and usage further found that while the community was cognizant of its existence, their knowledge of the museum was weak at best, and presented yet another barrier between the organization's ability to integrate. While those who visit the Frazier are impressed by the various contexts history is presented in, for the most part the community's perception was quite simply that of an old building full of ancient guns. Horizon's recommendation was that there be considerably more of an effort made to educate the community about the experiences they might enjoy at the Frazier. "Share of voice is no small or inexpensive investment as people decide where to spend their edutainment dollars in a community with well over one hundred such arts and attraction opportunities available."<sup>40</sup> The survey showed that participants called the museum by seventeen different names, but that "the Frazier" was used by almost everyone at one time or another. Horizon's recommendation was to attempt another name change, since the current "Frazier International History Museum" had garnered little to no equity. "A simpler name could

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Schulte, "Frazier International History: Awareness, Image and Usage Study." (Horizon Insight , 2010)

have some effect on focusing consumer attention on the broader museum mission.”<sup>41</sup> Horizon also recommended that the museum make a concerted effort to identify special exhibits able to attract unlikely and/or first-time visitors, as these types of so-called edutainment exhibitions have the potential to be especially attractive to the new demographic as defined.

Once all of the surveys had been conducted, and results were collated and quantified, it was time to build the strategic framework of the institutional plan.

### *Strategic Framework*

The strategic framework is the scaffolding upon which the new institutional plan would be built, and was a dramatic shift from prior thinking and operations, guiding new efforts towards different results to shape a contemporary role for the Frazier in the Louisville community. This approach exemplifies an emerging 21<sup>st</sup>-century museum ready to break away from now-dated 20<sup>th</sup>-century museum practices.

### *Overview of Strategic Framework*

- **Orienting Principles:** concepts and ideas that influence and drive the daily work of the institution identified over the course of the process; core points are evident throughout other elements in the framework
- **Mission:** reason FHM exists, and why and how it makes a difference in the world; every decision, program, and action must support and emanate from this mission
- **Vision:** what FHM would become once it succeeds in all aspects of its work and audience engagement
- **Values:** threads of belief that are embodied in the actions of the Board, staff, and volunteers that should permeate the organizational culture, the feel of the museum experience, and way people engage with one another
- **Key Outcome Measurements:** designed to enable Board and staff to measure progress towards the advancement of the new strategic plan
- **Strategic Initiatives by Year:** steps to be undertaken, and priorities to drive work plans, budgets, and support all elements of the strategic framework

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<sup>41</sup> Paul Shulte, “Frazier International History: Awareness, Image and Usage Study.” (Horizon Insight , 2010)

## *Orienting Principles*

The Frazier's strategic plan was centered on four chief principles orienting the executives and staff in their work, as follows:

### *FHM success depends on our ability to connect with our community*

- We seek to inspire every visitor who walks through our door
- We provide opportunities beyond regular attendance for our community to participate in FHM
- We routinely gather input about our visitors' experiences in order to improve upon them

### *FHM greatest assets are our mission, human resources, world-class collections, and historic building and location*

- Our ability to inspire visitors by exploring human stories of our civilization
- We best steward our collections by sharing them with the public
- Our location enables us to serve a wide demographic and our facility allows us to bring history to life

### *FHM business model aligns our greatest assets with existing and future financial opportunities*

- Strategic plan clearly defines what we do, who we are, how we act, and guides our decisions
- Philanthropic investors understand and believe in our ability to build a better community

### *Everyone understands what success looks like and his or her role in getting us there*

- We clearly communicate our institutional goals and priorities to all team members
- Every team member has a well-defined job description and plays a critical role in our success
- Regular feedback supports team members and enables them to thrive in their respective roles

The new orienting principles are the heart of the Frazier's institutional plan, but must be supported by a strong organizational mission.

### *Organizational Mission*

The absence of a strong mission statement is a pronounced shortcoming in the Frazier's institutional structure. The mission is ambiguous, inconsistent and inadequate in specific purpose. The Frazier has undergone several re-branding attempts and updated institutional plans, resulting in frequent revisions of the museum's mission statement; unfortunately, each re-write has left the mission less articulate than the last, placing the museum in a state of identity limbo and, ultimately, crisis. Adding to this problem has been a lack of follow-through in updating core documents that contain the mission statement itself, leading to a certain fossilization over time. While the museum has an existing mission statement, it is not manifest in collections policy, development agendas or marketing plans. This glaring lack of continuity results in different departments working from out-of-place benchmarks.

In addition, the Frazier operates under multiple working mission statements. Version one, developed by institutional leaders during the creation of the Frazier, reads: "The Frazier Museum's mission is to provide experiences that encourage inquiry as a catalyst for building individual respect and cooperation." Another version, attributed to founder Owsley Brown Frazier, reads: "The Frazier Museum's mission is to evoke a passion for the knowledge and understanding of history, so that all who pass through our doors may learn from the past, live in the present, and better prepare for the future." While both statements reflect worthy goals, neither clearly define any kind of actionable platform. Durable missions need not be more than manifest testaments to what the institution intends to achieve. The Speed Art Museum, for example, has a very concise mission statement, reading: "The mission of the Speed Art Museum is to discover,



together with our communities, the joy and power of great art.” Another example of a solid mission statement is that of the Dallas Museum of Art, reading: “The Dallas Museum of Art is both a responsible steward of cultural heritage and a trusted advocate for the essential place of art in the lives of people locally and around the globe. The DMA is transparent, ethical, and takes informed risks. It promotes research, dialogue, and public participation, helping to reveal the insights of artists from every continent over the last 5,000 years.”<sup>42</sup>

The absence of a well-delineated mission statement has both negative and positive ramifications. On the negative side, the lack of a strong mission has led to confusion within the community about the Frazier’s identity. People struggle to understand the institution and its purpose. One of the greatest challenges has been overcoming the idea that the museum is still a “gun museum”, an identity crisis exacerbated by a lack of guideposts for developing exhibitions and programming. The result has been an exhibition schedule that has ranged from heavy history exhibitions such as *My Brother, My Enemy*, popular culture (*Diana: A Celebration*), sports history (*Gridiron Glory*), to decorative- and applied-art exhibitions such as *Top Drawer* and *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous: Art, Luxury and Fashion in the Gilded Age*. While audiences have enjoyed this expanded scope of shows, it has done little to help them better understand what to anticipate from the museum. This has led to a measurable diminution of core audience and low member and donor retention rates. Another serious issue facing the institution has been the loss of essential funding opportunities. While the museum staff develops substantive exhibition concepts and plans, the lack of clear mission results in outside

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<sup>42</sup> “Mission Statement,” *Dallas Museum of Art*, accessed February 17, 2014

fundings, particularly at Federal agencies being unable to properly justify their giving as a result of the Frazier's relative institutional youth, weak governing structure, and tenuous position within the community. These problems, both perceived and real, have cost the museum hundreds of thousands of dollars in government funding. As for private and individual donors, the broad range of exhibition scope has necessitated the securing of new money sources at every turn, rather than allowing the museum to focus on the cultivation of loyal financial supporters. This is a time-consuming and costly endeavor, and one that frequently leaves the museum responsible for the lion's share of operational funding, where as similar institutions rely on corporate or private sponsorship.

The positive side to the absence of a strong mission statement is more fluid decision-making within an institution that is freer to be creative in its exhibition concepts and designs. The weak mission has given the Frazier opportunities to test the boundaries of what is considered achievable by a cultural history museum, and to explore history through different lenses, such as popular culture, art history and decorative and applied arts. The Frazier has given its audiences the freedom to view history in a different way, challenging them to interpret both known and unfamiliar history from a unique perspective. *Top Drawer* was an excellent example of this approach. The exhibition averted commonly held practices for cultural-history exhibits, and explored developing our exhibition through the relationship of applied arts and material culture, with the use of open visual space, color, shape, and form. This freedom of design was the museum's liberty; unconstrained by the strictures of mission, it was allowed to experiment with different concepts and ideas to mount an exhibit that was married the artistic and the historical.

The lack of mission has also liberated the Frazier to pursue an exhibitions program that ranges from small local history exhibitions to fee-rented large-scale blockbusters. Because of these opportunities, the museum has experienced some of its greatest successes and failures, but for an institution that is only a decade old, the occasion to discover itself has been both formative and prelude. Audiences are intrigued by what the Frazier will do next, an advantage the museum must capitalize on as it works to define itself within the community, and embark on chartering a definitive strategic plan.

Below are the Key Outcome measurements defined as part of the overall strategic framework of the new institutional plan.

### *Key Outcome Measurements*

Key outcome measurements are designed to quantify progress toward the goals articulated in the strategic plan. Outcome measurements will be reviewed and altered as needed, and some will require the institution to gather information necessary for establishing a baseline for future comparison prior to tracking.

#### **Goal 1: Increase Public Engagement**

Outcome Measurement 1: An understanding of our visitors and users informs our decisions throughout the year.

*Measurement tool: Frequency and use of online surveys, visitor experience and member surveys, and community conversations*

Outcome Measurement 2: We see an upward trend in the number of times the Frazier is mentioned in the media; this is an effectively implemented tracking indicator in communicating our audience engagement strategies

*Measurement tool: Measured biannually by a tracking service that covers print and online media and activities, and website hits*

Outcome Measurement 3: We offer a strategically selected mix of exhibits and programs that advance our orienting principles, mission, vision, and values, and meet audience goals

*Measurement tool: Measured biannually by a review of exhibits and programs to determine alignment with desired audiences and participation members*

**Goal 2: Advance Stewardship Role**

Outcome Measurement 4: We make steady progress implementing ongoing capital improvements

*Measurement tool: Measured annually by update from CFO/finance committee*

Outcome Measurement 5: We create on-line accessibility to our collection

*Measurement tool: Measured by the number of artifacts we make available digitally each year*

Outcome Measurement 6: We make significant progress toward our long-term goal of achieving a comprehensive inventory of institutional holdings

*Measurement tool: Measured by the number of collection items inventoried and cataloged each year*

Outcome Measurement 7: We make significant progress towards accreditation each year

*Measurement tool: Measured biannually by tracking of staff hours spent on accreditation activities*

**Goal 3: Ensure Financial Stability**

Outcome Measurement 8: Draw down on our portfolio; reduction is cumulatively applied each year until reserves are no longer needed to support the annual operating budget

*Measurement tool: Measured by the relationship between actual revenues and operating expenses each FY and use of reserves to meeting annual operating expenses*

Outcome Measurement 9: We focus on revenue growth in individual donors and corporate support as the primary drivers offsetting the portfolio draw down

*Measurement tool: Measured by year to year comparisons of contributions by individual and corporate support*

Outcome Measurement 10: Each annual budget will provide for the increase in overall net income required to achieve portfolio draw down

*Measurement Tool: Measured by the relationship between budgeted revenues and*

*operating expenses each FY*

**Goal 4: Build Leadership Capacity**

Outcome Measurement 11: Staff satisfaction increases by at least 5 % each year

*Measurement tool: Staff Surveys given annually*

Outcome Measurement 12: Board Satisfaction increases by a least 5% each year

*Measurement tool: Board Surveys given at annual meeting*

Outcome Measurement 13: There is full Board participation in fulfilling annual expectations

*Measurement Tool: Measured by Executive Committee tracking each member through annual evaluations*

Once the strategic framework for the institutional plan was completed, the assigned planning group divided into teams, with each team representing a department within the organizational structure. Together the teams would develop strategic initiatives for the overall plan. Each group was tasked with a particular area in the museum structure comprised of finance, development, marketing, education, visitor experience, collections, and Board of directors. I will focus here on visitor experience, and how strategic initiatives pertaining thereto led to the development of a new exhibitions policy, which ultimately led to the development of *Top Drawer*.

During strategic initiatives planning, the visitor experience team reviewed issues encountered since the museum opened, such as the perception of being an Anglo-centric niche museum, a dearth of experiences for girls and women, and having only two advanced English-speaking cultures represented in a history museum that calls itself international. In response the team developed new interpretive themes, as follows:

- *People on the move- fulfills our goal of incorporating core collections of arms and armour into a more humanistic interpretation*

- **Family Relationships-** *women, families, personal relationships shape our actions*
- **International Connections-** *political and social connections between and among The United States and other countries, telling stories from other cultural perspectives*

The foundation of this new rubric stems from an analysis performed by the British-American museum consultancy firm A Different View in 2008. An aggregation of their visitor-experience analytic studies has been performed-- with their proprietary database and software program Experience DNA-- which provides customized holistic blueprints of the visitor experience that measure psychological engagement through an analysis of flow, capacity, sense, motion, reaction and learning styles. Experience DNA analysis results indicated the following:

- We must make the third-floor Royal Armouries gallery more relevant to American audiences, whose knowledge of British and world history is marginal
- We must provide relevance to women and girls, people of non-European origin, and other countries that settled colonies in all of the Americas
- We must incorporate more technology inside the museum and its exhibits, and increase audience engagement

Based further on these findings, the team developed an exhibition rubric that would help the museum select the types of exhibitions it could produce and host based on scientifically pre-determined criteria. The goal was to streamline the process, provide audiences with what they wanted, and keep exhibits in alignment with the museum's mission. The five criteria chosen were:

1. **Blockbuster** - large-scale rented exhibitions, with mass-based demographic appeal
2. **International heritage-** exhibitions focused on other cultures and their perspectives
3. **Family history** - exhibitions that could be enjoyed by entire family, viewed as quality time together
4. **Local history** - exhibitions with strong connections to local and regional

people, places and events

5. ***Heavy history*** – exhibitions in Frazier’s traditional mode, focusing on conflict, events, places and people that shaped world history

In the future, every exhibition at the museum must meet a minimum of two of these criteria to be considered, and then be vetted through the exhibition rubric before being placed on the museum’s calendar. Additionally, the team decided that the exhibitions program required an evaluation process through a series of audience and member surveys conducted every three years to recalibrate, if necessary, the exhibition rubric. This seeks to ensure that the Frazier addresses topics that are not only mission centric but also relevant to contemporary audiences.

Once individual teams completed their work sessions, they reconvened to weave together all of the parts that had been identified and constructed in prior months. Each goal was reviewed and revised as needed, with deadlines, accountability and resources identified, and it was during this final session that materials were refined and amassed into one document. Upon completion the final report was submitted to the Executive Director, the Board Chair and the Executive Committee for approval. The plan was ultimately adopted on January 25, 2011.

It is informative from a ten-year perspective to look back at the Frazier and understand what the organization had been struggling with, in at first failing and then later succeeding in creating a shared vision. When the decision was made by the Board and executive staff to enter into a deliberative, consultant-led planning process to strategically reinvent the museum, creating a shared vision was actually an unintended goal. By posing such existential questions as “should we exist” “who should we be” and “what does that look like,” the museum galvanized its staff to form a collective

consciousness of who they were as an institution. In the book *Magnetic: The Art and Science of Engagement*, the idea of shared vision is one element of the core alignment that contributes to the creation of what is called a “magnetic museum.” In making the decision to develop exhibitions like *Top Drawer*, the Frazier was committing to a profound philosophical and cultural shift to achieve its transformation. According to Bergeron and Tuttle, the common thread in magnetic museums is the importance they place on people, service and creating an organizational culture dedicated to building relationships and fostering meaningful engagement.<sup>43</sup> Like magnetic museums, the Frazier advanced along the spectrum from an internal to a more external focus; from conveying information to creating experiences; from offering authoritative monologue to participating in ongoing dialogue; from attracting visitors to serving guests; and from academic isolation to real-world relevance.

#### Frazier’s Institutional Plan and the Development of *Top Drawer*

With the adoption of the museum’s first-ever institutional plan, the course was set to transform a sleepy niche museum catering to rich, older, Caucasian men to a vibrant audience-focused organization appealing to a younger and far more diverse population. The plan hinged on the development of a robust exhibition and public-programming initiative that ranged from fee-rented large-scale shows to intimate in-house exhibits. The museum was to host a least one blockbuster and one in-house exhibit every year, with in-house shows having a local connection branded under the name Hometown History. The exhibitions would be selected using the rubric designed during the planning process, and their content would be designed to have more appeal to family audiences,

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<sup>43</sup> Beth Tuttle and Anne Bergeron, “Building Core Alignment,” in *Magnetic: The Art and Science of Engagement* (Washington: AAM Press, 2013) 35-58.



women and diverse ethnicities. A balance would be achieved between exhibitions selected as so-called edutainment and those with strong educational content or scholarly collections stewardship. A public programming committee was formed to generate events surrounding exhibitions that would be friend-makers for the museum, and present the Frazier as an entertaining destination to gather, bond and socialize with friends and family. For public programs the committee created several different series. They reinvigorated the museum's *Second Saturdays*, a day each month when the museum offered free admission and a range of family-friendly activities, such as tours, craft projects and history themed activities. *A Night Out* was an adult-centered series where the museum would be open late one Friday a month, featuring music, dancing, food, guest speakers and special opportunities to view new exhibits and collection items. Another series was called *an Evening with*, with guest lectures, presentations and conversations about famous historical figures or locally significant people and places. In an added effort to attract younger demographics the museum developed several new membership groups. The first was the *Making History Group*, similar to the Young Collectors Party hosted by the Guggenheim, comprised of young professionals creating networking events around current and upcoming exhibitions. The group developed its own membership level and fees to join, and would host parties for exhibition openings and different social functions. They were able to participate in unique collections tours, behind-the-scenes tours and facility rentals. The museum also created a primary-level donor circle to further cultivate interest and loyalty amongst these young professionals.

Based on the results from surveys conducted during strategic planning, museum leaders well understood that their permanent collection was viewed by some as an

impediment to attracting or capturing younger audiences. The solution developed during strategic planning was to create an innovative program that re-interpreted the way the museum's collection was viewed. One solution was to look at history through points of view such as material culture, decorative and fine arts, popular culture, science and technology and consumerism. This idea of combining other disciplines with cultural history has begun to gain traction within the museum world. In an article titled *Recombining Ideas from Art and Cultural History Museums in Theory and Practice*, Outi Turpeinen discusses the benefits to cultural history museums of applying practices traditionally employed by contemporary art museums when displaying exhibitions. She explains that there is a clear functional use for conceptual artistic installations in cultural history museums that can confer new associations and meanings on artifacts, which in turn enables the museum to connect with contemporary life.<sup>44</sup>

*Top Drawer* reflected this design theory, a fusion of the traditional cultural-history model with a narrative subtext that connected academic knowledge and human emotions. This kind of integration opened up the exhibition for many possible interpretations by the audience, and each visitor was free to decipher *Top Drawer* through their own experience, background, education or culture. By incorporating this theory of design, the exhibition enabled audiences to have a more personal connection with the objects, and thus created a deeper and more respectful connection to the story told.

*Top Drawer* also reflected the museum's new strategic plan. It contained elements of all the newly identified criteria needed for a Frazier exhibition-- local history, international heritage, family history, and even elements of popular culture. The

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<sup>44</sup> Outi Turpeinen, "Recombining Ideas from Art and Cultural History Museum in Theory and Practice," *Nordisk Museologi* (2006): 83-86.

exhibition had something for everyone. It was also a strategic exhibition with very specific outcome measurements. It sought to boost community partnerships, build stronger donor ties, highlight diversification of the exhibits program, appeal to girls, women and families, and serve as a counterpoint to the concurrently running *Dina* exhibition. *Top Drawer* ultimately succeeded beyond its goals by catalyzing the museum's entire future exhibitions program.

CHAPTER THREE  
PATHWAYS TO EXHIBITION DEVELOPMENT  
*TOP DRAWER: A PRACTICUM*

Considering the impact an exhibition's components can have on the visitor experience, it is essential that they are developed and organized in a systematic way. All too often during the development of an exhibition a subtle chaos overtakes day-to-day operations; an exhibition will only be as organized and logical as the plan that precedes and directs it. For *Top Drawer*, an organized process was essential, not only because the exhibition was working within uncharted territory, but also because there was an external stakeholder adding an entirely new layer to the process. A controlled plan ensured that all parameters were covered, and that everyone worked within defined roles and boundaries.

While exhibitions are diverse, the processes for creating them are generally quite standardized for all organizations. Yves Mayrand explains the key components to the five basic phases of the development process in the *Manual of Museum Exhibitions* as follows: interpretive plan; conceptual design; design development; bid or tender packages; and working drawings. The development of *Top Drawer* engaged four of those five phases: interpretive plan, conceptual design, design development, and working model. Due to budget constraints, all work was handled internally between the museum and Bittners, and there was no need to for bid or tender packages.

