

# These American Standard® showrooms can make it anywhere



"If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere," go the lyrics in a verse of "New York, New York," the song immortalized by the late Frank Sinatra. It is a tune that the Frankel brothers, owners of Grande Central Showrooms of New York, have earned the right to sing throughout the streets of New York City. Howard Frankel, president, and his brother Warren, vice president, of Grande Central Showrooms, a subsidiary of Yonkers-based Central Plumbing Specialties Company, have had a can-do attitude since taking over the company from their father and his partner in 1994. The business has since grown to include two additional wholesale locations and four showrooms.

Survival in New York City has never been for the faint-hearted, but mere survival was never the goal of the Frankels. Indeed, business is good at Grande Central, in spite of the stock market rollercoaster and economic growth stagnancy that is now rounding the bend into its fourth year. In fact, if Grande Central, with its latest showroom grand opening in Midtown Manhattan April 1, 2010 and another planned launch in New York State in early 2011, were any indication of the state of the economy, evening news business reports would once again instill optimism into the hearts of investors. With no shortage of foot traffic in "The City That Never Sleeps," Grande Central has developed a special way of luring in hurried New Yorkers with the help of manufacturers like American Standard.

Read on and discover what makes this family-run business so successful in one of the most demanding marketplaces in the nation during one the toughest economies of our lifetime.

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## Case study:

# Grande Central Showrooms of New York – The American Standard® Showrooms That Are Wide Awake In “The City That Never Sleeps”

When brothers Howard and Warren Frankel, president and vice president respectively of Central Plumbing Specialties Company, took over the business from their father and his partner in 1994, they were selling plumbing pipes and supplies to industry trade customers at their Bronx and Park Avenue Manhattan wholesale locations. Not many years passed before the two doubled the number of wholesale plumbing supply distribution centers and added four showrooms, three of them stand-alone buildings. But it took perseverance, and to some degree a healthy dose of ignorance of the obstacles that lay ahead, to stay the course.

Recognizing the purchasing potential of customers outside the trade industry, the Frankel brothers set out to fulfill the needs, wants, and desires of retail shoppers, designers, and architects looking to accessorize homes and projects with high-end decorative plumbing fixtures that manufacturers like American Standard offer. They started by opening their first showroom in 1995, a 3,000-square-foot facility within their recently purchased, and what would later become, main wholesale distribution center in Westchester County, New York. The success of the showroom led to the 2003 branding of Grande Central Showrooms of New York and opening of their first stand-alone showroom, adjacent to their wholesale distribution center on Park Avenue on Manhattan’s Upper East Side.



Upper East Side Showroom on Park Avenue



Midtown Showroom on East 56th Street



Downtown Showroom on Bond Street

Soon following was the Downtown showroom, which opened in 2005. Then the largest, a 4,000-square-foot, two-story Midtown showroom celebrated its grand opening April 1, 2010, after an anticipated wait of a few months for city permits stretched into two and a half years. With another showroom scheduled to launch in early 2011 within the newly opened New York State wholesale distribution center in Rockland County, and established locations in the north, south, and midsection of the most densely populated borough of New York City, Grande Central Showrooms is strategically positioned for success, in the estimation of the Frankel brothers.

## Right through the very heart of it

"We're doing very well," says Howard Frankel, "I believe it's a result of strategically locating our showrooms,"

he continues. "Our newly-opened Midtown showroom has actually given our business a boost during the ailing economy." The Midtown showroom on East 56th Street is positioned in the heart of Manhattan in a building formerly occupied by a well-known Tri-State carpet, rugs, and furniture store. With the Architects and Designers Building – known as the A&D Building – on the next block, and a world-renowned New York City hair salon that caters to celebrities and high-end clientele from the fashion world across the street, the exposure is terrific, according to Frankel. "In my mind, our 56th Street opening has helped validate all of our showrooms," notes Frankel, referring to the well-received location and the prospective business to be gleaned from the heavy foot traffic surrounding it.

To capitalize on the population density of New York City, the three Grande Central Showrooms on the island of Manhattan are spaced 90 blocks apart. Each is immersed in the culture unique to their respective subsection of the city. "Our showrooms are based on individuality," says Frankel, pointing out, "The Midtown location is high-end, showing breadth of product from manufacturers that offer lots of contemporary designs like those from the American Standard® luxury, JADO® and Porcher® brands."