The following chapter is a project-specific practicum for the development of *Top Drawer* from concept formulation to de-installation, and follows the development process

of interpretive plan, conceptual design, design development, and working drawings, or in the case of *Top Drawer*, the three-dimensional model. The chapter opens with a brief introduction to the exhibition, and progresses through the four phases of its development.

Before presenting the introduction of *Top Drawer*, there should be mention made about the actualization of the exhibition brief, a document that formally recognizes the exhibit and allows all stakeholders to know its purpose and institutional reciprocity. The brief identifies the project sponsor, manager, curator and all other stakeholders, and states the exhibition's content. This is an important document to create, especially when working with an outside partner, because it formally delineates everyone who is involved in the exhibition process and what their assigned rolls will be. All relevant stakeholders should sign and receive a copy of the brief for their records. (See Appendix A.)

### Introduction to *Top Drawer*

*Top Drawer: 150 Years of Bittners* was a seven-week limited-engagement exhibition at the Frazier History Museum running from November 17, 2012 to January 1, 2013. The exhibition invited visitors to experience traditions in styles of furniture from the late-17<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The four-thousand square-foot exhibition featured Continental, English and American furniture inspired by great monarchs and makers, and explained how the political, cultural and social forces of these periods inspired the aesthetic of domestic interior settings to the present day. Audiences had opportunities to examine fine antiques and master-crafted reproductions from Bittners' custom shop, and to discover how a small German immigrant's custom cabinet shop became not only a

Louisville tradition, but also a nationally-renowned design firm.

The journey in the development of *Top Drawer* begins by examining the formulation of the exhibition's interpretive plan.

### The Interpretive Plan:

An exhibition is more than just objects in a room. In order for the audience to have an engaging learning experience, a discernible message and meaning must be clearly conveyed. This is what the interpretive plan achieves, serving as the vehicle that communicates the message and meaning behind the objects, and creating continuity between the explicative materials, objects and artifacts being shown. The interpretive plan blueprints the experience that inspires audiences to explore, inquire, and augment or reach beyond what they already know about a subject. Tom Klobe states that “an effective plan takes into account the ways different people learn, and engages these parameters to create a multi-sensory learning experience within a structure that contains a diversity of interpretations and supplies multiple means of access and inquiry.”<sup>45</sup>

Depending on the depth and scope of an exhibition, the interpretive plan can be simple or complex. As Hugh D. Spencer states in the *Manual of Museum Exhibitions* “...the core of an interpretive plan must define the research, collection, images and content needed for the exhibition, as well as the design and creative needs, along with production requirements.”<sup>46</sup> For *Top Drawer*, the interpretive plan was relatively simple, as there were few added components to install other than the objects themselves. This is

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<sup>45</sup> Tom Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*. (Washington, D.C.: AAM Press of the American Association of Museums. 2012) 5-6.

<sup>46</sup> John Nicks, “Curatorial Research,” in *Manual of Museum Exhibitions*, by Barry Lord and Gail Dexter Lord (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2001) 544.

not always the case; some exhibitions require an extensive plan that may take months to compose. Overall, the interpretive plan is an important working document, because it serves as a guide to the overall theme and ensuing requirements for the exhibition. The interpretive plan plays a key role in the exhibition development process, serving as a script for the exhibition, and defining research, design and content. (See Appendix B)

*Research: Theme, Object and Image*

When preparing for an exhibition, the curator must conduct two types of research: theme and object. Theme research provides a broad base of contextual information and develops the framework as well as the substance of the exhibition storyline.<sup>47</sup> The second form of research is object, or artifact: this provides information on the artifacts, works of art, graphics and audio-visuals that are to be included in the exhibition.<sup>48</sup> The order in which these types of research can be conducted varies, depending on the exhibition itself, and available resources.

For *Top Drawer*, the research was conducted by the curator and co-curator. Due to the limited time frame available, both theme and object research were conducted simultaneously, using a multitude of local, national and international sources. Bittners was a crucial partner in the research process, because they were the primary repository of information on the history of the firm, as well as location of objects, and identification of lenders and contributors to the exhibit. Bittners' Vice President Ben Small arranged interviews with the great-granddaughters of William Bittner, who shared useful family

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<sup>47</sup> Nicks, "Curatorial Research," 556

<sup>48</sup> Nicks, "Curatorial Research," 556

stories and ephemera, including photographs, mementos, documents and unique pieces of furniture.

The research for local history was conducted at the University of Louisville Archives, using city directories, local newspapers, periodicals and history books from the late-19<sup>th</sup> century. Larger databases, such as the National Archives and the Library of Congress, were used for researching ship's registries and contemporary imagery. During this same time research was also being conducted on the Bittner family through genealogical records at ancestry.com. Local historian and city councilman Tom Owen, who is an expert of the history of Louisville in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, was able to provide information on the local immigrant community around the time of Gustave Bittner's arrival in Louisville, as well as the names of local immigrant periodicals that might contain information about Gustave and his workshop. He also suggested looking into the archives at local churches, as immigrants traditionally played an active role in their congregations. These kinds of archives often provide a wealth of information on the local immigrant community.

The selection of furniture periods and styles for the exhibition was made using Bittners historic ledgers. From these records it was elementary to discern the most popular trends in furniture and interior design, and therefore those likely to be retailed or crafted by Bittners. The periods and styles selected were: Chippendale, Adam, Sheraton, Hepplewhite, Directoire/Consulate, French/American Empire, Regency, Biedermeier, Victorian, and Mid-Century Modern. Research about these periods was conducted using the cabinetmaker's guides, books and broadsides written by Thomas Chippendale, Thomas Sheraton, George Hepplewhite, the Adam brothers, Duncan Phyfe, Charles



Percier and Pierre Fontaine, Herman Miller, George Nelson and Charles and Ray Eames. Additional sources for research were publications by leading antiques dealers and furniture historians. To further aid in research, Bittners' President, Douglas Riddle arranged for an interview with Hubert Schuwey, who served as Bittners master cabinetmaker, or *ebeniste*, for over forty years, and Brian Keenan, who serves as Bittners current master craftsman, and whom once served as Mr. Schuwey's intern. Both men provided original information about the firm, discussing everything from the history of the company and the Bittner family, their own educational experiences, how they feel the industry has changed today, their favorite pieces of furniture to make, and their best and worst types of customers. The information they provided painted a more complete company history, including information about key people who were essential to the firm's growth, as well as the names of crucial clients and potential loans for the exhibition.

The research for this exhibition was extensive, but upon completion allowed for the formulation of the timeline and outline that would serve as a guide for the exhibition from its beginning to its end. The outline contained information on exhibition text, decorative furniture elements, and an examination of the larger political, social and cultural environments corresponding to named styles.

### *Object Research*

Using Bittners ledgers as a guide, a master list of names of historically recognizable citizens and potential living lenders for the exhibition was created. This list, in conjunction with the professional and personal connections of the Senior Vice President

of Bittners, provided the exhibition team with access to historical homes, clubs, businesses and private collectors. Bittners pieces were located in White Hall, the Conrad Caldwell House, and at Cave Hill Cemetery, where a wall-mounted clock and an Italianate refectory table that the cemetery had commissioned in 1880 were uncovered. Also identified were pieces reported to exist in private clubs, such as the Pendennis and the Louisville Country Club. During this time, the Filson Historical Society was contacted, and access was given to view the records of the Bullitt family farm, which contained a detailed inventory of all household furnishings. The Bittners ledger indicated that there had been a considerable number of pieces commissioned by the Bullitt family. Regrettably, a search of the records did not provide anything by way of original Bittners pieces still at the farm, as the majority of Bullitt family furniture had been badly damaged, thoroughly neglected or deaccessioned during times of economic distress. Additional pieces were located by Bittners designers and staff in the homes of their other clients. One example in particular came from William Bittner's great granddaughter, who agreed to loan a superb Sheraton style sideboard with matching knife boxes. (See Figure 1).

Bittners also allowed the exhibition team access to their storage areas, where they maintained a large collection of original furniture elevations. Many of the drawings dated back to Gustave Bittner's time. Several drawings were matched to pieces being used in the exhibition. Unfortunately, the majority of these drawings were in deplorable condition. Due to the passage of time, the type of paper used and generally poor to non-existent conservation efforts, many were too delicate to move for use in the exhibition. (See figure 2)

### *Image Research: Graphics*

For *Top Drawer*, the decision was made to use stand-alone graphics and emblematic motifs to support and sustain the narrative, and reinforce the thematic infrastructure of the exhibition. The types of graphics to be used were divided into three categories: prototype sketches by cabinetmakers of historic import; images of selected elements repeated in architecture and interior furnishings; and photography of extant historic exterior decorative detail found in Old Louisville. The first two categories were to be used on text panels and as small graphics in the gallery, and the third group were to be enlarged as outsized posters in the gallery space. All the images were chosen to exemplify commonly-found themes of cultural and aesthetic invention, transition and diversity.

To obtain these types of images, a variety of primary and secondary sources were used, and several considerations were taken into account when doing this. Images must be obtained in a resolution adequate to their ultimate use; for museum exhibition and publication purposes, a minimum of 300dpi for small graphics, and 600dpi for large graphics, is required. These resolution levels are rarely found in free-use or public-domain sources; however online image libraries are a good source for high-resolution files for reproduction. The museum used Bridgeman Art Library, Corbis Images, the National Archives, the Filson Historical Society Photographic Archives and the University of Louisville Library Archives and Special Collections. Fees associated with purchasing, licensing and reproduction rights vary depending on the image itself, and the type, location and duration of its use.

Prototype sketches used in the exhibition were selected from contemporary

facsimile volumes. Pictures taken from these types of books are complimentary when adopted for educational use by museums or schools, and many of them, having been published one, two or three centuries ago, were indisputably public domain. Here, resolution levels were not an issue, as these illustrations did not require enlargement; and for smaller, anecdotal treatments the exhibition team were able to pull from clipart. In addition, original 19<sup>th</sup> century cabinetmaker's elevations from Bittners were framed and made available for placement. Once all of the images had been gathered, they were stored on the computer until final selection was made during the graphic-design phase.

### *Writing the Text Labels*

Text labels are the standard means of communicating factual and interpretive information and supporting the narrative theme of the exhibition to the museum-going audience.<sup>49</sup> The text writer's mission is to research, distill and convey information in a straightforward, unambiguous and intelligible way.

This is a task of skill and precision, with marked constraints. In a wall text, the number of words is strictly determined by the purpose, function and location of the passage being written. Promotional materials such as flyers, rack cards, and press releases must be succinct, impactful and lively, while providing the reader with the sum and substance of the exhibition. Next, introductory labels preface overall themes and familiarize the audience with the exhibition's fundamental concept, and need to do so in twenty-five words or less. These are followed by section labels, wherein the main body of the narrative is related in one-hundred-and-fifty to two-hundred-and-fifty words,

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<sup>49</sup> Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*, 54.

serving as guideposts to introduce and explicate the content of each passage. Visitors will look to these particular labels to provide direction, understanding and cohesion, and chronicle the relationship of objects both to one other and to their larger historical lineage. Smallest are the object labels, iterating the basic facts of title or designation, date of execution or manufacture, medium or material of composition, height-by-width-by-depth size in inches and centimeters, accession number, donor information, and, where germane, provenance.

All textural information is to be written at a level understandable to both children and adults—as a rule, to an approximation of American-level eighth-grade. This, however, can be complicated by the nomenclature of a relatively sophisticated exhibition topic, as was most certainly the case with *Top Drawer*. From such a standpoint, writers are cautioned to strike a balance between their need for precise and thorough exposition and the audience’s need for elementary comprehension. Another factor is the learning style of the audience: do they want to breeze through an exhibition without spending a prolonged amount of time reading panels, in which case information needs to be concise and easily obtainable, or do they want to know a little more? Do they spend time stopping and contemplating the objects before them, and expect to understand the gist of the topic at hand without delving too deeply, or do they intend to devote a good part of their day to the museum, thoughtfully reading every bit of information provided? The fundamental aim is to confer information in a fashion that adapts itself to all of these types of visitors.

The challenge in *Top Drawer* was to keep the vocabulary content to layman’s terms, which was at times difficult, as much of the basic operating terminology of the

decorative arts is highly specific to the discipline. The goal was to provide historical background that the audience would need to understand the significance of each piece and its constituent decorative elements. The panels discussed the origin and evolution of periods and styles in the context of their political, social and cultural milieu, and referenced corresponding cabinetmakers and monarchs.

Bittners staff provided text with a précis on the processes and mechanisms of cabinetmaking. The chief cabinetmaker composed a few pages on woods, joinery, carving, marquetry and finishing. Again, the challenge presented by his text was distilling technical information into a form that could be comfortably accessed by an extended audience.

After several rounds of proofreading, editing and re-writes, the text for the exhibition reached a desired medium, and they were submitted to the graphic designer. (See Appendix C).

Once the components of the interpretive plan are in place, the conceptual framework of the exhibition is addressed. This next section is an exploration of the process used to develop the conceptual design for *Top Drawer*.

### Conceptual Design

The exhibition process commences with the conceptual development of an underlying premise. In the case of *Top Drawer*, the objective was to provide audiences with an expository introduction to a diverse range of local, national and international decorative-arts knowledge and experiences, and to evidence by example the fact that history plays a decipherable role in certain less-than-conspicuous aspects of our everyday

lives. Implicit in the topic were strong themes of politics, culture, society and economics grounded in post-Renaissance American, English and Continental history, that could be traced directly back to the office and workshop of a mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century German immigrant.

Bittners was established at the dawn of the Second Industrial Revolution, concomitant with the rise of a newly powerful, insular and prosperous upper class. Social, political and economic conditions fostered growth of what Thorstein Veblen famously termed conspicuous consumption: the acquisition, accumulation and bestowal of luxury material goods in order to attain, maintain and unambiguously communicate to others real or perceived social and economic ascendancy.<sup>50</sup> The longevity of Bittners, and the timeline of their business, is mirrored in the emergence and persistence of this upper class, and later upper-middle class, normative of conspicuous consumption, from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.

One of the contexts within which *Top Drawer* is relevant is the abiding taste in these classes, and others, for named, high-decorative styles originating from 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century America, England, France, Italy and the German states. Chippendale, Adam, Sheraton, Hepplewhite, Empire, Regency, Biedermeier, and Victorian Renaissance- and Gothic-revival furniture and decorations appoint the interiors of the Tudor, Norman, Lombard, Italianate, Romanesque, Chateausque, Colonial, Queen Anne and Georgian houses of America's rich. From our local hamlets of Old Louisville, Mockingbird Valley, Anchorage and Glenview, to Grosse Point Shores, Holmby Hills, Shaker Heights, Greenwich, Saddle River, Belle Meade, Oyster Bay Cove, Chevy Chase Village, Bloomfield Hills and King's Point, is sustained a circumscribed universe of habits of

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<sup>50</sup> VeblenThorstein, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)

style as diligently adhered-to and shared as they are like-minded. Bittners has always been nimbly positioned to serve these rarefied domains, both locally and nationally, retailing faithful reproductions and fine period examples of given decorative styles to a well-heeled clientele nationwide.

It is further worth noting that the above-mentioned styles, in construction, ornament, scale, quality and finish, do not lend themselves readily or well to known modes of mass production, nor have styles that do—among them Hitchcock, Midwestern Golden Oak, Mission, Eastlake, Bauhaus and Mid-Century Modern—ever strongly appealed to the patrons of a firm such as Bittners. Though some crossover can be found between common mass-produced and superior custom-made furniture, particularly in the Colonial Revival, Arts and Crafts, and Art Deco vernaculars, factory-made reproductions invariably fail to meet the standards of the affluent.

From the point of view of modern aesthetic philosophy, and its influence on the thinking of Veblen, *Top Drawer* can be viewed through the lens of Thomas Dewey's encompassing definition of art as part of the experience of material, economic and political culture. For Dewey, if the aesthetic experience is to engage, it should be understood in light of the continuum between the sublime and the prosaic, the exalted and the mundane, and the consumer and the consumed.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, although Dewey was in some ways arguing against the formality and airlessness of the museums of his day, *Top Drawer* can be seen within the condition of his notions of both made and implicit meaning.

The realization of an exhibition is complex, and manifold facets must be taken

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<sup>51</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience*. (New York: Harvard Lecture Series, Perigee Trade/Putnam)



into account when developing its thesis. In his book *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*, Tom Klobe discusses the importance of a solid concept to the success of an exhibition. Klobe states: “A strong exhibition is one that integrates scholarship and imagination with goals of audience participation and edification.”<sup>52</sup> Depending upon the size of the institution, this may be undertaken by the curator alone, or by an exhibition team composed of leaders from various museum departments, such as curatorial, education, development, marketing, design and fabrication, as well as partners from the community, including artists, collectors, dealers, sponsors and lenders. The team approach has many advantages, not the least of which is that various skills and perspectives work together to refine concept development. Curators focus mainly on content development; educators hope to foster the concept in a way that makes for a stronger audience learning experience; development and marketing departments analyze the exhibit from their perspective of promoting and selling it; designers and fabricators analyze an exhibition from the perspective of space, accessibility, cost and their ability to spatially communicate message to audience.

Developing a concept for an exhibition can be a monumental task, and there are many approaches to organizing ideas for topics. Informal open-discussion forums are an effective way of producing ideas and organizing thoughts while gaining input from others. Creating charts with the foundational proposition and diagramming sub-topics from that central theme, as well as investigating outside sources such as the internet,

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<sup>52</sup>Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*, 54.

magazines, television and other institutions for inspiration, are also constructive.<sup>53</sup>

When developing an exhibition concept, it is important to take an inquirer's vantage point. Ask questions with regard to the working concept: what is the message; what is the purpose; who is the intended audience; what do they already know; and what does one need to tell them? Asking the who, what, why, when and where of the matter is an efficient and effective way to focus the project, streamline research, make artifact selections, and ensure that optimal information is being compellingly conveyed to your intended audience.<sup>54</sup>

Klobe stresses the importance of a well-formulated conceptual framework. Often termed "the big idea", a theme, which allows visitors to perceive that a certain order guides their experience, and establishes the meaning and intention of the exhibition. In defining the big idea, the exhibition team is defining global objectives, and progressively establishing the manner in which those goals will be realized.

#### "The Big Idea" and the Integration of Audience-Responsive Approach

Local history exhibitions were the highest scoring in the audience and member surveys conducted during institutional planning. Therefore, when it came time to decide what type of exhibit would be mounted using the new institutional plan, it was determined the focus would be local history. Bittners was selected as the subject of the exhibit because it has been in continuous operation since 1854, a span of time that correlates with a number of the most recognizable historical events in local, regional and national history. There was some hesitation by museum leaders to use Bittners as a

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<sup>53</sup> Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*, 46.

<sup>54</sup> Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*, 54.

subject, due to its strong connections to the museum, but it was deemed that the firm's significance to local history was of greater importance than its tangential association with the museum.

The selection of Bittners produced added benefits for other areas of the museum organization, namely development and fundraising. Bittners clientele and their families were an identified demographic that the museum had struggled to cultivate in the past. Through the proposed partnership, the museum would have a rare opportunity to engage with this group, and create events and programming to attract their notice and interest. From the beginning, it was understood that the exhibit's purpose would not be a substantive revenue draw from admissions, but rather would represent an important strategic friend-making opportunity for the museum.

*Top Drawer* was the first time the Frazier shared its authority for exhibition development with an outside community partner, and the first time it developed an exhibition using the audience-responsive development theory. This is a relatively new theory in the museum world, but one that has been gaining traction in recent years as more organizations trend towards greater audience engagement. In *the Manual of Exhibition Development*, Margaret May discusses this approach as an alternative to the more traditional models of research-based and market-driven exhibition development.

In her book, May discusses how audience-responsive exhibitions are conceived with an awareness of the interests of visitors, and in relation to the context of the collections and research relevant to the exhibitions.<sup>55</sup> While the significance of blockbuster exhibitions that attract high attendance and benefit a museum's bottom line is

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<sup>55</sup> Margaret May, "Exhibition Ideas: Integrating the Voices of Communities and Audiences," in *Manual of Museum Exhibition*, by Barry Lord and Gail Dexter Lord. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2010) 32.

universally acknowledged, museums are realizing the value of the exhibition program as a fundamental tool in developing sustained relationships with the communities they serve, and the audiences they wish to attract over a lifetime. This was certainly the driving force behind the Frazier's then-new strategic plan and subsequent exhibition program. May explains that museums have found "...when they share the authority for developing the exhibition idea or interpreting the collection with the communities for whom the exhibition is intended, they can be even more successful from a long-range perspective."<sup>56</sup> On a more profound level, this process of exhibition development furthers the museum's mission to educate, and its mission to facilitate community development and identity; this is precisely what the Frazier was hoping to achieve with exhibitions such as *Top Drawer*.

### Design Development

The purpose of a design plan is to transform the concept into an exhibition, interpreted through a complex mix of spatial layouts, objects, texts, graphics, color, videos and lighting. It is also the point at which the visitor experience is created. A strong and effective design plan minimizes distractions, emphasizes the message, and removes barriers between the audience and the medium, inviting visitors to engage and interact with the subject as they move through the space.

#### *The Design Plan*

The design plan is essentially a blueprint for the exhibit, determining its sensory look and feel. The shaping of this plan is the responsibility of the exhibition designer, a position that may be filled by the curator, project manager, or a team including both. For

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<sup>56</sup> Margaret May, "Exhibition Ideas: Integrating the Voices of Communities and Audiences," 32.

*Top Drawer*, the design plan was the responsibility of the curator and co-curator, with Bittners serving in an advisory capacity.

A design is assembled to create a storyline divided into chapters that correspond with the interior architecture of the exhibition space. For *Top Drawer*, this was done by classifying the exhibition into time periods by century: 1700 – 1800; 1800 – 1900; and 1900 – 2000; and then into thematic subdivisions, from Chippendale through Mid-Century Modern. In creating this classification system and then subdividing it, a format and storyline was developed that conformed well to the exhibition space.

Design formulation is an inexact science: plans range from simple to complex depending on the depth and scope of the core content, and the process is variable, often working through several incarnations before a final arrangement is settled upon. Here, the implementation of a storyline becomes an effective tool, creating markers and threading the design together with site, content and audience. Spatial design is the most commonly neglected element in exhibition strategy, and a primary reason for the failure of an exhibit to convey its spirit and substance.<sup>57</sup> A strong spatial design is the overarching component that has the greatest impact on human response, by devising the implicit pathway that is a guiding principle for the viewer's experience. Approaches to the development of a pathway differ by preference and necessity; some provide for open exploration, allowing the audience to view the exhibition in a manner they chose, while others are prescriptive, encouraging the audience to follow a circumscribed route.<sup>58</sup> It is also very important to be aware of the standards established by the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) regarding all manner of accessibility for those individuals with

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<sup>57</sup> Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*, 4

<sup>58</sup> Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*, 4

physical or cognitive limitations, which can be determinative.

Scale models are an invaluable tool in staging and developing these ideas, allowing designers to materialize their thoughts flexibly, and in three dimensions. Such a model was developed for *Top Drawer*: a replica of the museum's bayed, four-thousand-square-foot temporary gallery space, fitted to identify all fixed architectural and utilitarian elements, made out of foam-core to a one-inch scale. From the outset of *Top Drawer*, the museum was committed to a design that worked within the galleries, followed the storyline, and connected with the audience. Bittners prevailing interest was brand-specific continuity to their showroom floor. It was incumbent on the Frazier to make the point to Bittners early on that the museum wished to avoid anything that looked or functioned like a designer showcase, or appeared to be an advertisement for Bittners. As mentioned earlier, this was a concern for the museum from the outset, and to prevent conflict-of-interest issues from arising, the museum felt obliged to maintain focus on the historical concept rather than the company.

There were two different design concepts for the *Top Drawer*. The first employed an open-floor plan that mimicked the clean, modern and open feel of a contemporary art gallery. The furniture would be placed throughout the second, third and fourth bays so it could be viewed from all sides. The devised path was one of open exploration where the audience would feel free to roam and range as they pleased. While this concept was welcomed in theory, it had the potential to work against the storyline, which in reality required the audience move through the exhibition on a chronological path.

With a better understanding of where the design needed to go, the museum reconditioned its strategy, deciding to employ the use of temporary walls to achieve this

result. The purpose was to avoid making the space feel crowded or confined, so the walls were situated in an S-pattern, allowing traffic to flow without bottlenecks or queuing. Walls were also floated at a height of eight feet, cultivating an open, lighted and airy feeling. The lengths of the walls, and thus the spaces defined by them, were determined by the placement and volume of furniture, text panels and graphics contained within each section, varying accordingly.

Crowd control was another major concern for *Top Drawer*, because the museum was expecting significant spillover from the record-breaking attendance for *Diana*. The addition of the walls helped with this eventuality, by engineering a traffic pattern that minimized overcrowding, and the placement of text panels and graphics to create natural pause points.

The walls also formed smaller, more intimate gallery spaces, by assigning each period or style to its own section. This allowed for the installation of period-specific graphics and texts in each space so that visitors could easily draw the connections between concepts and objects. These intimate spaces also created pacing, helping to combat overstimulation and audience fatigue. The object was for visitors to experience moments of excitement followed by moments of calm in instigating a pace that minimized the ‘blur-factor’.

It was understood from the design plan that each section would be dedicated to a specific period or style; at this juncture, a decision needed to be made with regard to how the pieces would best fit within these designated borders. The first idea was to situate objects in an open-floor concept, placing some against walls and others in central open areas. There were seventy-five pieces of furniture available for exhibition, which was

more than could be used. Therefore, cuts were made based on form, size, quality and capacity. The first round of cuts disposed of pieces that were duplicates, and those not of museum quality. Then scaled cutouts were made of those remaining, which were worked into the maquette. The objective was to fit as many pieces into the space as reasonably possible and still meet ADA standards. It quickly became evident that the open design failed to meet this requirement. As a result, the decision was made to place all of the pieces around the perimeters of each room; this, however, created another problem for oversized pieces such as dining tables, because they would not fit against walls. After trying several configurations, all but one of the large dining tables were cut from the exhibition. The single piece that was kept was a large circular center table, decorated with spectacular conforming fan marquetry of rare woods, custom-designed by Bittners for the exhibition. In order to keep this piece in the exhibition, the top was removed from its base and mounted to the wall. (See figure 3).

Applying the explicit element of form was equally important for *Top Drawer*, because there were many pieces of varying size, shape and function, arranged in spaces divergent in configuration and square-footage. Form is important for its power to effect how an object manifests itself in space.<sup>59</sup> In *Top Drawer*, to coalesce each section, deliberate aesthetic decisions were made with regard to furniture groupings, distribution, and sequence. It is important to remain aware that large pieces relegated to small or cramped spaces will lose their power of presence, while small pieces placed in areas too large may appear inconsequential.<sup>60</sup> Form also pertains to groupings that include pieces of such differing size that inclusion of accessory elements is required to balance the

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<sup>59</sup> Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*, 8

<sup>60</sup> Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*, 8.



differential.<sup>61</sup> For example, the Chippendale section featured a Philadelphia style highboy seven feet in height, and next to it a Chinese Chippendale style armchair. To balance the disproportion in size between the pieces, a mid-sized Chippendale style wall mirror was hung between them, to offset the differential. (See figure 4). Throughout the exhibition, shape and shadow were manipulated, and in many cases added elements such as mirrors, girandoles, Renaissance bronzes, porcelains or paintings were included, to encourage harmony and to accentuate and illuminate the showcased pieces. This properly articulated the mood of each section, and further signified the objects on display. A well-designed space is one that reduces ‘museum fatigue’, is defined by the objects in it, creates and maintains pacing, and engages the audience.<sup>62</sup> The scrupulous use of space provides visitors with a positive learning experience, and qualifies the success of an exhibition.

The next decision was determining the color of the gallery walls. As with space, line and form, color also imprints the audience’s mood. In fear of stating the too-obvious, dark colors equate to seriousness, lighter colors to cheerier. Less pronounced is the use of color as a transitional cue, leading audiences from one area or topic into another.

After some debate about using a color combination of vibrant colors for the gallery space, it was decided to use one that would enhance the richness of the woods and reflect their burnish. The color chosen was a warm crème that matched the colors Bittners was using in their showcase room. This selection provided an unimpeded feeling free of extraneous visual information, and maintain a sensibility of grace and ease in the

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<sup>61</sup>Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*, 10.

<sup>62</sup>Klobe, *Exhibitions: Concept, Planning and Design*, 9.

smaller bays.

### *Two-Dimensional Design*

Two-dimensional design refers to graphics and text panels. Graphics are instrumental in the interpretation of the exhibition's theme, provide visual interest, and allow further exploration of the topic in a way that is time, cost and space conscious.<sup>63</sup>

The use of graphics was particularly fitting for *Top Drawer*, because furniture is an element of design that is always a constituent part of a larger scheme, both architecturally and historically. *Top Drawer* used single four-color photographic images in each section, representing a period interior paralleling the furniture of a specific style or era.

### *Text Panels*

Depending upon the timeframe and budget, the format and design of text panels can be performed in-house, or by an outside consultant. For *Top Drawer*, Julie Breeding, an outside consultant was selected. She was figuratively walked through the exhibition, the design of the gallery, and all other pertinent details. The first mock-up presented was of a modern design that used bold colors. While this initial concept was well liked, the opinion was shared that the color combination was too extreme for what the exhibition hoped to achieve. The panels appeared confusing and distracting, with an overabundance of colors, elements and images literally competing with the text for attention. The museum requested something softer and more in line with the neutral palette that had been selected for the walls. Julie was also asked to include some of the important decorative elements in the panels from cabinetmaking and architectural design

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<sup>63</sup> Phillip Hughes, *Exhibition Design*. ( New York: Lawrence King Publishers, 2010)

catalogues, and the exhibition's elements-of-style chart and makers-and-monarch's timeline. She understood their significance, and promised to include them in her amended design.

The selected design featured a crème background with soft golden text and graphics, and incorporated all the components requested in the previous meeting. The panel ground featured a detail from a cabinetmaker's sketch, over which was placed text listing the dates of the period, along with the name and dates of the corresponding presiding monarch or leader. Below this were listed the famous makers of the period, along with their dates and country of origin. In each of the top corners she included a signal decorative element from the period, and the text was laid over a ghosted cabinetmaker's sketch. The panel was perfect, bringing together all the elements that needed to be expressed in a way that was clear, classic and subtle. (See Appendix D).

Panel size was determined by factoring written text word-count, number and type of graphic elements, and location within the exhibit. *Top Drawer* required several different sizes of panels. Due to the extended length of written text, the twelve period panels were measured to be forty-eight by twenty-nine inches each. The workshop had multiple text sections, which resulted in a panel that was eighty by forty-eight inches, and landscaped. The 'Bittner and Son' panel was also oversized to accommodate family photographs, and biographical information on Gustave Bittner and his son, William. This panel measured forty-eight by forty-eight inches. The largest panel was the Bittners timeline, measuring ninety-six by twenty-three inches. Once the size was of each panel was determined, the design package was sent to the printers.

### *Bittners Video*

Another two-dimensional piece in the exhibition space was the Bittners video. In the introduction section of the gallery there was a large temporary wall situated where guests entered the exhibition. This was the perfect spot for an element that would immediately direct and focus people's attention. Douglas Riddle collaborated with the museum about ideas for the area, and he suggested part of the space be used as a video screen. He offered to produce a short film featuring the Bittners workshop, and the craftsman's interest in applications for reclaimed lumber. These were natural tie-ins with the large Bittners-made table in the exhibit constructed of lumber taken from the museum building while it was under redesign. The idea also worked well with the replica workshop, as the film highlighted some of the displayed techniques and tools used in cabinetmaking since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, adding an aspect of compelling visual interest for visitors as they approached the gallery and entered the first bay.

### *Educational Programming*

Another fundamental aspect of the exhibition design plan is the development of educational programming. All creditable museums view public education as a crucial part of their missions, both in theory and practice, and it is important for designers and curators to partner with their education departments from the outset. As text was written, the museum's educators were sent copies to assure that the information in the exhibition could be used for school programs, and that it promoted their mission and programming. One of their requests was to have various staffers at Bittners give tours and lectures to school groups in the museum. The idea was presented to Bittners and they agreed to

assist in any way possible. Work was also done with the education director in targeting different types of schools and students who might gain the most from this exhibition. Several trade schools had been in contact previously, asking if the museum offered any programming their students might find useful. The Education Director reached out to these institutions and received a positive response, particularly with respect to their design and woodworking students, who were delighted to have an opportunity to speak with those employed in their future profession.

### *Budget*

At this point, a more comprehensive and detailed budget analysis is undertaken, from planning to fabrication to installation, so that all participants have a clear and global understanding of costs. The preliminary budget, developed for the exhibition brief, is broken down and run alongside the actual budget by the exhibition curator, project manager, and accounting director. The budget for *Top Drawer* was different, due to contributions by Bittners. (See Appendix E).

Upon completion of the budget analysis, a detailed and comprehensive picture of the exhibition strategy emerged. Upon completion of the budget the museum was able to move forward and execute an exhibition marketing plan, work plan, fabrication and installation plan, and evaluation program.

### Marketing Plan

The following section will discuss the formulation of the marketing plan for *Top Drawer*. Generally speaking, the marketing of exhibitions at the Frazier at that time fell

within the sole purview of the Director of Marketing, with limited input from curatorial, and only then in the form of facts and images. *Top Drawer*, however, presented unique challenges. To start, it was a new type of exhibition at the museum, one created for a specific demographic of individuals who were moneyed, well educated and maintained positions of power and prominence in business and society. This required a marketing strategy geared towards targeted publications and media outlets. Traditionally, marketing campaigns for the museum were blanketed across local newspapers, radio spots and television morning shows. This type of broad-spectrum strategy lacked the exclusivity appropriate to the exhibit's intended demographic, as the campaign sought to reach these individuals through formats they were accustomed to seeing and appearing in.

Advertising called for more of a design element than that found in the traditional campaign, and Bittners was determined that all imagery reflect their signature aesthetic. To achieve this required a great deal of collaboration between the museum's marketing team and Bittners, which led to several contentious moments. Added pressure came from a lack of funds to promote *Top Drawer*. The majority of the Frazier's marketing budget for that period of time had been allocated to the massive campaign created for *Diana*.

While there was some initial thought to adding *Top Drawer* to some of the media material for that exhibit, it was quickly rejected as there were strict regulations regarding marketing materials for *Diana*. Compounding the issue was a rider in the *Diana* contracts that stated the museum could not advertise anything potentially construed as competitive to it. This was a massive blow to the Bittners team, because they viewed this as an opportunity to develop brand recognition with the *Diana* audience, many of whom were out-of-town visitors. The exhibition was estimated to draw over 100,000 visitors

during its six-month run, which was a tremendously favorable opportunity for Bittners.

In the course of time, both entities applied creative solutions and worked together to generate campaigns that accomplished their respective goals. The Frazier team developed internal marketing materials advertising the exhibition using flyers and rack cards, along with a short teaser film on its internal monitors, print placement in the museum newsletter, and a push on three of the museum's social-media sites: Twitter, Facebook, and Frazier.org. Though the costs of this campaign were minimal, it would be seen by all visitors to the museum, *Diana* guests included, and would not violate the Frazier's agreement with EDG, the company touring *Diana*. Bittners, in turn, offered to cover the expense associated with all external marketing: design and print of rack cards for their showroom and the museum, placement of full-page ads in select local periodicals and newspapers, including the *Voice Tribune*, *Sophisticated Living*, and *N-Focus*, and advertising of the show at charity and social events they were sponsoring throughout the city, such as *Gilda's Night*. It was agreed upon by both organizations that these two plans combined would work to engage the community's interest in the exhibition, and ensure that Bittner's clientele, as well as museum guests would be given sufficient notice of the exhibition's existence. Once the plan of action was chosen, both organizations quickly implemented their strategies. The first step was to issue a press release announcing the exhibition to all media outlets. The press release was written between the Frazier's and Bittners marketing staffs and released on October 29, 2012, and was followed by a series of media releases, including a first round of rack cards, a teaser video, print advertisements and a second round of rack cards. (See Appendix F). Shortly before the opening of the exhibition, a second, more brand-specific rack card was

released, designed by Bittners marketing director.

The teaser video ran on internal museum monitors in the admissions area, and on the Frazier and Bittners websites, simultaneously launched in early September. During this period Bittners also ran the *Top Drawer* advertisement in local newspapers as a larger version of the first rack card.

Due to the timeframe and budget, the museum struggled with securing an official media sponsor for *Top Drawer*. Bittners, however, was able to marshal support from the *Voice Tribune* and *Sophisticated Living* magazines, both of which ran stories on *Top Drawer*. Kentucky Educational Television reached out to the museum after hearing about the exhibition, asking if the show could be included in a spot on *Louisville Life*. All of these opportunities to advertise in the Commonwealth came about without any financial commitment from the museum. The combined marketing efforts were met with much enthusiasm by the general public, and both organizations were pleasantly surprised by the response and word of mouth such limited advertising generated.

### Work Plan

Before moving forward to the final phase of exhibition development, the curator and project manager undertake the development of a comprehensive work plan, detailing everything to be completed before the exhibition opens. This document provides the exhibitions team, curators and contract workers with a formal outline of who is responsible for which jobs, and when those jobs need to be initiated and completed.

For *Top Drawer*, a detailed work plan was created outlining every phase of the exhibition. Each person or team was represented by a color code that framed their assigned tasks, so they would know exactly what they needed to accomplish, and when.



This type of plan is best outlined using an excel spreadsheet. (See Appendix G).

### *Fabrication and Installation*

Fabrication and installation, depending on the size and budget of the institution, and the disposition of project managers, may be handled internally or by independent contractors. At the Frazier, the work of this phase was handled by the curator, project manager and exhibitions team.

This part of the exhibition process is better represented in diagram format. To provide a more methodical and logical interpretation, the exhibition's fabrication and installation work-plan spreadsheet has been included herein (See Appendix H.) The installation plan divides fabrication and installation into tasks, delineating by who is charged with completing which tasks, and the dates work should commence and then be completed. Each stakeholder working on the exhibition receives a hard copy of the plan one week prior to the commencement of fabrication; the plan leads them through exhibit fabrication, installation and take down.

### Evaluation Program

While the success of an exhibition hinges on developing a strong concept and orderly design, it must also succeed in communicating with and to an audience. The audience is the determining factor as to whether or not an exhibition is able to confer its message and deliver a meaningful experience. As a result, museums have begun to understand the importance of learning who visits their institutions, and why. For the most part, museums use evaluation methods to survey their audience: who they are, why they

attend, and what programming has brought them into the museum at any given time. Several different types of evaluative criteria can be used to help determine the approximate success of current and future programming. One of the simplest techniques is recording and monitoring attendance. The information obtained here serves as a baseline for, and may be used as a predictor of, future interest in subject-related exhibitions. For this technique to be effective, records monitored must be those related to a specific exhibition, rather than general admission. This type of evaluation was practiced daily at the Frazier by measuring ticket sales related to special exhibitions, and with the use of a body-counter mounted in their temporary galleries. In the *Manual of Museum Exhibitions*, Duncan Grewcock discusses the three main types of evaluation that should be used during exhibition development: front-end evaluation, formative evaluation, and summative evaluation. He explains that "...front-end evaluation is conducted during the development phase, and is often the most important, because results garnered from this technique can have a major impact on the outcome of the exhibition concept, content and brief."<sup>64</sup> This method assesses the potentiality of visitor access, understanding and enjoyment at an early stage of progression, and is used to assay and evaluate the exhibition concept. Front-end evaluation seeks to identify the target audience, and helps to determine if the proposed exhibition will broaden the institution's established base.

Formative evaluation should occur during the design phase, and according to Grewcock "...it tests the detailed content and proposed modes of communication with representatives of target markets."<sup>65</sup>

The final-stage summative evaluation takes place towards the end of the

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<sup>64</sup>Duncan Grewcock, "Before, During and After: Front End, Formative and Summative Evaluation," in *Manual of Museum Exhibitions*, by Barry Lord and Gail Dexter Lord, (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2001) 44.

<sup>65</sup> Grewcock, "Before, During and After: Front End, Formative and Summative Evaluation," 44.

implementation phase, and addresses actual exhibition visitors. This type of evaluation can be conducted through hosting a pre-opening or soft opening for an exhibition.