## Start spreading the news

The unique atmosphere of each Grande Central showroom is what draws customers in. The mood of the Midtown showroom reflects the upscale, contemporary feel of the neighborhood, with New York City's famed MoMa – The Museum of Modern Art – just blocks away. In the spirit of the culture, the original paintings of local artists, in addition to prints from renowned photographer Peter Lik, serve as a backdrop in the showroom. Customers found Lik's original signed waterfall print, called "Sierra Cascade", so compelling that Frankel decided to place a running garden fountain nearby to enhance its visual sense with sound.

Product displays are renewed every three to four months to avoid stagnation. The art gallery theme of the Midtown showroom also features more-than-average space between products to allow room to step back and contemplate



designs without peripheral distraction or a feeling of confinement. "We have full vignettes and stand-alone pieces within groupings where you can stand back and appreciate all aspects of the product," explains Frankel. The showroom also includes a dedicated vessel sink wall and an area designated solely for toilets.

Porcher suites were created in the Park Avenue location to complement the demographic of the local traffic, according to Frankel. "The Lutezia® Collection is one of our featured suites in our Park Avenue showroom to fit the traditional demographic of the traffic," Frankel points out. Background tile and accessories are used in the vignettes to create mood and reflect a lifestyle feeling reminiscent of home.

An impressive window display of sculptures is used to catch the eye of Park Avenue passersby. Frankel enjoys

sharing the story that one of the passersby included a world-famous entertainer who walked into the showroom and offered to purchase the entire sculpture collection, not realizing their store was a plumbing supply business.

The art theme carries over into the showroom located in the Downtown neighborhood north of Houston Street, and aptly called NoHo. There the annual NoHo ArtWalk brings artists from all around who leave brochures highlighting their work in the showroom. "We make it a point to partner with the community in all our locations," says Frankel, highlighting the strong artist influence and artist lofts throughout the NoHo section of town. "We take advantage of the annual NoHo ArtWalk week," he continues, "by bringing in additional sculptures and paintings, somewhat like a fashion week event."

## I want to be a part of it

The Frankel brothers are keenly aware that catering to the disparate tastes in New York City necessitates an intimate understanding of the cultural nuances surrounding each of their locations. "We sell a lot of traditional and transitional design at our Park Avenue showroom due to the architecture of the neighborhood," says Frankel, referencing the area's pre-war dwellings. "However, overall," he continues, "we're seeing more movement with contemporary designs that are coming out of Europe."

Contemporary tastes among Grande Central customers gravitate toward brands such as Porcher, Frankel has noted. "Porcher's new one-piece toilets are well-designed, great functioning toilets that sell very well," states Frankel, referring to toilets in the luxury Veneto<sup>®</sup>, Chapeau<sup>™</sup>, Archive<sup>™</sup>, Epic<sup>™</sup>, L'Expression II<sup>®</sup>, and Ovale<sup>™</sup> Collections, as well as the Porcher Solutions<sup>™</sup> line. "They incorporate much of the American Standard Champion<sup>®</sup> 4 flushing system," he goes on, adding, "and the design of these pieces is phenomenal."

Frankel explains that specific American Standard collections sell better in specific showrooms in Manhattan and the Westchester location. "The American Standard Town Square<sup>®</sup> Collection, which is a great-looking collection with toilets, baths, faucets and accessories, has done very well in Midtown and Park Avenue,



both of which lean toward traditional and transitional style. The Tropic® Collection has beautiful faucets and furniture and is also a good mover in Midtown, whereas the more traditional Antiquity™ toilet and matching pedestal sink resonates with our Park Avenue customers. Assortments like the stylish Studio™ and Generations™ Furniture Collections work well across our Manhattan and Westchester markets. And the contemporary Green Tea®, Serin™, and Berwick™ Collections do well in our Downtown showroom.”

### It's up to you, New York, New York

With a market of 8.4 million New Yorkers, the Grande Central Showrooms have a definite advantage being located in and around The Big Apple. The demographics of the showrooms are as complex as the city itself, perhaps so much so that only a true New Yorker can fully comprehend it. Like the commuters chaotically darting with great haste for their train through Grand Central Terminal, the Grande Central Showrooms seems to have tapped into the inner workings of the city that never sleeps.

And New Yorkers Howard and Warren Frankel would have it no other way. In the city that never sleeps, this family-owned-and-run business and its showroom teams will not stop until they wake up and find themselves “top of the list” in successfully meeting upscale plumbing design needs right here in old New York.



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