Prior to the institutional planning process, the Frazier rarely conducted routine evaluations, but as the teams moved through the planning process they became more aware of the importance of strong evaluation techniques. Horizon Research conducted large-scale front-end evaluations of the museum's current and proposed exhibition calendar, helping teams to understand how audiences and community viewed the museum and the shows it was mounting. The results of these surveys guided teams in developing new exhibition criteria discussed earlier in the strategic plan. Horizon used member and visitor surveys, focus groups and interviews to conduct their evaluations. They also made a strong recommendation that the museum implement an evaluation and tracking program for all exhibitions. From there, the visitor experience team created the exhibition rubric which contains evaluation criteria for internal use, and a series of surveys and questionnaires that can be sent to members and constituents to track the success of current exhibits and the potential interest in future projects. *Top Drawer* was an exhibition the museum confidently anticipated would appeal to a new audience, one that did not typically associate decorative arts with the Frazier. Museum staff were able to conduct front-end evaluation with individual visitor, tour-group and educator and student surveys; and through the Museum Assessment Program, a dedicated focus group. The museum learned that both the current and potential audience found the idea of *Top Drawer* intriguing and appealing. The Frazier's core audience at the time liked the idea because it was local history, while potential visitors were drawn to its broader chronology. The idea of an exhibition that did not require a viewer to possess any kind of

specific academic background appealed to both groups.

The formative evaluation was conducted during the design phase to test exhibit content and modes of communication to the target audience. This appraisal was conducted with prototypes and mock-ups of the exhibition from which the curators and designers are able to envision how the museumgoers would avail themselves of the exhibit.

Summative evaluation was conducted through audience feedback surveys once the exhibition was complete. Feedback cards were placed with a variety of questions at the exit of the exhibition: What about your experience was enjoyable? What about your experience was problematic? What would you like to see more, or less, of in the future? Did you learn anything new, and if so, what? Would you recommend this exhibition to a friend or relative? Additionally, there was a soft opening for the families and friends of Bittners and Frazier staff, two evenings before the opening reception on November 17<sup>th</sup>. They were supplied with the same questionnaires throughout the evening. Later, the museum conducted further summative evaluations after the exhibition had opened to the public, through the use of web-based and direct-mail surveys to members. (See Appendix I). There were also one-on-one interviews with guests as they toured the exhibition. For the most part, the information collected was positive, though there were some who felt there was not enough variety of furniture styles and periods on display. Visitors were enthusiastic about the local connection with Bittners, many sharing their own personal associations with the firm, while others expressed their delight at being able to experience these objects at close proximity. Some unexpected results came from the number of visitors who left the Frazier and traveled down Main Street to Bittners, asking if they

might tour their showroom and workshop. All of this information was tracked, collated and memorialized to serve as a set of objective benchmarks for future, similarly-themed exhibits.

Museums have begun to recognize and acknowledge the empowerment gained from careful analytical scrutiny of the opinions and ideas of their public. More so than in the past, audiences enjoy being active participants in the museum-going experience; no longer do they expect to be one side of an exchange where the institution is educator and audience its student. Evaluation surveys put a measure of decision-making power into the hands of the audience, and it is incumbent upon museums to use these gained insights to nurture lasting relationships with the communities they serve.

CHAPTER FOUR  
ANALYSIS AND IMPACT OF *TOP DRAWER*

Analysis of Top Drawer

American, English and Continental furniture period styles are surveyed within their socio-historical context in *Top Drawer: 150 Years of Bittners*. The fifty selected objects on display reflected and illustrated the material archeology of upper-class Louisville society and their tastes in furniture and the decorative arts. Surveying and critiquing the political, economic and sociological factors that contextualize these domestic furnishings was the primary focus of the exhibition. The museum applied the interdisciplinary term “material culture” as a rubric for the diversity of period, style and custom-made Bittners furniture items featured in the exhibition, to demonstrate that domiciliary artifacts can be used to directly evidence and re-experience the near past.

Originally intended as an accompaniment to the museum’s larger blockbuster exhibition *Diana: A Celebration*, *Top Drawer* ultimately shared many of that exhibition’s predominant operating features, including important private loans, masterful objects, visual flare and historic resonance. In addition to its more academic framework, *Top Drawer* also introduced audiences to the largely unfamiliar firm named Bittners, an established local interior-design house founded in 1854 by German immigrant and cabinetmaker Gustave Bittner. Though the firm has never been recognized as a leader in

stylistic innovation, it has been lauded for its superb craftsmanship, incomparable reproductions and dedication to the use of reclaimed materials.

The exhibition opened with a configured mock-up of the Bittners workshop, and featured text panels introducing the firm's founder and namesake. From there, guests were drawn first to a virtual tour of 18<sup>th</sup>-century England and introduced to signature works of Chippendale, the Adams brothers, Sheraton and Hepplewhite. Among these furnishings are decorative items such as sconces, knife boxes, mirrors and Renaissance bronzes. The walls feature oversized color graphics depicting period rooms, offering visitors a glimpse of some of the pieces on display within their historical context. As visitors move through the exhibition they are taken to 19<sup>th</sup>-century France, where they experience the influence of Napoleon Bonaparte on the Directoire/Consulate and French Empire styles of Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine. This is followed by a trip to the shores of North America where the establishment of the American Federation in 1789 greatly influenced the American Empire style as interpreted by Charles-Honore Launniier and Duncan Phyfe. From there guests return to England, where the reign of King George IV inspired conspicuous displays of luxury, protocol, hierarchy and idle pursuit, which in turn influenced the designs of Henry Holland's ornamental architecture, Thomas Hope's household decoration, and George Smith's interior furnishings and design. Next they traveled into the German States and the Biedermeier Era to study the influence of the growth of an aspiring urban middle-class in the context of a suppressive political, social and economic framework. The tour winds down with an exploration of the Victorian Era, the Art Deco period, Mid-Century Modern, and then Bittners today, a contemporary space decorated to represent the firms'

present design philosophy of blending traditional furnishings with a modernist aesthetic.

*Top Drawer* embraced the implicit architecture of the museum galleries, incorporating the exposed-wood beamed ceilings, expanses of raw-brick walls, low-slung ductwork and cast-iron lintels. The exhibit space was consciously designed to resemble an art gallery rather than a period interior, with presented objects serving more as discrete entities than elements *in situ* displayed to be viewed individually. The space was left relatively open, with floating walls placed strategically to separate the various periods, yet so as to not detract from the open floor plan. The color scheme was monochromatic, with walls and bases painted the same light cream color, adding to the feel of a modern or contemporary gallery space. This was a conscious design decision meant to show continuity between the traditional furnishings of the period styles and the contemporary space created by Bittners. The Bittners space was designed to showcase their commitment to the use of traditional furnishings in contemporary settings. The room featured a 19th-century Caucasian carpet with contemporary sofas and armchairs, paired with Tuscan-style side tables. To cap off the space, Bittners installed a large refectory table made from reclaimed lumber saved from the museum during its renovation, and more repurposed hardwood floors from 1865 that had once served as fence rails at a local farm. All of these design elements were chosen to reinforce the message that when furniture is viewed in such a way it will evoke multiple associations that serve to materialize the purity of its forms, and spotlight the cultural and social context of a given community at a given point in time.

However, for everything this exhibition got right, it left unanswered questions and missed opportunities for further critical and analytical examination, all of which could



have increased the educational content and value of the exhibit.

To start, the exhibition was successful in documenting the tastes and preferences of the local elite, but it failed to engage in a larger discussion about how those preferences reflected trends in consumerism of the time, as well as what the absence of period styles may have said about the tastes and influences of the growing middle classes.

The omission of this conversation is perhaps the most substantial drawback of the exhibition, because it fails to place Bittners in the cultural context of its era, thus rendering an incomplete view of the society as a whole. The absence of this storyline is owed in large measure to the fact that the show focused solely on the period styles produced by Bittners, as determined by their historic ledgers. But then the question persists: is the exhibition just as much about what is not represented as what is? It would have been beneficial had there been a section in the exhibition that highlighted other popular trends of the time, and perhaps discussed what segment or demographic of society favored the styles of those pieces featured in the show. We know from speaking with Bittners staff that the firm had only produced furniture considered desirable by its clients—a fundamental pretext of virtually any capitalist enterprise; and we also know from studying their historical ledgers that Bittners' clientele were exclusively the patricians of American society at the time-- so what do the pieces produced say about the considerations that drove their tastes? An exploration of these questions would have engendered a fruitful dialogue, especially in light of the fact that the firm rose to its zenith during the Gilded Age, a period of unprecedented economic expansion and social dynamism which had a profound impact on the social order, and resulted in a conflict between the established conservative elite and the new middle class. In design, this

period was marked by the rise of machine-made goods, which meant that for the first time, instead of using historical styles for inspiration, designers were able to quite literally copy them *en masse*. Bulk production meant more goods available to a broader market, and in greater variety at affordable prices. The downside to this came with a diminution in material quality, which resulted in a yearning to recapture the superiority of things skillfully handmade. This in turn led to an era in which revivals, rather than new styles, predominated. Disseminated by improved communication, transportation and numerous grand expositions, the revival styles crossed national as well as historical boundaries, influencing architecture as well as design. It is during this time that we see Bittners skyrocket in popularity, becoming the most recognizable and in-demand design firm and cabinet shop for wealthy clients from Louisville to New York. Significantly, the firm assiduously rejected fabrication techniques associated with the industrial period, instead choosing to continue making furniture within the code of strict training, practices and trade traditions passed down by European cabinetmakers.

It is during the Gilded Age when we see the birth of modern consumer culture, and this is an area where *Top Drawer* could have been more explicit with regard to why Bittners' clients were interested in only certain period styles for their homes. One possible answer lies in the popular writings of economist Thorstein Veblen. His theory of consumerism, called Social Class Consumerism, is based on his analysis of the application of accumulated capital and its symbiotic relationship to the attainment of higher social status.<sup>66</sup> Veblen rightly theorized that consumer goods are made more desirable by virtue of their cost of manufacturing, retail pricing and relative market

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<sup>66</sup> VeblenThorstein, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions*.

scarcity, especially pertaining to conspicuous consumer goods such as furniture, works of art and architecture.<sup>67</sup> If we apply Veblen's theory to the production of goods at Bittners, it makes sense of the fact that the firm did not adapt itself to mass production, instead choosing to produce furniture and other forms of cabinetry using pre-19<sup>th</sup>-century European techniques. Items made this way take far longer and more skill to create, ensuring a form of market self-rarity; and due to associated material and labor costs, the pieces themselves would retail at a purposefully higher price point that inherently embodied advanced status and wealth. For rich and newly-rich clients aspiring to showcase their social standing, Bittners would have been the ideal place to shop.

Providing further evidence to this theory would have been a brief survey of architectural styles in relation to furniture trends. Prior to the end of the 19th century the styles selected to decorate a room were dictated by the architecture of the house itself: it would have been unheard-of to decorate a Gothic-revival house with craftsman-style furniture. It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that the design of a room would have been dictated more by personal preference than by its formal environment or prevailing fashion. Here was an opportunity to explore how people interpret meaning, and how their experiences, backgrounds, education and cultures influence trends in design.

Another counterpoint to a discussion about period styles produced by Bittners might also have been an exploration of other popular furniture period styles favored in the time not produced by Bittners, and how those trends can further inform us about the society and culture at large. Perhaps the most prolific of those styles emanated from the

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<sup>67</sup> VeblenThorstein, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions*.

Arts and Crafts movement, a period in Europe, England and North America between 1880 and 1910 characterized by anti-industrialism and its perceived dehumanizing effects, and a desire to return to the use of traditional skilled labor, individual aesthetic expression and superior materials. In America this movement drew inspiration from John Ruskin and William Morris, as well as Colonial, Shaker and Native American crafts. This new generation of architects and craftsmen aimed to create solid furniture by hand, using fine materials in simple, uncontrived forms that were attractive, sturdy and functional. Arts and Crafts furniture was as much a social statement as an artistic one, championing the individual craftsman over industrial efficiency and mass production, and setting the stage for design movements that followed, from Art Deco to Bauhaus to Mid-Century Modern.

Another avenue to pursue in gaining a better understanding of furniture trends would have been an analysis of the reasons why English and Continental design traditions were most favored in furniture design until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This theory is explored in an article written in 1918 by literary critic Van Wyck Brooks titled “On Creating a Usable Past”, where he laments a perceived poverty of American culture.<sup>68</sup> According to Brooks, one of the causes for the deficiency is that the United States did not possess a “usable past”, a cultural memory that could provide a comfortable sense of continuity through tradition. The solution, he believed, was in defining the past in ways similar to how European nations had long valued, preserved and cultivated their own traditions. Brooks maintained that American culture should commemorate that which was genuinely unique to its own historical experience. He argued that Americans should

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<sup>68</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past,” *The Dial*, April 11, 1918: 337-341.

discover their own aesthetic patrimony as opposed to relying on imported traditions.

This Brooksonian lack of an identified American culture might offer some insight as to why Bittners primarily produced furniture in English and Continental high styles-- styles documented and prized for centuries as symbols of wealth, power and status. On the other hand, popular American period styles such as Craftsman, Eastlake or Golden Oak did not emerge from such an established birthright, pertain to rarity or antiquity, or reflect a hierarchy in social order. Important to understand here is that the case for 17th- and 18th-century French design, where preoccupation with intricate detail, costly materials, high-order workmanship and aristocratic taste was always in evidence, would have held immense appeal to a 19th-century American buyer.

Looking closely at *Top Drawer*, the exhibit missed an opportunity to fully delve into a discussion around the influence and impact of immigrants on Louisville's social and cultural evolution, especially with respect to architecture and design. This was a disappointing loss of content, especially considering that Bittners was founded by an immigrant who traveled to Louisville from his home German state during the Revolutions of 1848. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to thoroughly and cohesively include this narrative in the exhibition. That said, the influence of Louisville's immigrant community is seen widely across the older parts of the city, particularly in the design of local houses and churches. What is most striking about a survey of these structures is the heavy European influence in their construction. What was the motivation behind these design choices—as, for the most part, the individuals responsible for this extraordinary renaissance of decorative art in Louisville fled their homelands in response to war, revolution, or social and religious persecution. Should they not be aspiring to build

structures that are representative of their new rights and freedoms? Or were the decisions to build structures reminiscent of those in their homelands an attempt to ease their homesickness, or to create safe havens of familiarity in a new land? These would have been worthwhile questions to pose, answers to which might have also provided insight into why these immigrants also chose similar styles to decorate the interiors of their houses as they prospered. As Phoebe Stanton points out in her book *The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture*: “People are drawn to the familiar, and meaning is often fondly associated with things that share a relationship with a person’s understanding of who they were and where they came from.”<sup>69</sup> As such, it is not too far afield to imagine that when designing and furnishing their houses, these newly-minted Americans would have favored the same styles and periods that traditionally represented elevated status in their homeland. This is a point in the exhibition where including graphics and elements from Louisville’s architectural history would have helped illustrate these fascinating relationships, and make a stronger connection between Bittners and the community by highlighting the constitutive story of American immigration.

It would have been instructive to display in this section examples of 19th-century Louisville architecture, which abound. A study of local architecture, erected with the expectation of surviving into posterity and thus so readily available and accessible to this day as a glimpse into that historic period, would have been both compelling and illuminating.

By addressing these questions, *Top Drawer* could have developed a more critical and analytical perspective, adding greater educational value to the exhibition, and

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<sup>69</sup> Phoebe Stanton, *Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1968), 67.

offering audiences a different perspective for examining the message these furniture periods and styles were delivering with regard to observable local social and cultural preoccupations.

Another worthwhile conversation might have centered on the ways in which popular trends traveled across the nation through similar communities across the country. An intra-cultural contrast-and-compare could have been made between the architectural styles favored by different communities, and the resulting trends in interior design, based on the business models of similar firms in competition for Bittners' clientele.

In retrospect, *Top Drawer* could have included a more comprehensive study of the furniture itself, and what the decorative elements comprising their design said about the history of the decorative arts. Developments in furniture design have always been subject to a variety of factors, including economic and political change, technological advances, necessity, status and fashion. Not all countries have experienced the same influences, nor are the features of any one style evenly manifest in all furniture made during one particular time. However, each period style does have its own defining characteristics, symbols if you will, meant to express the relationship that object shares with the overarching trends and values of the time in which it was made. In his essay *The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction*, Jules Prown argues that "...artifacts provide a way in which the past can be directly re-experienced with our senses, and thus a way of apprehending historical time."<sup>70</sup> According to Prown, "...the style of objects reflects not only the technical traditions of their maker, but also the contemporary culture

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<sup>70</sup> Jules Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction," in *The History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, by Steven Lubar, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1993) 1-20.

in which they were developed.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, objects can be studied to help us understand human beliefs, behavior and history in the cultural and social context of the individual’s relationships with family, community or organized society.

Finally, *Top Drawer* was designed in a way that allowed for every piece to be displayed and viewed individually. This lent itself perfectly for an in-depth study of each piece, particularly the decorative elements featured on the items displayed. Designs in the exhibition ran from stately case clocks to lavishly-decorated commodes, multipurpose tables, serpentine sideboards, ornate secretaries and delicate canapés, each resplendent with intricate marquetry, gilt mounts and rare inlays, and each designed to tell a story. In the original exhibition design there was to be a text panel developed to serve as a decorative elements key. The key, called “Elements of Style”, was to be devised to illustrate images of various decorative details-- a carved ram’s head, a Greek urn, a laurel swag, a wreath, a trophy, a quatrefoil, marquetry, guilloche, a variety of feet including pad, claw-and-ball, hoof, spade, or bun-- with a brief description of historical context and significance, as in the following example:

Carved Ram’s Head: Neoclassical decorative element, originally found in antiquity and most often used to decorate alters as a representation of sacrifice. Robert Adam was the first to incorporate them in English furniture, architecture and decoration. Carved ram’s heads were popular decorations for tripod table knees, cane handles and as projections from which to hang swags, hats or crops.

Unfortunately, the panel was removed from the overall plan, due to concerns over the already-appreciable volume of texts and graphics being incorporated into each space. There was a brief discussion about turning our “Elements of Style” panel into a QR code, but the idea was canceled as being cost prohibitive. The loss of this content negatively

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<sup>71</sup> Prown, “ The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction,” 1-20.



impacted the exhibit's ability to critically analyze manifestations of culture through material production, and the use of objects as a primary source for the understanding of the relationship between group identity and material culture.

In sum, the story of furniture is inextricably linked with the story of our civilization. Interior furnishings have consistently reflected the aspirations, fashions and technologies of their time. Developments in furniture design have always been subject to socio-economic and political change, technological advances, necessity, status and fashion. Not all countries experienced the same influences, nor are the features of any one style universal for all pieces from their period. However, each period style does have its own defining characteristics, and each of those share an evinced relationship with the time and place in which it was created.

### Impact of Top Drawer

When the idea for *Top Drawer* was first discussed the exhibition was placed within the context of the initiatives that had been developed for the museum's strategic plan. We required an exhibition that increased public engagement and supported our efforts to ensure financial stability. An important secondary consideration was for us to mount an exhibition to serve as a strong counterpart to *Diana: A Celebration*.

*Top Drawer* fulfilled all of these requirements, as part of a selected mix of exhibits and programs that advanced our orienting principles, mission, values and attendance goals. The exhibition improved the museum's ability to connect with its community by building strong partnerships with other local businesses and institutions, and by providing audiences with an opportunity to study history and its impact from a

fresh perspective. By partnering traditional cultural-history themes with material culture and the decorative arts, we were able to share objects and history with the public in innovative ways.

*Top Drawer* also had an impact on our plans toward ensuring the Frazier's financial stability, providing the institution with an opportunity to capture and cultivate a new demographic of donors, both from private loans to the exhibition, and through dedicated programming and events surrounding the opening and run of the exhibit. By making the focus of the exhibition the history of a local business, we demonstrated to community leaders, foundations and other private philanthropic investors our shared commitment to their operations and objectives.

Beyond these strategic goals, *Top Drawer* had a pronounced impact on the long-term evolution of the museum's exhibits program. The success of the exhibition with both our core audience and new demographics indicated there was a strong interest in decorative arts and material culture topics. *Top Drawer* became the nexus of commercial, cultural, educational and historical matrices for future exhibitions.

The first to follow in its footsteps was a project that explored an area of cultural history *Top Drawer* was unable to survey, but one significant to our understanding of the cultural heritage of post-industrial-revolution America. The project consisted of a coffee-table book and exhibition titled *Kentucky by Design: Decorative Arts and American Culture (KBD)*, a comprehensive examination of the leading aspects of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Art Index of American Design in Kentucky from 1935 to 1942. The Index of American Design was a pictorial survey of approximately 18,000 renderings and 4000 photographs of selected examples of American decorative

and utilitarian designs from the Colonial era through the end of the 19th century.

*Kentucky by Design* was an examination of Kentucky's contribution to the Index, and the book contains essays written by leading scholars Erika Doss, Jerrold Hirsch and Jean M. Burks.

The exhibition opens at the Frazier in August of 2016, and will feature a selection of the original renderings together with objects directly related to them, along with a broad variety of correlated historical and interpretive materials. There will be an exploration of the work of the New Deal and the WPA in shaping Kentucky's sense of social and political identity; an art-historical analysis of the study of folk art, the Modernist aesthetic and national character from the New Deal era to the present day; a concentration on Shaker folk life and material culture specific to Kentucky; an illustrated history of quilt making in Kentucky; and an examination of the WPA Federal Writer's Project *Kentucky, A Guide to the Bluegrass State*, and its role in shaping Kentucky's sense of national and regional cultural character.

One of the questions that *Top Drawer* was unable to address was the lack of representation of American decorative arts in the Bittners workshop, and the dearth of requests made by Bittners clientele for the same. A potential answer to this question is revealed in *Kentucky by Design*, through a discussion of the history of the Index of American Design and its significance to the recognition of American decorative arts. The Index of American Design commissioned artist's renderings and photography to record American decorative culture from the Colonial era through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a large swath of American history that even by the time of the Great Depression had been largely ignored. As earlier noted, in 1918 Van Wyck Brooks published "On Creating a

Usable Past,”<sup>72</sup> declaring that the United States failed to sustain a cultural memory that could provide a comfortable sense of its own continuity.<sup>73</sup> The creators of the Index of American Design repeatedly used Brook’s term in describing the purpose for their undertaking: to provide the background materials needed to stimulate the appreciation and future development of American culture.<sup>74</sup> It was the goal of the Index to acquaint Americans with their unclaimed cultural legacy. *Kentucky by Design*, as a microcosm of the larger Index project, allows us to examine the broader themes presented in the national project from a local and regional perspective.

The Frazier exhibit is only the second ever developed focusing on the Index of American Design, and the accompanying catalog published by University Press of Kentucky is the fourth book to be written on the subject, and the first and only to focus on the Index in a single state. What makes this exhibition significant is that unlike *Top Drawer*, which focused on fine handmade furniture and antiques, KBD is a study of the nexus of design, function and regional culture. The exhibition highlights the democratic point of view that utilitarian objects created by working people reflect what is uniquely American in the creative spirit of our nation. Whereas *Top Drawer* featured serpentine sideboards, Empire secretaries, demi-lune side tables, Chippendale highboys and gilded convex mirrors, KBD highlights a range of items far more prosaic in nature-- pumpkin salt gourds, flax spinning wheels, cast-iron caldrons, coverlets, toy banks, tonic bottles, seed combs, quilts and coverlets.

While *Kentucky by Design* delves more deeply into the complexities of the

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<sup>72</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past.”

<sup>73</sup> Virginia Tuttle Clayton et al., *Drawing on America’s Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) 1-3.

<sup>74</sup> Clayton et al., *Drawing on America’s Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design*, 5-6

development of American decorative arts, the project would not have been possible without the success of *Top Drawer*. When the exhibition was included on the General Public Exhibit Survey it tested poorly, with only four percent of those surveyed showing an interest in the exhibition and catalogue. Nevertheless, the Frazier decided to keep KBD on its calendar as a strategic project, designed to promote the museum's commitment to developing original scholarly work relevant to contemporary audiences. Similar to *Top Drawer*, KBD tested well in the exhibition rubric, as meeting all essential criteria for a Frazier exhibition. The interest that *Top Drawer* generated in the history of decorative arts gave the museum the added confidence and impetus to pursue this project in earnest.

Another exhibition owing its existence to *Top Drawer* is titled *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous: Art, Fashion and Luxury in the Gilded Age*, running from October 4, 2014 to February 1, 2015. Based in part on *Impressionism, Fashion and Modernity* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2013, *Lifestyles* presented the spirit and material culture of America's Gilded Age through the era's most iconic artwork and artifacts of style. Fashionable dresses and accessories, American Impressionist paintings, and luxury products from the period are among those items featured. The exhibition surveys the Gilded Age on a national scale with a parallel exploration of the experiences of individual families from our region, bringing to life ways in which the Southeast in particular reacted and adapted to its novelty. Visitors experienced the extravagance of the Gilded Age and the birth of modern American consumer culture. Like *Top Drawer*, *Lifestyles* seeks to demonstrate how art mimics life, how trends in fashion, art, leisure and affluence share a direct connection to developments in politics, industry and economics. Inspired

by the book *Gilded Age* by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, the exhibition surveyed the changing trends in women's and men's fashions as advancements in industry, transportation and general commerce impacted the manufacture and distribution of apparel. There was an examination of the fine arts of the period, and how the growing affluence of the new middle class, and their concomitant demand for objects of luxury, created an entirely new market for American Impressionist paintings.

Finally, *Top Drawer* was responsible for a brand of exhibits programming at the Frazier that would focus on local and regional history. Horizon Research indicated that fifty-seven percent of those surveyed possessed a strong desire for more local-history exhibitions, especially those partnering with other area businesses of longstanding.<sup>75</sup> In response to these requests, we created a new exhibit sequence called *Hometown History Series*, seeking to explore the diversity of our region, and retell the eventful story of Louisville. Our goal is for this series to strengthen our community partnerships and help secure the Frazier as a go-to local-history museum. The first exhibition in this new series celebrated a century of the advertising firm Doe Anderson and its award-winning work for local, regional and national clients. The exhibition, titled *Doe Anderson: The Art of Persuasion*, was a retrospective of the firms' most memorable and iconic marketing and advertising campaigns documenting local, state and national history. Also, for the first time on public display, was the firm's collection of over five hundred Maker's Mark bottles, featuring every bottle they have ever produced.

Future exhibitions for this series include the Olmstead Parks, local neighborhoods such as Limerick and Germantown, a history of Naval Ordinance, The Louisville Ballet,

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<sup>75</sup> Paul Schulte, "Frazier International History: Awareness, Image and Usage Study." (Horizon Insight , 2006)

and others still in development.

Beyond the impact on the Frazier exhibitions program, *Top Drawer* introduced the museum to the concept of the corporate partner/sponsor. Prior to *Top Drawer*, the museum had never partnered with another institution or business to produce an exhibition, beyond traditional sponsorships. While new to the Frazier, partnerships such as these are not novel in the museum world, but as we learned this is a double-edged sword. The tribulations associated with this level of support have been a topic of study through the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD); a recent article on their website focuses on the cross benefits such a partnership may have for the institution and corporate sponsor, as well as advice for managing these often complex relationships. According to the article, partnerships with arts and cultural institutions provide a twofold opportunity for the sponsor: they receive acknowledgment for their efforts to serve the public interest, and they have a venue to address and promote corporate relations and marketing goals. Museums receive material benefits from these relationships as well, gaining an opportunity to connect with new demographics through corporate relationships, as well as cultivation and diversification of their base of financial support.<sup>76</sup>

As a first-time relationship of this nature for the Frazier, Bittners was relatively risk-free. The firm was owned and operated by the museum's founder Owsley Brown Frazier, thus ensuring an inherent level of compatibility between institutions. Still, the partnership was not without its issues and conflicts. First and foremost were the possible ramifications of the different staffs of two of Mr. Frazier's personal projects coming together to develop an exhibit. We knew from the beginning that there would be scrutiny

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<sup>76</sup> "Corporare Sponsorships," American Association of Art Museum Directors, accessed April 11, 2016, <http://www.aamd.org>.

from the general public and local media as to the commercial vs non-profit aspect associated with this project. As such, we maintained a strict policy throughout that all donations to the exhibition from Bittners were of the in-kind variety. We also sustained detailed accountings of all transactions between the two entities, in the event that information about the partnership was requested.

In terms of the project development itself, the Frazier was obligated to state its intentions and goals for the exhibition to the Bittners principals from the outset. For the museum this was an educational project; for Bittners it was strictly a marketing and sales opportunity. Often these goals came into direct conflict with one another-- the museum focused on maintaining its mission and values, and Bittners promoted its brand identity. The AAMD article cautions that in corporate partnerships the museum must be careful to ensure their mission remains uncompromised. To recapitulate, Bittners from the beginning wanted complete control over any information disclosed about their history, and final say over all exhibition content and design. The exhibition was designed around a timeline that highlighted significant events in both the history of the company and the city of Louisville, as well as principals involved in the firm's evolution. Unfortunately, when this concept was presented to Bittners, they rejected the content of the timeline for one that focused historically upon key moments in the growth of their business. We were unable to accept this alternative, because their timeline had been heavily redacted, and the remaining events depicted did not provide a clear picture of the firm's history or its connection to local events. In an effort to resolve this issue we explained to Bittners that the museum had a responsibility to present information that is factually accurate as well as educational. We also pointed out that the history of the firm and associated



individuals was public information, readily available through historic newspapers, periodicals and interviews at the University of Louisville archives. Bittners was unsparing in their refusal to use a fact-based timeline-- they had brand standards to maintain, as well as a responsibility to protect the privacy of their owners, clients and longtime supporters. Ethically, we could not publically present information we knew to be false or misleading. Bittners threatened to walk away from the project at this juncture, which left us at an impasse; it was incumbent upon us to find a solution.

From Bittners' perspective, as noted above, this exhibition was viewed as a marketing opportunity. The *Diana* exhibition was slated to bring in over one-hundred-thousand visitors from Louisville and surrounding states, and there was the potential for Bittners name and products to be viewed by a large percentage of those visitors. Bittners requested ultimate approval for all external marketing, design elements and text pertaining to the exhibition. This level of control by a corporate sponsor is not unheard of—in fact the AAMD article specifically discuss these types of issues with corporate donors, and the suggested response they provide is exactly the one we gave Bittners: we thanked and acknowledged them for their partnership and contributions, and then proceeded to reject their terms of sponsorship on the grounds that their required form of participation was in violation of the museum's interests, mission and values. We offered a compromise by providing the last bay in the exhibition gallery as a showcase for Bittners' contemporary design philosophy. In addition, we agreed to allow Bittners to control all external marketing materials if they agreed to work within our brand standards and absorb associated costs. Finally, we consented to collaborate with their designers on layout, in exchange for complete control over all exhibition content, which included

texts, text-panel designs and graphics. Understanding the significance of this exhibition for the marketing of their brand, Bittners agreed to the adjusted terms, and we moved forward.

Partnerships such as this can be a tremendous asset to the museum beyond exhibition support. The opportunity to attract new audiences through association with a reputable corporate sponsor exponentially increases the museum's ability to maximize public engagement. In the case of *Top Drawer*, this exposure came in the form of the lenders to the exhibition and the guest list of Bittners clientele that attended the exhibition opening and subsequent private events Bittners held during the run of the exhibition. Financial sustainability is also enhanced by the introduction of a new pool of philanthropic supporters, and in nurturing working relationships with corporate leaders and donors who have the potential to become part of the museum's board. The relationship with Bittners lenders, led to increase interest in the museum's other exhibition endeavors. Howard and Susan Vogt, owners of *Rodes* clothing store, developed an interest in the museum following *Top Drawer* and later became a corporate sponsor and lender to the *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* exhibition. Additionally, they hosted several high profile fashion shows and charity events at the Frazier, while also expressing an interest in serving on the Museums Board of Directors. Tracy Blue, the former editor and chief of *The Voice Tribune* has also shown an interest in serving on the museum's Board of Directors, following *Top Drawer*, she loaned the museum all the pieces in the Art Deco section of the exhibition. Heather French Henry and Steve Henry attended the opening of *Top Drawer* and later selected the Frazier as the location for their *White Christmas* exhibition featuring Rosemary Clooney memorabilia from the *White*

*Christmas* film. They too, hosted several high profile private events during the run of *White Christmas* introducing the museum to additional donor prospects.

Ultimately, *Top Drawer* not only exceeded the goals set forth by the institution, it was a resounding success with audiences. In March of 2014, the Frazier Museum received results from a Horizon Insight survey. (See Appendix J). The report titled *Community Awareness and Visitation Study* compared the survey results from 2014 to a similar survey that was conducted in April of 2010. The survey showed that Frazier Museum has improved in every category of awareness, image, and usage. This growth appears to be in direct correlation to the new exhibitions program. The recurring messaging about new and different things at the Frazier has built community awareness and positive brand image. Positive perceptions of audiences remained high compared to 2010, suggesting that the unique programming was received warmly by the increasing number of new visitors. The 2014 survey revealed that 60 percent of everyone asked said that the FHM was the place to go “where your family can learn more about history locally, nationally, or internationally. Additionally, the survey indicated that those adults who have never been to the Frazier are now the minority. What was 60 percent of the population in 2010, is now 41 percent in 2014. What this segment has heard about exhibits and activities lead them to believe that there is more to learn there about history- especially history about our local area. They were dramatically less likely to expect weapons and arms to be the main focus of a visit to the museum. Visitation to the museum was up eight percentage points in 2012-2013 alone. That represents a 30 percent increase compared to 2008-2009. They liked the the level of information they received about historical events, but most of all the enjoyed the special exhibits offered over a

course of time. The survey results show there is little question about the importance of special exhibits in the overall positive impressions from visitors. This outcome was the main goal of the new exhibition program outlined in the 2010 institutional plan. The diversity of programming and the broad scope of topics such as *Top Drawer*, have increased community interest in and awareness of the museum. The results of this survey have secured the museum's intentions to continue to expand the exhibitions program of history told through art and material-culture studies, and to enriched community relations with other local benefactors. As the program moves forward, the Frazier intends to expand upon the themes and issues addressed in *Top Drawer*.

#### Lessons Learned from *Top Drawer*

Three years have passed since the *Top Drawer* exhibition closed, but its legacy continues to impact the organization. As the museum passes its ten-year anniversary, it is once again poised on the edge of a complete regeneration. The question is, has the museum learned how to successfully navigate today's cultural landscape?

*Top Drawer* was a moderately sized but powerful exhibition, providing the museum with an abundance of learning opportunities, especially those pertaining to corporate partnerships. Every aspect of the exhibition was an exercise in compromise, boundaries, and revised expectations. Though the museum understood the inherent risks of a partnership with Bittners, there were no established policies governing exhibitions developed with and by corporations.

The most significant perceptions to overcome were the potential shadows of commercialization and artistic compromise. To safeguard against these potential public

perceptions, the museum needed to assert its control over all curatorial content from the outset. In some instances, this was easier said than done. One particular battle led the museum to change the entire scope of the show to focus less on the history of Bittners, and more on the history of furniture periods and styles. This shift occurred over a discrepancy between Bittners version of its historical time line, and the factual documented history of the firm, uncovered through curatorial research and discovery. When the museum could not compel the firm to agree to use a factual timeline, the decision was made to greatly reduce the exhibition's dependence upon many salient elements of Bittners' corporate history. Engaging in this particular confrontation was a learning curve for the museum, which in the past had not been held answerable or accountable to any outside entity for the type and quality of factual information it presented. Ultimately, what this lesson came down to, was learning what it meant to work with a functioning entity, one with its own set of standards and practices.

Adding to the exhibition's complexity was the need to beware of creating the impression that it would enhance the profit profile of Bittners business. When the exhibition was initially conceived, this was not a consideration, because the goal was to obtain loans of Bittners pieces from private lenders and organizations. However, when the search for objects led curators to the Bittners showroom and warehouse for museum-quality pieces, the issue became a concern. The museum did not wish to appear, in thought or deed, to be enhancing the market value of Bittners' inventory. For the first time, the museum was forced to consider that by virtue of its stature and public role, it stood to confer a certain kind of elevated validity to collections merely by exhibiting them. To protect against this eventuality, the museum did not list Bittners as the donor,

but rather listed their collections as privately owned.

As the exhibition evolved the learning curve continued. The next obstacle was the possibility that the museum could appear to be selling its reputation or exhibitions program in exchange for corporate financial support, a very real concern. To avoid this scenario, Bittners could not offer or donate money to help the museum with the development of the exhibition. Adding another facet of difficulty was the fact that Bittners was owned by the museum's founder; as a result, from the outset there was media speculation as to the very nature of the relationship. This would be a scenario the museum would face again when it decided to move forward with its Bourbon expansion.

Just as with *Top Drawer*, the bourbon expansion sees the museum engaging in a new corporate partnership with the KDA, and in particular with Brown Forman Distilleries, which is owned in large part by the Frazier family. As with *Top Drawer*, this partnership has led to the perception that the Frazier has become a marketing arm for a corporate entity. This latest endeavor is on a far larger scale than the partnership forged with Bittners for *Top Drawer*, and as such it is more fraught with potential for the museum to appear corrupted by commercialization. As with *Top Drawer*, and in an effort to preclude speculation, the museum has made every attempt to state that all content contained within the exhibition will be developed by the Frazier, and not subject to the biased and sometimes aggrandizing legends that are so commonly associated with the Bourbon industry. To further solidify its position, the Frazier has also stated that while the exhibition will be created in partnership with KDA, the museum will maintain full ownership over all aspects of the project. The advent of this new relationship, however, is eerily reminiscent of the Frazier's not-too-distant past and ill-fated relationship with

the British Royal Armouries. Then, as now, the relationship with the KDA places the Frazier into the position of serving a niche market.

A dispassionate observer might be inclined to view the Frazier's latest venture as an invitation for the museum to fall back into entrenched habits. The time has come for the institutional plan developed in 2009 to be updated, and the museum is still struggling with a less than clear mission statement. As with the original organizational concept, the Bourbon expansion project has been developed under the auspices, that if you build it they will come. Museum leaders have failed to perform adequate feasibility studies, and visitor surveys to determine if the local community is interested in one more Bourbon experience in a market already heavily saturated with similar entertainments. While all recent studies have shown that the new expanded exhibitions program has brought the museum into the lives and homes of more visitors than ever, it remains to be seen if the lessons learned as the museum has navigated these turbulent waters over the past ten years will stand it in good stead, and prevent the organization from trapping itself in a marketplace that has a finite shelf life for local, regional and national interest.

## CONCLUSION

### BRINGING IT TOGETHER

As this paper concludes, the remaining points to be made pertain to the shared relationship between the broader themes in contemporary museum theory addressed at the beginning of this paper, and what was learned from the example of *Top Drawer*.

The development of *Top Drawer* exemplified certain changes in museum theory and practice occurring across the industry. Many of today's museums serve as provocateurs relative to the status quo, in working to move beyond collection-based agendas, and embracing the communication of meaning across disciplinary boundaries with the inclusion of ideas that function beyond the culturally sanctioned expertise of curators. The Frazier History Museum demonstrated its receptiveness to this idea, by committing to a partnership with Bittners, and inviting their input and expertise in developing exhibition content and object selection for *Top Drawer*.

A reciprocal communication model is now practiced by many museums that no longer envision themselves in the traditional role of teacher to their audiences. The Frazier has embraced this change, by committing itself to the free flow of information through a multitude of outlets, such as on-site comment cards, social media applications, public programs, special events, exhibitions and community partnerships.

*Top Drawer* was, in part, a response to the museum's need for a more diversified exhibitions program: one that included items of interest and relevance for women,



families, and children, and subject matters that focused on other areas of history, such as fine and decorative arts, and local and popular culture. Audiences expressed a desire to more fully comprehend relationships between their community and the world at large, and they wanted history to be told from more than just a North American perspective.

In an effort to heighten awareness of the diverse audiences being served, the Frazier has developed exhibitions that view familiar historical events through a contemporary perspective. The *Spirits of the Passage* exhibition, for example, told the story of the transatlantic slave trade from the perspective of the enslaved. The *Lewis and Clark Experience* features accounts told from the perspective of Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and other non-Anglo Saxon Europeans. In addition, the museum has been working to introduce a more diverse voice throughout its second floor American History Galleries. Inclusiveness is now a central tenet of the museum's mission and management, which has inspired diversified programming that is varied in its priorities and content.

*Top Drawer* was the Frazier's first attempt at integrating the relationship between the local and the global, drawing direct correlations between historic periods and trends that were popular in their time, to periods and trends that are preferred by modern-day local residents. Audiences were also provided with an understanding of the shared relationship between material culture and social, political and economic history.

Since *Top Drawer*, the museum has used this format on other exhibitions. Selected examples are: *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous: Louisville and the Gilded Age*; *Kentucky by Design: The Decorative Arts and American Culture*; *Doe Anderson*:

*Kentucky and Global Marketing*; and *The Bourbon Expansion*. Private lenders and local businesses were invited to participate directly in all of these exhibitions, demonstrating the Frazier's commitment to telling a collective historical story with global implications through direct community interaction.

The proliferation of museums over the last decade has destabilized routine expectations, often requiring institutions to serve as building blocks for a knowledge-based economy and cultural tourism. However, the continued popularity of museums, as well as the rapid growth in their size and numbers, has not coequally translated into funding sources; instead, museums are challenged to create value. More museums have begun to embrace the proposition that they serve as destinations for entertainment, and locations for public assembly, in addition to being centers for scholarship, display and preservation. There is a widely shared sentiment that this perspective lends itself well to communicating public value, enticing audiences, and generating philanthropic support at every level.

In the fall of 2015, the Frazier began working on a plan to incorporate the story of bourbon into its temporary and permanent exhibitions program. The history and economic importance of bourbon is critical to the story of Kentucky, with ramifications that stretch across the globe. Just as in *Top Drawer*, the bourbon expansion sees the museum engaging in a new partnership, this time with the Kentucky Distillers' Association (KDA), a group comprised of most of the major bourbon distillers in the Commonwealth. The Frazier will develop, fabricate and install the concept of a new bourbon-oriented visitor experience, and KDA will ensure that the project serves as an official debarkation point to the Kentucky Bourbon Trail® adventure and the Kentucky

Bourbon Trail Craft Tour®, both of which are owned and trademarked by the KDA. Initial plans call for bourbon-related exhibits and visitor experiences that impart the history and cultural development of one of Kentucky's signature industries, and interactive learning programs and events that will introduce the growing number of bourbon distilleries throughout Kentucky. The stated goal is for the Frazier to become an international tourist destination. It is the hope of museum's leaders that this plan will allow them to attract a meaningful percentage of the over 700,000 visitors partaking annually in the Kentucky Bourbon Trails experience.

The notion of the museum as a magnet for cultural tourism is not new. Earlier in this paper, there was a lengthy discussion on the building of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, Spain, and the subsequent economic impact the tourist dollars brought to the local economy. In the same spirit, but on a smaller scale, is the Frazier bourbon project.

In addition to serving as centers for cultural tourism, a larger number of museums are embracing the blockbuster exhibition. The mass appeal of these kinds of exhibits has provided an accrual in the value of museums to contemporary culture, and they are viewed as tools for sustained support. The Frazier took this theory to heart when, as part of its new exhibitions program, it added blockbusters as a criterion for exhibition selection. This led the museum to book popular exhibitions such as *Da Vinci: The Genius*; *Diana: A Celebration*; *The Eye of Napoleon*; and *Grid-Iron Glory*. Museum leaders believed that the broad appeal of these exhibitions would lead to the same success experienced by other institutions, in capturing new audiences, driving admissions revenue, and increasing dwindling membership numbers. At the same time, installing fully-formed temporary exhibits ideally provides curatorial departments with added time

and resources to develop the kinds of mission-based, in-house local exhibitions that serve as a counter balance to the universal themes presented by blockbusters.

In addition to growth in revenue and membership, the museum believed that this new exhibitions schedule, subsequent public programs, and aligned special events would enhance public interest and attract new levels of museum leadership. The Frazier, like so many organizations around the nation, has members who have held positions on their board far past their expiration date, and for reasons other than the betterment of the organization. With the passing of Owsley Brown Frazier, the museum was able to look at the the make-up of its board of directors as well as its process for selecting new members, and decided it was time for an overhaul. The 2009-2013 board of directors largely consisted of European-American males over the age of 50. If the museum was to fully embrace the concept of inclusion, as stated by their strategic plan, then recruiting a diverse population to serve within its walls must be a priority.

The Frazier is not alone in this realization. An article in the *New York Times* from March 2016, called *Stretching the Matrix for Museum Diversity*, highlights the Speed Museum's commitment to engaging a more diverse board of directors. The article reports that a survey done in 2007 by the Urban Institute revealed that eighty-six percent of the board members of American non-profit institutions were European-American. Museums across the nation are working to create incentives to attract more diversity in positions of leadership. Public programs and exhibitions have generated a new level of involvement from communities, in particular young professionals and their families. There is increased interest over a more diverse demographic to serve in leadership

capacities on various committees and in the boardrooms of institutions across the United States.

Exhibitions such as *Top Drawer* were designed, in one measure, to attract new prospects to fill these positions, identified and cultivated as a result of their association with certain aspects of the show's development and realization. *Top Drawer* gave the museum an opportunity to introduce itself to Bittners clientele, who as a group were younger than 50, well educated, financially secure, socially active, and ethnically diverse. This was an appealing demographic for an organization whose typical age group was over 50, male, and Caucasian. This was a transfusion the museum's board needed to ensure that the organization continued to be progressive in its practices, programs and exhibitions.

In 2009, the Frazier Museum's Board and Staff made a conscious decision to come together and develop a plan that would help the failing organization overcome the obstacles of relevancy, audience engagement, leadership and sustainability. The plan they devised allowed the Frazier to clarify for themselves and the community, what they aspire to be, whom they serve and why it matters. The museum turned outward to the community, inviting them to take ownership over the organization, as partners in education, philanthropy, and leadership. The museum has accomplished this through a diverse and robust exhibitions program, special events and public programs, enhanced membership opportunities, donor circles, and community partnerships. The museum has made a connection between people and performance. It has developed relationships and delivered a return on investment, listened deeply to its stakeholders' needs and worked tirelessly to serve those needs.

Exhibitions like *Top Drawer* paved the way for the museum to explore new frontiers in exhibition development, audience engagement, financial sustainability, and museum leadership. It demonstrated that when museums are bold, inventive, responsible and creative with ideas that matter, they will persist as preeminent and uniquely relevant communication centers well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Sheraton Buffet with Knife Boxes



Figure 2: Bittner Scaled Drawing of Chippendale Highboy



Figure 3: Bittner custom made table top (wall mounted)



Figure 4: Chippendale style grouping



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## Appendix A: Top Drawer Exhibition Brief

### Top Drawer Exhibition Brief

**Project Name:**

- Top Drawer: 150 Years of Bittners

**Project Sponsor:**

- Dr. Madeleine Burnside, Executive Director Frazier History Museum
- Douglas Riddle, President of Bittners Interior Design

**Project Curator:**

- Wesley Spencer

**Associate Curator:**

- Andrew Kelly

**Project Manager:**

- Brigid Muldoon

**Audience:** This exhibition is intended for general museum audience as well as connoisseurs of antiques and furniture making

- Family
- Children
- Women & Men
- Craftsmen
- Collectors & Craftsmen
- Historians
- Novices

**Stakeholders:**

- Madeleine Burnside: Project Sponsor, controls entire exhibition and budget
- Douglas Riddle: Co-Project Sponsor, signs off on all designs and ideas for project, responsible for managing Bittner staff on the project
- Ben Small: Vice President of Bittner, assisting in researching and locating artifacts for the exhibition, exhibition design, and client relations
- Kevin Guthrie: Director of Exhibitions, oversees project manager and exhibition staff, insures proper fabrication, installation and maintains exhibition budget
- Krista Snider- Director of Marketing and PR, responsible for creating and initiating marketing plan to advertise exhibition
- Jessica Hardison- Chief Financial Officer, responsible for maintain and approving exhibition budget, and marketing budget
- Jodi Lewis- Director of Education, responsible for working with curator to create educational programming
- Frannie Guenther- Marketing Director for Bittners, responsible for developing a

marketing plan with Krista for the advertisement of the exhibition

- Christopher Prather- Assistant Manager of Bittners, responsible for working with curator to facilitate all work between Bittners and Frazier
- Amy Cimba- Head Designer for Bittners, in charge of creating design for the “Bittner Today” room.
- Kelly Williams: Curator of Collections, is in charge of all loan requests, facilitating loan acquisitions and returns, handles insurance, and oversees installation of all exhibition artifacts
- Brigid Muldoon – Project Manager, develops schedules and oversees the fabrication and installation of exhibition and manages exhibition team
- Monty Fields –Preparator, handles fabrication and installation of exhibition
- Julie Breeding- Graphic designer, responsible for creating design of exhibition text panels

**Exhibition Objectives:**

- Follow the goals set forth in the strategic plan, and develop an exhibition that interest a larger demographic
- Follow recommendations of MAP assessment, and provide more local history exhibitions

**Project Objectives: SMART**

- *Specific:* Bittners 157-year history represented by furniture made by or sold by company
- *Measureable:* Ticket Sales, Guest Surveys, and MAP Focus Group
- *Agreed:* All stakeholders agree with the exhibition objectives and that they will provide the services required of the to complete the exhibition
- *Realistic:* The elements we have put together can be fabricated and implemented by the exhibition opening
- *Time Constrained:* Exhibition opens November 16, 2012 – January 1, 2013

**Deliverables:**

- Curatorial Staff- Responsible for researching and developing all exhibition content, writing text, selecting graphics, creating interactives, designing space, selecting and placing all artifacts and conducting interviews, and provide the information in a reasonable time frame for the exhibition staff to fabricate and install
- Marketing Staff – Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan
- Project Manager – Maintain schedules and budgets, work on fabrication and implementation of exhibition, facilitate between exhibition principles and exhibition staff
- Exhibition staff – complete fabrication and installation by completion date
- Collection staff – send loan requests, arrange transport and schedule pick-ups and drop off of furniture, oversee installation of artifacts
- Facilities team- coordinate gallery prep, HVAC and Humidity controls, design



- and adjust exhibition lighting
- Cleaning Staff – Prep space for opening, dust and maintain a clean gallery throughout the duration of exhibition
- Security – Monitor exhibition space for artifact security, develop a plan for gallery monitoring by security staff
- Education department- develop an educational program for group and school tours
- Development Department – Develop a plan to obtain money through gifts and or grants to fund the exhibition
  
- This exhibition falls within the parameters for our new exhibition programming plan as set forth under our new institutional plan created during the strategic planning process. Top Drawer will serve as a catalyst for other decorative arts exhibitions to be created or hosted by the Frazier History Museum in our attempt to meet the changing needs of our museum demographic.

**Project Completion:** November 16, 2012

**Exhibition Budget:** \$40,000

**Link to Strategic Objectives and/ or other projects**

***We agree that this is a viable project. We authorize the beginning of the planning process.***

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Madeleine H. Burnside Ph.D.  
 Executive Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Douglas Riddle  
 President, Bittner Interior Design

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Wesley Spencer  
 Curator

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Andrew Kelly  
 Co- Curator

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Brigid Muldoon  
 Project Manager

## Appendix B: Top Drawer Interpretive Plan

### *Top Drawer: 150 Years of Bittners* Interpretive Plan

#### Description

*Top Drawer: 150 Years of Bittners* is a four-thousand-square-foot exhibition that explores how a German immigrant's custom cabinetmaking shop became a Louisville tradition. The audience will experience American, English, and Continental furniture inspired by the great monarchs and cabinetmakers, as well as the story of how the political, cultural and social forces of these periods continue to inspire the aesthetic of our homes. The gallery is divided into three interpretive precincts: historical furniture styles, historical periods, and Bittners Interior Design Firm today. We have also included a section dedicated to the reconstruction of Bittners workshop, featuring a biographical panel on Gustave Bittner and his son William Bittner.

Component: Entrance and Introduction

#### Messages/Objectives

- To make a powerful first impression and to emphasize the long and rich history of the company in the city of Louisville,
- Introduce the Bittners Interior Design firm, and showcase its versatility, and creativity.
- Transport visitors into the Bittner workshop as it looked in 1854, and how it looks today
- Introduce the founder of Bittners Gustave Bittner, his son William and to provide information on the very heart of Bittners its workshop.
- To encourage visitors to want to learn more about the history of this firm, and the history of furniture

#### Media and Means of Expression

- Text panels: Introduction, G. Bittner and William, and Workshop
- Oral History Interview: Video monitor running the oral history interview with Hubert Schuwey and Brian Keenan, where they are discussing the firm, their careers and education, and sharing stories of their experiences
- Bittners and Ballet: Video Projector, a film loop of the Bittners workshop and craftsmen building a table, finishing, while offering an artistic insight into how they acquire the lumber for their re-purposing work.
- The Cabinet Maker: A re-construction of the Bittners Workshop, featuring materials and tools of the trade, as well as patterns and finishes. The space

will demonstrate how little the creative and process has changed over the last century

- The Table: An interactive art installation, hanging at eighty-four-inch diameter table-top mounted on the wall to highlight the various finishes and inlays done by the Bittners craftsmen. Visitors will be allowed to touch and photograph the piece.
- Background Audio: Playing throughout the space will be a piano piece composed for the exhibition and featured in the introductory video loop.

#### Component: Historical Furniture Styles

##### Message/Objectives

- Introduce audience to the makers of well known furniture styles and how the elements of design featured on those pieces is related to the political and social culture of the time.
  - History of Thomas Chippendale and Chippendale furniture, along with the history of the Adams brothers and Adams furniture, Thomas Sheraton, and George Hepplewhite
  - The History Director/Consulate Furniture style and the influence of French Architects Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine on the style as well as the transition to French Empire
  - The History of French Empire and its relationship with Napoleon Bonaparte as well as the influence of Percier and Fontaine, we also explore the elements of design that are influenced by the campaigns and political intrigues of Napoleon.
  - The relationship shared between French Empire and American Empire and the makers such and Duncan Phyfe and Charles Lannuier
- ##### Media and Means of Expression
- Artifacts: Examples of furniture from each of the styles, pieces featured will be fine antiques and reproduction antiques either made by Bittners craftsmen or sold by the firm
  - Text Panels designed with graphics featuring original sketches from the workbooks of the famous cabinet makers and architects
  - Large Wall Graphics featuring colored photos and paintings of historic rooms designed for and furnished with examples of period pieces. i.e. Napoleon's study at Malmaison, the Adam designed entry hall at Osterly

Park featuring Hepplewhite furnishings

- Accessorized with Renaissance bronze statuary and 19<sup>th</sup>-century French porcelains, as well as mirror-glasses and girandoles designed in the style.

Component: Historical Periods

Messages/Objectives

- To highlight the differences between historical styles and historical eras. For example, whereas Louis XVI furniture is a distinct style directly related to a single country and a single monarch's relatively brief reign, Victorian furniture is a reflection of a lengthy and geographically disparate era.
- To discuss the social, cultural, and political influences that developed the Regency periods, and the elements that define this historical period, such as the convex mirror, as well as the use of animal motifs like the hairy-paw foot, lion's head and fish.
- Focus on the social, cultural, and political influences that developed the Biedermeier period, and the decorative elements that define it.
- Focus on the history of the Victorian Era, and the social, cultural, and political influences that developed this unique period in furniture, architecture, and dress.
- The history of the Art Deco period and the social, cultural, and political influences of this time in history

Media and Means of Expression

- Artifacts: Examples of furniture from each of the styles, pieces featured will be fine antiques and reproduction antiques either made by Bittners craftsmen or sold by the firm
- Text Panels designed with graphics featuring original sketches from the workbooks of the famous cabinet makers and architects
- Large Wall Graphics featuring colored photos and paintings of historic rooms designed for and furnished with examples of period pieces.
- Accessorized with Bronze statuary

## Components: Bittner Today and the Future

### Meaning/Objectives

- Introduce the audience to Bittners today, and develop a designer showcase room featuring the best Bittners has to offer, and a way to explore where the company is now and where it wants to go in the future.
- Design a space that feels like a room in a home, transport the audience to a place where they can visualize living this lifestyle.

### Media and Means of Expression

- Room Build featuring paneled walls, reclaimed lumber floors decorated with fine antiques and newly designed Bittner crafted pieces, mixed with contemporary decorative elements, statuary, books, and piece of contemporary art
- Space to be designed by Bittners staff

## Appendix C: Object Text

### CHIPPENDALE—1760 - 1780

Thomas Chippendale, England (1718 – 1779)

King George III, King of Great Britain and King of Ireland, King of Great Britain and Ireland, and later King of the United Kingdom and Hanover, 1760 - 1820

Thomas Chippendale was a London cabinet maker and interior designer. He was the first decorative artist to publish a comprehensive book of signature furniture designs—The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker's Director—in 1754, 1755, and in an updated third, final and larger edition in 1762. Establishing the popular English taste of the period and widely adapted by American cabinet makers by the 1770s, what came to be known as the Chippendale style incorporated Gothic, Chinese, French Rococo and, later, Neoclassical motifs in the manner of Adam, to the Queen Anne style prevalent during the reign of George II (1727 – 1760). In America Chippendale furnishings were made primarily in the fine workshops of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newport, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Charleston, where original forms such as the highboy and block-front chest were perfected, and an overall more restrained approach than that illustrated in The Director held forth.

Solid mahogany was always and remains today the preferred primary wood for Chippendale furnishings, allowing for much of the deep, expressive carving and endurance native to this robust, vigorous, straightforward style; Japanning (painted decoration imitating lacquer) and gilding were further popular applications. Cherry was employed by the cabinet makers in Connecticut, and Walnut in certain parts of the South. Signature motifs of Chippendale style—though difficult and at times problematic to isolate-- include the highly-evolved knee-carved cabriole leg, claw-and-ball and hairy-paw feet, rockwork, or “rociaille”, and shellwork patterns, fretwork and tracery, the pointed Gothic arch, chinoiserie, ornately-carved broken pediments, aprons, skirts and ogee brackets, Greek order pilasters and quarter-columns, and ribbon-work carving.

### ADAM—1780 - 1830

Robert Adam, England (1728 – 1792)

James Adam, England (1732 – 1794)

King George III

Robert Adam and his brothers John and James were the most renowned and influential English architects and interior designers of the eighteenth century. Robert's publication The Ruins of the Palace of Diocletian (1764) and the seminal book co-authored with his younger brother Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam (1773 – 1778; and 1779) established a new vernacular of Neoclassicism in the decorative arts, greatly influenced the late-Chippendale, Hepplewhite, Sheraton, Empire, Directoire and Consulate styles, and was the founding inspiration for much of the Federal neoclassical Empire and Greek Revival periods in North America between 1780 and 1850. Though Adam is rarely referred to as a distinct furniture style it is impossible to imagine virtually any named period between the last-quarter of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the Victorian era that does not bear the stamp of his ascendancy.

Motifs popularized by Adam were many and varied, including husk chains and festoons, drapery swags, stylized radiating-fan inlay, oval medallions in countless

variation, rosettes, Doric, Ionian and Corinthian columns and pilasters, trailing vines of acanthus leaves and bellflowers, musical, armorial and floral trophies, vases, urns, wheat sheaves, arabesques, garlands, lyres, masks, profiles, animal motifs and statuary

### **HEPPLEWHITE—1780 - 1810**

George Hepplewhite, England (c. 1727 – 1786)

King George III

If Robert Adam had been a cabinet maker his workshop might have been named A. Hepplewhite and Co. of Cripplegate, London. Though what little is known of George Hepplewhite the man is ambiguous at best, two years following his death his resourceful widow Alice published the first edition of the Hepplewhite company's volume of three-hundred furniture designs called The Cabinet Maker and Upholsterers Guide—standard reference for the eponymous style it made eminently fashionable in England and North America from around 1780 to 1810.

The Hepplewhite style is distinctive and immediately recognizable—light, formal, elegant, practical, urbane furniture in the Adam Neoclassical taste. Decoratively painted, lacquered, or gilded, predominantly executed in mahogany highlighted by harmonious marquetry in satinwood, maple, boxwood, sycamore, tulipwood, birch, ash or pine, and unfailingly graceful and well-proportioned. Newly-introduced standard furniture forms attributed by Hepplewhite were oval and shield-back chairs, bow-, and serpentine-fronted sideboards, narrow, mannerly glazed secretaries, and short chests of drawers. In addition to many of the motifs found in Adam vocabulary, other common elements are square or circular tapering legs—at times reeded or fluted-- spade feet, the Prince-of-Wales plume, H-form stretchers, and slender curvilinear seat fronts, backs and arms.

### **SHERATON—1790 - 1805**

Thomas Sheraton, English (1751 – 1806)

King George III

The popular conception that distinguishes the Sheraton style from Chippendale and Hepplewhite is based on Thomas Sheraton's four-volume directory The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing Book published in London between 1791 – 1794. The Sheraton period, however noteworthy, was short-lived and thrived only from about 1790 to 1805. The contour of Sheraton's important early designs were heavily influenced by the Adam, Hepplewhite and late French Capetian-Dynasty styles, and were sought after for their classical proportions, easy gentility, clinical perfection, and unique functionality. Although Sheraton and Hepplewhite shared much the same decorative lexicon and a penchant for lucid, slender form, the true distinguishing characteristics of Sheraton are painted and decorated surfaces, an emphasis on verticality and rectangularity and a more pronounced, calculated sense of lightness and attenuation.

Mahogany remained a standard wood, though Sheraton maintained a personal affinity for satinwood, rosewood and tulipwood, and his furniture is conspicuously enlivened by his willingness to engage these lighter, more colorful and workable materials. Sheraton is best remembered for introducing new standards of English furniture forms-- including pencil-thin-reeded canopied tester beds, graduating nests of small side tables, lady's writing desks, demi-lune consoles, sofa tables, the ever-standard-classic saber-leg tripod or quadrupedal dining table, and the oddly queer, rare harlequin.

## **DIRECTOIRE—1795 – 1799/ CONSULATE 1799 – 1804**

The Directory, an Executive Body of Five Directors elected by the Council of Ancients to preside over France's bicameral legislature in the second-to-last phase of the French Revolution, November 2, 1795 – November 10, 1799. The Original Members of the Directory were: Jean-Francois Rewbell, PaulFrancois Jean Nicolas, vicomte de Barras, Louis Marie de la Revelliere-Lepeaux, Lazare Nicolas Marguerite Carnot, and Etienne-Francois Le Tourner. The Consulate, an Official Assembly of Three Consuls of the First French Republic ruling France in the final phase of the French Revolution: Jean-Jacques Regis de Cambaceres, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Charles-Francois Lebrun, November 10, 1799 – May 18, 1804. The Directoire and Consulate styles were established by Pierre Fontaine and Charles Percier, cardinal French architects responsible for the later more consequential and formidable Empire style that evolved immediately and naturally from their interior designs and seminal publications Palais, Maisons, et autres Edifices de Rome Moderne (1802) and Recueil des Decorations Interieures (1812). Decorative art of the Directoire and the Consulate was Frances' introduction to much of the neoclassical repertory of the Adam brothers. Transitional, minimalist and relatively conservative in approach, the worthiest contribution of these brief periods to the evolution of Continental furniture were as requisite precursors to the Empire period. Furniture of the Directoire and the Consulate, in addition to its austerity, is recognizable for minimal carving, planar expanses, reliance on grained veneers and fruitwoods, confined use of marquetry and ormolu, and allusion to neoclassical architecture. Among the favored ornaments were those symbolic of the post-monarchical French Republic, such as Prygian caps of liberty, lictor axes, and oak, laurel and acanthus crowns; other motifs derived from classicism included the swan, lozenge, star, Greek palm and lyre.

## **EMPIRE—1805 - 1830**

France, 1804 – 1830; North America 1810/1815 – 1840

Napoleon Bonaparte, France (1769 1821)

Emperor Napoleon I, Emperor of the French, 1804 - 1815

Pierre Fontaine and Charles Percier's brilliant re-design of Napoleon's palace residence Chateau de Malmaison during the Consulate period established the official Empire style in Paris, fostered by a cult of antiquity based on the archaeological revival of closely-copied antique Greek, Roman, Etruscan and Egyptian forms. Empire furniture in France and North America was not dissimilar and characterized by the formality, mass, symmetry, resoluteness, density and ravishment of Fontaine and Percier. It was executed largely in solid or veneered mahogany liberally mounted with bronze-dore appliques, metal inlays or giltwood highlights, and displayed little-to-no carving, lacquering or marquetry. An integrated, rigid and encompassing language of decoration embellished this furniture, including but not limited to laurel wreaths, anthemion and key patterns, winged classical or mythical figures, Olympian gods, emblems of Imperial triumph, eagles, swans, lions, chimeras, caryatids, sphinxes, lyres, flaming torches, stars and animal- and character-masks.



## **AMERICAN EMPIRE in the FEDERAL PERIOD 1810/1815 - 1840**

Charles-Honore Lannuier (1779 – 1819) French-born American

Duncan Phyfe (1768 – 1845) Scottish-born American

The Federal Period covers a range of styles in vogue following the establishment of the American Federation in 1789- predominantly Hepplewhite, Sheraton, Regency, Greek Revival and Empire. Two New York cabinetmakers are credited with codifying and domesticating the Empire style in the United States-- Charles-Honore Lannuier and Duncan Phyfe—conflating the mass, exuberance and triumphal spirit of their French contemporaries to the simple, handsome, polished orthodoxy of the Federal style. Their surpassing self-confidence and artistry resulted in some of the finest, most animated and sensational furniture ever made in North America. The thriving workshops of Lannuier and Phyfe produced intuitively recognizable furniture known for its good character, attention to detail, superlative carving, exquisite mounting, perfect construction, incredibly rich finish and conspicuous mastery. Forms most often associated with American Empire are klismos chairs, scroll-arm and scroll-back sofas, settees and armchairs, Greek daybeds, recamier and meredienne, and pier, card and center tables. In addition to the liberal and innovative use of mirror glass, applied giltwood and bronze-dore, other distinctive elements in the American style unselfconsciously engage the symbols of post-Revolutionary bounty—colossal eagles, swaggering fruit trees, rich drapery swags, bulging wheat wreathes and aggressive cornucopia. Considered high connoisseurs of fine woods and their properties both Lannuier and Phyfe favored rosewood, Brazilian mahogany, walnut and zebrawood, and neither shied away from embellishments theretofore considered by their illiberal clientele to be a thing less-than-tasteful.

## **REGENCY—1811 – 1830**

The Prince of Wales, Prince Regent, 1811 – 1820, succeeding to the Throne as

King George IV, King of the United Kingdom and Hanover, 1820 - 1830

This era dates from the Regency of the Prince of Wales to the end of his reign as King George IV. The Regency period coincides with the Federal style in North America, the Empire style in France, and the Biedermeier style in Austria. Regency furniture was an eclectic, refined and practical style based on a vernacular interpretation of the revival in classical ideas whether they were Greek, Roman or Egyptian. An incorporation of certain features of the Directoire, a simplification of eighteenth century traditions, skillful design, admirable execution and excellent proportion were hallmarks. Mahogany and rosewood predominated, together with metal ornament, marquetry and gilding. Favorite motifs were the hocked animal leg, the lion monopodium, archaic lion masks, the swan, lyre and anthemion, acanthus, paterae, rosaces, winged sun discs, lotus flowers and the pagoda. An itinerant yet highly-popular transitional style handled well by a select few cabinetmakers and designers from around 1815 to 1830, among them Thomas Chippendale Jr., Henry Holland, Thomas Hope and George Smith.

### **BIEDERMEIER—1815 – 1848**

Francis I, First Emperor of Austria, 1804 – 1835

Ferdinand I and V, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary and Bohemia, 1835 - 1848

The Biedermeier style originated in Austria, the German States and Scandinavia, and was a material federation of many of the distinct features found in the Late-Georgian, Regency, Directoire and Empire styles. Biedermeier is in fact a style that has far outlived its own period—enduringly popular well into the early 1920s, then again in the mid-to-late 1930s, and once more a strong revival in vogue towards the end of the twentieth century to the present day. Cherry, ash, oak, birch, walnut and pear woods were preferred to mahogany and rosewood, and the use of spalted, burlled or flame-figured woods was celebrated. Biedermeier in its best incarnation strived for a simplified symmetrical historicism, progressive scale, truth in materials, and the conscious expression of superior craftsmanship and finish. Deviation from Neoclassical axioms, marquetry, applied metal and painted ornamentation were eschewed until the late, post-1830 period, although these elements ultimately grew to define much of the stylistic canon of Biedermeier as we know it. Ebonized detail, the use of animated woods and constraint in ornament remained customary and faithful elements throughout.

### **VICTORIAN—1840 - 1901**

Queen Victoria (Alexandrina Victoria 1819 – 1901, House of Hanover)

Monarch of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, 1837 – 1901

The Victorian period in England and America is differentiated by an admixture of stylistic revivals. The Bittners workshops thrived at the height of this era, and the unhinged latitude typifying the Victorian taste to great extent well-matched both the demands of their clientele and the superlative skills of their cabinetmakers. Cobbled together from Jacobean, Gothic, Flamboyant, Grotesque, Romanesque, Renaissance, Queen Anne, Chippendale, Empire and Romantic styles—no stone remained unturned, no imaginable amalgam of motifs and elements dismissed, no singularity of style sacrosanct, no challenge to the maker unmet.

For all of its provocative self-romance and diversity American Victorian furniture in retrospect is a marvel of stylistic indomitability—the almost-exclusive use of mahogany, rosewood, maple and oak, incredibly solid craftsmanship, the presence of deep, aggressive carving, molding, layering and shaping, obsidian almost-opaque finishes, a virtual absence of painting, marquetry and metal applications, and a compelling, at times intimidating, sense of scale, weight, presence and sentimentality.

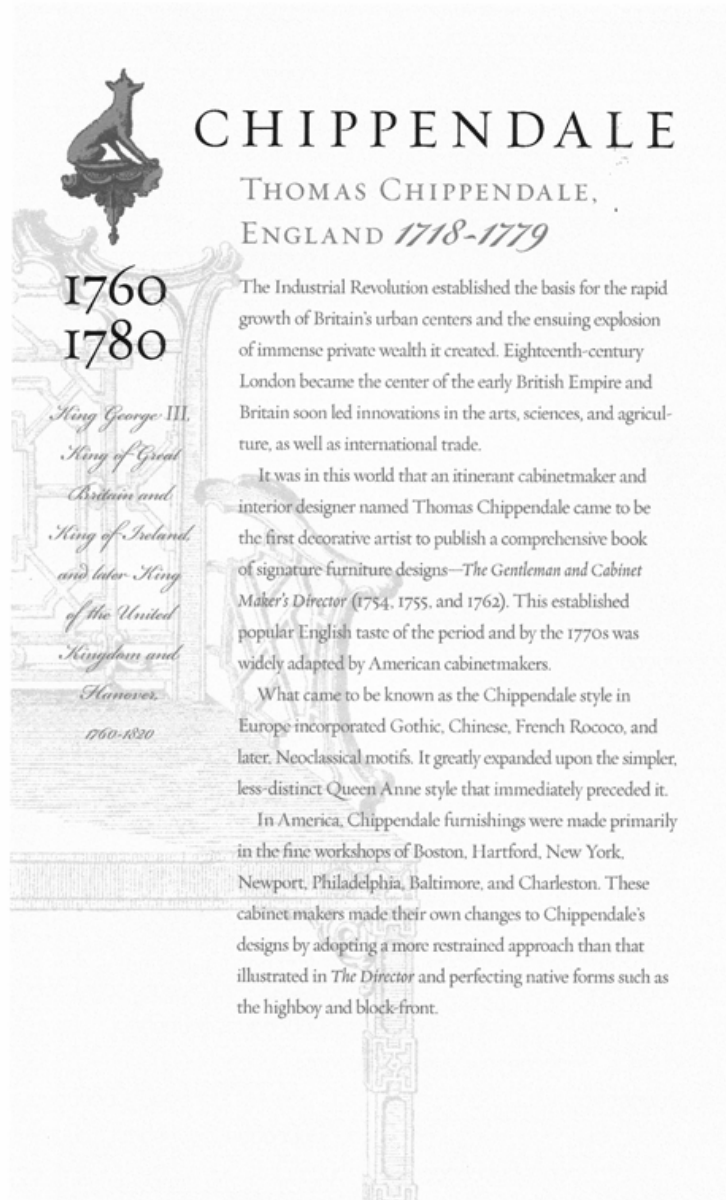
### **MID-CENTURY MODERN—1945 – 1965**

Flag of The United Nations

Mid-century modern furniture is one aspect of a larger architectural, industrial and graphic-design movement in North America, Scandinavia, Brazil and Japan that blossomed during the post-World War II period through the mid- to late-1960s. This furniture was not so much referred to as being a thing made as it was a thing *designed* and *manufactured*. Ergonomics, practicality, technical innovation and a sense of unified rational simplicity were key elements in this late-modern style. The embodiment of post-war cultural rebirth and enlightened progressive humanism, the mid-century modern aesthetic championed key tenets of the International Style—abhorrence of ornament,

function in form, and truth to material. Although the use of steel, leather, organic and synthetic glass and plastics accounted for a great deal of its pragmatic allure, a core group of these modernists-- Alvar Alto, Norman Cherner, Ray and Charles Eames, Arne Jacobsen, Sam Maloof, Tendo Mokko, George Nakamshami, George Nelson, Isamu Noguchi, Eero Saarinen, Hans Wegner and Suri Yanagi-- embraced the possibilities inherent in mahogany, rosewood, teak and laminate ply/woods as organic materials appropriate to the application of industrial design. This furniture, and the global fraternity that inspired it, is exemplary and incredibly intelligent, bright, fun, useful, optimistic, inspiring and practical.

## Appendix D: Exhibition Text Panels



**CHIPPENDALE**

THOMAS CHIPPENDALE,  
ENGLAND 1718-1779

1760  
1780

*King George III,  
King of Great  
Britain and  
King of Ireland  
and later King  
of the United  
Kingdom and  
Hanover,  
1760-1820*

The Industrial Revolution established the basis for the rapid growth of Britain's urban centers and the ensuing explosion of immense private wealth it created. Eighteenth-century London became the center of the early British Empire and Britain soon led innovations in the arts, sciences, and agriculture, as well as international trade.

It was in this world that an itinerant cabinetmaker and interior designer named Thomas Chippendale came to be the first decorative artist to publish a comprehensive book of signature furniture designs—*The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker's Director* (1754, 1755, and 1762). This established popular English taste of the period and by the 1770s was widely adapted by American cabinetmakers.

What came to be known as the Chippendale style in Europe incorporated Gothic, Chinese, French Rococo, and later, Neoclassical motifs. It greatly expanded upon the simpler, less-distinct Queen Anne style that immediately preceded it.

In America, Chippendale furnishings were made primarily in the fine workshops of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newport, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston. These cabinet makers made their own changes to Chippendale's designs by adopting a more restrained approach than that illustrated in *The Director* and perfecting native forms such as the highboy and block-front.



# ADAM

ROBERT ADAM,  
ENGLAND *1728-1792*

JAMES ADAM,  
ENGLAND *1732-1794*

1780  
1830

*King George III,  
King of Great  
Britain and  
King of Ireland  
and later King  
of the United  
Kingdom and  
Hanover,  
1760-1820*

The Roman cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii were buried beneath a massive volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79CE. When they were rediscovered and excavated in the eighteenth century, they were found to have been almost miraculously well-preserved for seventeen centuries. They offered examples of design from every aspect of daily life and ignited an almost obsessive European and British interest in every possible aspect of Greco-Roman Imperial Classicism.

English designers Robert Adam and his brothers, John and James, were profoundly influenced by these and other archaeological discoveries of the time. Robert published *The Ruins of the Palace of Diocletian* (1764) and co-authored with his younger brother the seminal book, *Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam* (1773-1778; and 1779). These established the brothers as the most renowned and influential English architects and interior designers of the eighteenth century. They restored vernacular Neoclassicism, greatly influencing all the major decorative arts leading up to the Victorian era. Their work also provided the founding inspiration for much of the Federal, Neoclassical, Greek Revival, and Empire styles in North America between 1780 and 1850.



# SHERATON

THOMAS SHERATON,  
ENGLAND 1751-1806

1790  
1805

*King George III,  
King of Great  
Britain and  
King of Ireland  
and later King  
of the United  
Kingdom and  
Hanover,  
1760-1820*

The Sheraton style is distinguished from Chippendale and Hepplewhite based upon Thomas Sheraton's four-volume directory, *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing Book* published in London between 1791-1794. The Sheraton period in England was derivative and short-lived—from about 1790 to 1805, though Sheraton's designs later found great popularity in the New York workshops of Duncan Phyfe.

The contour of Sheraton's important early furniture was heavily influenced by the Adam, Hepplewhite, and late French Louis XV and XVI styles, and were sought after for their proportions, gentility, and functionality. Although Sheraton and Hepplewhite shared much the same decorative lexicon and a penchant for lucid, slender form, the true distinguishing characteristics of Sheraton are painted and decorated surfaces, an emphasis on verticality and rectangularity, a slightly more Continental flavor, and a pronounced, calculated sense of lightness.





# HEPPLEWHITE

GEORGE HEPPLEWHITE,  
ENGLAND C. 1727-1786

1780  
1810

*King George III,  
King of Great  
Britain and  
King of Ireland,  
and later King  
of the United  
Kingdom and  
Hanover,  
1760-1820*

Little is known of English designer George Hepplewhite—so little in fact that many have questioned his existence altogether!

Nevertheless, two years following the announcement of his death, his resourceful widow—or some say a clever woman named Alice merely posing as such—published the first edition of the Hepplewhite company's volume of three-hundred furniture designs called *The Cabinet Maker and Upholsterers Guide*. It soon became the standard reference for the style it made eminently fashionable in England and North America from around 1780 to 1810. Though the true origin of these designs remains a mystery to this day, there is no question as to their immediate popularity with well-to-do city-dwellers on two continents.

The Hepplewhite style is distinctive and immediately recognizable. It combines lightness with formality, and elegance with practicality—all within the Adam Neoclassical taste. Decoratively painted, lacquered, or gilded, predominantly executed in mahogany, highlighted by harmonious marquetry, it is unfailingly graceful and well-proportioned.



# DIRECTOIRE / CONSULATE

1795

1799

1799

1804

*The Directorate*

*Five Directors*

*were elected by*

*the Council of*

*Ancients to*

*preside over*

*France's*

*legislature, 1795-1799.*

*They were replaced*

*by the Consulate.*

*Three Consuls*

*who ruled, 1799-1804*

The French Revolution began as a widespread and intensely negative reaction to the excesses of the Bourbon kings from Louis XIII to Louis XVI. Disgust with their rule was exacerbated by the scarcity of basic goods and services as well as the lack of a reliable means of distribution. During this period France existed in a chronic state of upheaval. Nevertheless, it led to the brief transformation of a feudal, aristocratic society into a liberal, secular republic. The Republic endured from the first year of the Revolution, 1789 until Napoléon Bonaparte named himself Emperor of France in 1804.

It is in this historical context that the Directoire and Consulate styles were established by Pierre Fontaine and Charles Percier, the preeminent French architects of the day. Transitional, minimalist, and relatively sober in approach, Fontaine and Percier introduced stylistic restraint, influenced by the neoclassical repertory of the Adam brothers. This was well-suited to the reduced circumstances in which many French cabinetmakers found themselves, restricted as they were by a dearth of raw materials, shortage of applied labor, and shrinking demand.

When Napoleon came to power, the architects evolved their designs into Empire style that developed naturally from their interior designs and seminal publications, *Palais, Maisons, et autres Edifices de Rome Moderne* (1802) and *Recueil des Decorations Interieures* (1812).





# EMPIRE

1805  
1830

*France, 1804-1830*

*North America*

*1815-1840*

*Napoleon Bonaparte*

*France, 1769-1821*

*Emperor*

*Napoleon I*

*Emperor of  
the French*

*1804-1815*

The sweeping impact of Napoléon Bonaparte on European history and culture would be difficult to overstate. The reach of his ambition was matched only by the majestic trappings of the French Empire over which he reigned. These trappings were drawn from two of the great empires that preceded his own—the Roman Empire and the Dynasties of Ancient Egypt. It is here that one is able to see clearly how two of Napoléon's foreign excursions—the Italian campaigns of 1792-1802 and the Egyptian expedition of 1798-1801—had such far-reaching influence on the decorative arts of early eighteenth century France.

Pierre Fontaine and Charles Percier's masterly re-design of Napoléon's palace residence, Chateau de Malmaison, during the late Consulate period established the official introduction of Empire in Paris. Many of their designs were fostered by Napoléon's fascination with the symbolism of imperial power and classical antiquity, and were further based on the archaeological revival of closely-copied Greek, Roman, Etruscan, and Egyptian forms.

# AMERICAN EMPIRE



CHARLES-HONORE LANNUIER,  
*1779-1819*

1815  
1840

DUNCAN PHYFE *1768-1845*

*Thomas Jefferson,*  
*1809-1817,*

*James Madison,*  
*1817-1825,*

*James Monroe,*  
*1825-1829,*

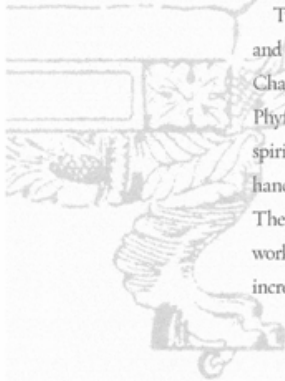
*John Quincy Adams,*  
*1829-1837,*

*Andrew Jackson,*  
*1837-1841*

George Washington was unanimously elected first President of the United States on February 4th, 1789. That same year saw the establishment of much of the American federal government as we now know it—the first Congress declared the new United States Constitution in effect; the Departments of State, Treasury, Defense and the Federal Judiciary came into being; and Congress ratified the Bill of Rights.

Historically, the Federal Period ran from 1789 to 1830 and was a time of national pride, self-determination, and idealism. This new society was forging a unique American identity in all things, including architecture, design, and the fine and decorative arts. Though the latter still bore an inescapable resemblance to the mid- to late-Georgian era, the emerging Greek Revival and American Empire styles reflected a distinct Federal look.

Two New York cabinetmakers are credited with codifying and domesticating the Empire style in the United States—Charles-Honore Lannuier and Duncan Phyfe. Lannuier and Phyfe were able to merge the mass exuberance, and triumphal spirit of their French contemporaries with the simple, handsome, polished orthodoxy of the late-Federal style. Their thriving workshops produced intuitively recognizable work known for superlative carving, perfect construction, incredibly rich finish, and conspicuous mastery.





# REGENCY

1811  
1830

*The Prince  
of Wales,  
Prince Regent,  
1811-1820,  
succeeding to  
the Throne as  
King George IV,  
King of the  
United Kingdom  
and Hanover,  
1820-1830*

In the later part of his life King George III, suffering from dementia and a host of other incapacitating maladies, was deemed unfit to reign over the British Empire. In 1811, he was replaced by his son, the Prince of Wales, who ruled as his proxy as Prince Regent until the death of his father, when he became King George IV. The Prince Regent was one of England's greatest patrons of the arts and architecture, and his reign encouraged the development of a tight-knit upper class obsessed with conspicuous displays of luxury, protocol, hierarchy, and idle pursuit.

The Regency style and period coincides with the Federal style in North America, the Empire style in France, and the Biedermeier era in Austria and the German States. Regency furniture was a distinct product of its age—an eclectic, highly refined, and demonstrative style, based on a Georgian vernacular interpretation and classical ideas.

Henry Holland's *Etchings of Ornamental Architecture*, Thomas Hope's *Household Furniture and Decoration*, and George Smith's *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* all held great sway over the Regency taste, calling for larger, heavier profiles, renewed interest in Greek and Roman emblems and contours, and a fascination with Egyptian and Chinese styles, forms, and surfaces.



# THE BIEDERMEIER ERA

1815  
1848

*Francis I.  
First Emperor of  
Austria, 1804-1835  
Ferdinand I and V.  
Emperor of  
Austria, King  
of Hungary  
and Bohemia,  
1835-1848*

The term Biedermeier refers to the historical period in central Europe between the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and the Continental Revolutions of 1848. The driving cultural force of this era was little more than the growth of an aspiring urban middle-class in the context of a repressive political, social, and economic framework. It is believed that this particular set of conditions resulted in a narrow focus on the prosaic aspects of domestic existence, much to the detriment of society's higher calling.

As it was later characterized, the so-called Biedermeier style in furniture design and interior decoration first emerged in Austria and the German States. It was both a marriage of certain distinct features found in the late-Georgian, Directoire, and Empire styles, and, many also theorize, a material reaction to the cultural aridity and claustrophobia of the era.

Biedermeier is in fact a style that has far outlived the era after which it was loosely named—enduringly popular well into the early 1920s, then again in the mid-to-late 1930s, and subject to a strong revival towards the end of the twentieth century to the present day. Biedermeier, in its best incarnation, strives for a simplified symmetrical historicism, progressive scale, truth in materials, and the self-conscious expression of superior craftsmanship and finish.



# THE VICTORIAN ERA

1840  
1901

*Queen Victoria*

*Alexandrina*

*Victoria, 1819-1901*

*House of Hanover*

*Monarch of the*

*United Kingdom*

*of Great Britain*

*and Ireland*

*1837-1901*

It could be argued that an era known for Herman Melville, the light bulb, Jack the Ripper, linoleum, Lord Tennyson, the Civil War, photography, Charles Darwin, women's suffrage struggles, Charles Dickens, the telephone, Frederick Law Olmstead, the Christmas card, Walt Whitman, Transcendentalism, and the sewing machine had quite a lot to say! It could also be argued that it's no wonder the furniture from such an era would be as eccentric to the modern eye as it is.

Victorian furniture is not distinguished by any single dominant style, rather by the complicated, intimate domestic cultural customs and attitudes of the Victorians themselves. The preoccupations of the Victorian mind were reflected to great extent by the atmosphere and scale of their interiors. Dark, high-ceilinged, heavily-curtained, wallpapered, and wainscoted spaces were stuffed with every imaginable form of furniture and accessory, cobbled together from Jacobean, Gothic, Romanesque, Tudor, Rococo, Renaissance, Queen Anne, Chippendale, and Empire styles. No combination of forms, elements, periods, and styles was dismissed. Rooms were crammed with sofas, chairs, ottomans and footstools; dining, side tables and buffets; bedsteads, night stands, bookcases, desks, chests of drawers, washstands, plinths, layers of Persian rugs, cigar stands, and hall trees--and everything adorned with fringes, tassels, and beads.

No room, antechamber, hallway, nook, or staircase escaped the clattering attentions of the proper Victorian homeowner.



# ART DECO

1925  
1939

*L'Exposition  
Internationale des  
Arts Decoratifs  
et Industriels  
Modernes,  
Paris, 1925,  
The New York  
World's Fair,  
United States, 1939*

Art Deco was an international phenomenon in the decorative, industrial, and domestic arts. The period begins and ends with world's fairs—l'Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris in 1925, and the New York World's Fair of 1939. Art Deco quickly achieved cultural prominence in regions as far apart as Europe and China, Japan and Cuba, and North and South America. Its sensibility was reflected in furniture, architecture, fashion, and jewelry, as well as film, graphics, and interior design.

The world was relatively peaceful during this period, and marked by significant technological advances in fields such as communication and travel. Movies, radio, air travel—all were reaching popular markets. But the period was also haunted by the series of political and economic crises that led up to World War II.

The most apparent defining characteristic of Art Deco is dynamic streamlining—the self-consciously created look of clear-cut elegance and sleek glamour. New materials such as chrome, stainless steel, aluminum, and plastics were widely employed in combination with various woods and other traditional elements such as ivory, gilding, glass, shagreen, animal pelts, silver, lacquer, and marble. The radical movements in recent art—Cubism, Constructivism, Futurism, Art Nouveau, Bauhaus—were powerful influences, as were the roots of those movements in the cultures of Aztec Mexico, pre-Colonial Africa, and Ancient Egypt.



## THE MID-CENTURY MODERN ERA

1945  
1965

*Tagore, 1945*  
*Aarving, 1945-1950*  
*Stig Hasselmann, 1945*  
*Sweden, 1945-1960*  
*W. Thore, 1945*  
*Burman, 1961-1971*

Mid-century modern furniture, and the international fraternity of designers and architects that inspired it, is intelligent, optimistic, inspiring, practical, and fun.

One aspect of a broad industrial design movement in North America, Scandinavia, Brazil, and Japan, which blossomed during the post-World War II period through the mid-1960s, was the perception that furniture was not so much a thing made as it was a thing designed and manufactured. Ergonomics, practicality, technical

innovation, and a sense of unified, rational simplicity were key elements in this late-modern style.

The embodiment of post-war cultural rebirth and enlightened progressive humanism, the mid-century modern aesthetic championed key tenets of the International Style—absence of ornament, function in form, and truth to material. The use of steel, leather, organic and synthetic glass, and plastics accounted for a great deal of its pragmatic allure. A core group of these

modernists—Alvar Alto, Norman Cherner, Ray and Charles Eames, Arne Jacobsen, Sam Maloof, Tendo Mokko, George Nakamichi, George Nelson, Isamu Noguchi, Eero Saarinen, Hans Wegner, and Sori Yanagi—embraced the possibilities inherent in mahogany, rosewood, teak, and laminate plywoods, as organic materials appropriate to the applications of new forms and methods.



# G. BITTNER & SON

1854



Gustav Bittner was born in Pratzan, German Silesia, in 1829, where he learned the craft and trade of cabinet-making as an apprentice. Later, and together with thousands of his young countrymen, Bittner escaped the chaos and deprivations of Central Europe caused by the Continental Revolutions of 1848—in his case by emigrating to the United States aboard a Bremen Liner steamship named *Copenhagen*. The ship docked in New Orleans on November 18, 1852. Gustav Bittner debarked, cleared States Customs, and found work.

Ultimately he traveled to Kentucky, briefly settled in Frankfort, and then established permanent residence in Louisville in 1854. It was here that Gustav opened his first shop at 415 Brook Street and hung out his first shingle: Gustav Bittner Cabinet Making.

Gustav Bittner went on to become one of the foremost cabinetmakers in Kentucky—a formidable rank achieved in the competitive, tight-knit, and affluent society that was Victorian Louisville. An unassuming man dedicated to family, business and community, he is heralded to this day by generations of first-Kentucky families as the finest cabinetmaker and interior designer of his era.

William C. Bittner was born in Louisville on March 22, 1872—one of five sons born to Gustav and Magdalena Breitenbach Bittner. Only he and his brother Frank lived into adulthood.

William was educated both at public school and St. Boniface parochial. After completing his education he apprenticed in the Bittner's workshops under the tutelage



of his father. Upon Gustav's death in 1895 William succeeded him as President and General Manager of Bittners. In 1909, the business was incorporated as G. Bittner's Sons, and a large new workshop and offices were occupied by the company at 427 South First Street.

Under William's direction Bittner's continued to flourish. The interior design division was opened, and the cabinetmaking workshops expanded together with it. Much like his father, William had a passion for repurposing woods and decorative elements, and traveled the world for rare period items to incorporate into Bittner's unique designs. It was during this period in its history that Bittner's cultivated the exclusive patronage that made it the preeminent firm of its kind in the region.



# OWSLEY BROWN FRAZIER AND BITTNER'S



Owsley Brown Frazier, best known for his philanthropy and his passion for sports, history, and guns, also had a passion for the decorative arts. It was his love for the latter which prompted him to purchase Bittner's, a Louisville landmark, in 1983. As Chairman of Bittner's, Mr. Frazier challenged his dedicated team of designers to always "raise the bar, and keep it there." Through his leadership, Bittner's was able to become the nationally renowned design firm that exists today.

Bittner's is currently owned by his daughter Laura Frazier, thus insuring that the legacy created by Mr. Frazier and the Bittner's design team will continue to raise the bar for years to come.

Appendix E: Budget

Top Drawer Exhibition Budget		
Expense	Budget	Expenditures
<b>Facilities</b>		
Construction Supplies	2,000.00	2,319.42
Paint/Painting	3,000.00	3,387.75
<b>Marketing/PR</b>		
Rack Cards	0.00	811.00
Invitations	0.00	1,108.00
<b>Printing</b>		
Panels	3,000.00	2,465.62
Large Wall Graphics	2,000.00	1,152.00
Vinyl	150.00	85.56
Object Label Supplies	200.00	159.88
Reproduction Fees	250.00	597.00
<b>Interactive Elements</b>		
Supplies	50.00	0.00
Props	200.00	85.84
<b>Environmental Elements</b>		
Bittner Workshop	1,000.00	0.00
Bittner Showcase Room	1,500.00	0.00
<b>Transportation &amp; Shipping</b>		
Speed Platforms	150.00	129.95
<b>Consulting/Contracting Fees</b>		
Andrew Kelly	21,000.00	17,469.26
Julie Breeding	3,000.00	4,919.00
<b>Opening Evening Event</b>		
Valet Parking	0.00	400.00
Catering	2,000.00	4,032.00
Flowers	100.00	150.00
Audio Equipment	0.00	275.00
<b>Research</b>		
Books	200.00	117.07
<b>Miscellaneous</b>		
	200.00	216.62
<b>Total Budgeted Expenses</b>	<b>40,000.00</b>	<b>39,880.97</b>

Appendix F: Top Drawer First Edition Rack Card



# TOP DRAWER

## 150 YEARS OF BITTNER'S



**EXHIBITING**  
**NOV 17, 2012 - JAN 1, 2013**

Experience the old world craftsmanship of Bittner's custom-crafted furniture through the 18th and 19th centuries! "Top Drawer" is a 4,000 sq. ft. exhibition that explores how a German immigrant's custom cabinet shop became not only a Louisville tradition, but also a nationally-renowned design firm that still thrives today. Exquisite American, English and Continental furniture inspired by great monarchs and makers is featured, as well as the story of how the political, cultural and social forces of these periods can inspire the aesthetic of our homes. Examine restored antiques and master-crafted pieces produced by Bittner's custom shop.

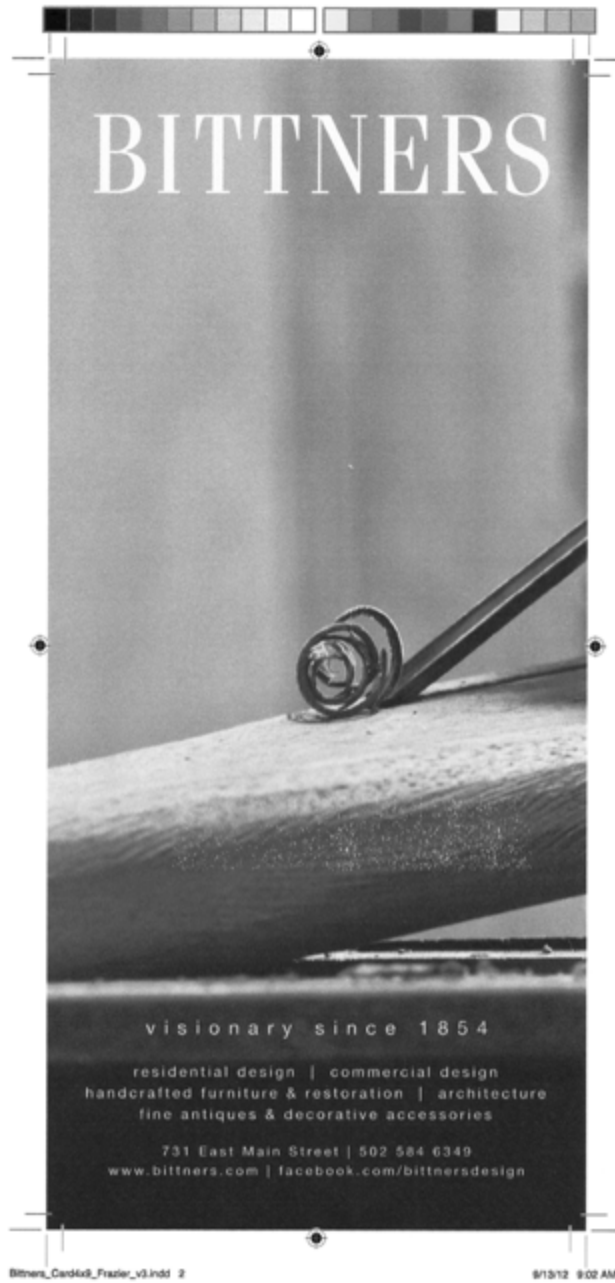


**the Frazier**  
History Museum  
829 West Main Street  
Louisville, KY 40202  
(502) 753-5663  
[www.FrazierMuseum.org](http://www.FrazierMuseum.org)

Media Sponsor: The Voice-Tribune

Bittner\_Card04\_Frazier\_v3.indd 1

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Appendix G:

**Bitters Exhibition Work Plan**

Task	Lead	August				September				October			November			
		6-10	13-17	20-24	27-31	3-7	10-14	17-21	24-28	1-5	8-12	15-19	22-26	29-2	5-9	12-16
<b>MEETINGS</b>																
Team Meetings	Wesky/Team															
<b>PLANNING</b>																
Artifact Selection	Wesky/Andy															
Exhibition Outline/Design	Wesky/Andy															
Image Research	Wesky/Andy															
Furniture Design and Layout	Wesky/Andy															
Interactive/AV Plan and Layout	Wesky/Brid															
<b>CONTENT DEVELOPMENT</b>																
Text Panel - Writing	Wesky/Andy															
Text Panel - Editing	Kelly															
Text Panel - Design	Julie Breeding															
Object Label - Writing	Wesky/Andy															
Object Label - Editing	Kelly															
AV Elements/Editing	Tom															
<b>FABRICATION</b>																
Text Panels	Audrey															
Object Labels	Audrey															
Graphics	Audrey															
Interactive/AV Elements	Richard															
Large Element/Wall Construction	Richard															
Bitter Showcase Room	Mony															
<b>INSTALLATION</b>																
Samurai De-install	Brid															
Wall Installation	Richard															
Paint Gallery	Richard															
Showcase Installation	Wesky/Bitters															
Object Arrngl	Kelly															
General Installation	Erica/Team															

## Appendix H: Top Drawer Fabrication and Installation Plan Spreadsheet

Bitters Installation Plan									
Task	Lead	October						November	
		1-5	8-12	15-19	22-26	29-2	5-9	12-16	
<b>INSTALLATION</b>									
Samurai De-install	Brigid								
Wall Installation	Richard								
Paint Gallery	Richard								
Workshop Build	Monty/John								
Place Platforms	Team								
Object Arrival	Kelly								
Object Install	Team								
Text Panel Installation	Audrey								
Graphic Installation	Brigid								
Object Label Install	Audrey								
Workshop Installation	Monty								
Lighting	Richard								
AV/ Projector	Richard								
Prop Installation	Wesley								
Clean for opening	Team								
Showcase Installation									
Wall Build	Monty/John								
Floor Installation	Contractor								
Mirror Installation	Monty/Brian								
Drapery Installation	Contractor								
Object Installation	Bitters								

## Top Drawer De-Installation Plan Spreadsheet

Bitters De Install Plan												
Task	Lead	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Monday		
		Jan 2	Jan 3	Jan 4	Jan 7	Jan 8	Jan 9	Jan 10	Jan 11	Jan 14		
<b>Bay 1,2,3</b>												
Remove furniture												
Remove platforms	ALL											
Remove objects from 'workshop' area	KELLY											
Tear down 'workshop'	JOHN											
Take down text panels	AUDREY											
Wall removal	RICHARD											
Patching	ART											
Painting												
<b>Bay 4</b>												
Remove furniture												
Remove wainscoting	JOHN											
Remove flooring	GEORGE											
Remove window wall	RICHARD											
Drywall												
Paint walls and duct work												


# Appendix I: Customer Feedback Survey

info@fraziermuseum.org

Home   My Surveys   Survey Services   Plans & Pricing   [+ Create Survey](#)

**October 11 - January 13, 2012 survey**  
Customer Feedback

Design Survey   Collect Responses   Analyze Results



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[Download Responses](#)  
[Share Responses](#)

Default Report   + Add Report

**Response Summary**

Total Started Survey: 39  
Total Finished Survey: 38 (97.4%)

[Show this Page Only](#)

PAGE: 3

1. How would you rate your visit to the Frazier History Museum?

[Create Chart](#)   [Download](#)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Poor	2.6%	1
Fair	0.0%	0
Average	0.0%	0
Good	25.6%	10
Excellent	71.8%	28

answered question   39

skipped question   0

[Show this Page Only](#)

PAGE: 4

2. How often do you visit the Frazier History Museum?

[Create Chart](#)   [Download](#)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Have only been to the museum one time.	51.3%	20
Once a week	0.0%	0
Once a month	5.1%	2
A couple of times a year	15.4%	6
Only for specific events/exhibits hosted by the Frazier Museum.	28.2%	11

answered question   39

skipped question   0

## Appendix J: Horizon Research Summary

### *Summary Overview*

*The Frazier History Museum (FHM) is "on a roll." While most other major attractions of a similar nature in the community did their best to "hold their own" over the past four challenging years, the FHM has improved in almost every category of awareness, image, and usage. This amazing growth seems clearly linked to the high visibility of travelling expositions – most significantly the Diana exhibit. The recurring messaging about new and different things at the Frazier History Museum has built community awareness and positive brand image, even when it did not translate into attendance. If there was a downside to the communication dynamic, it was the growing impression that the Museum was a little "pricey" and therefore maybe something families might not be able to afford in the future.*

*The product itself, and the consumer experience with it, remained high. Positive perceptions of their visit were strong in 2010 and remained so in 2014, suggesting that the unique programming and the permanent exhibit itself was received warmly by the increasing number of new visitors. Visitors seemed to "connect" better with the museum, too. Those who came away feeling "familiar" with the FHS grew significantly compared to 2010.*

*These and many more impressions were gleaned from an online survey of 523 adults representative demographically and geographically of the local Louisville region in February of 2014 and compared with a similar study conducted in April of 2010 by Horizon InSight.*



## CURRICULUM VITA

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University Press of Kentucky  
Lexington, Kentucky, 2015