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Inquiries:

Stephanie Somogyi Miller/stephanie@spreadpr.net

Press

212.696.0006

**The Windy City Gets a Piece of the Big Apple:
Samuel & Sons Passementerie Opens in Chicago**

May 2008 (Chicago, IL) – Beginning this month, Samuel & Sons, the premier passementerie tradition in the New York design community, opens the doors to its new showroom in the famed Merchandise Mart in downtown Chicago. As is often the case with Chicago imports, this showroom has taken the Manhattan original and revised it with a sophisticated, Mid-western interpretation. “We were looking for an updated design of our classic New York showroom,” explains Sam Cohen, Founder and President of Samuel & Sons. They certainly found that with the help of Chicago-based architecture firm, Searl Lamaster Howe architects.

“We designed the showroom to be inviting in every way,” continues Linda Searl, principal of the firm. “The goal was to project an image of the high-quality product throughout the design without competing with the product.” The design needed to be contemporary and clean; and with the location of the showroom on the sixth floor of the massive Mart, it needed to stand out.

This goal is evident before even stepping through the door. Instead of placing displays in the front windows as might be expected, the design team has left the windows open to entice clients to venture inside. Once across the showroom’s threshold, the client is compelled to look upward. Running along the entire length of the ceiling is a contemporary steel sculpture. The weaving metal was designed to mimic the weaving of fabric, similar to the trims for which Samuel & Sons is renowned and, while made of steel, the sculpture is subtle, not overpowering.

Chicago designers are already familiar with the Samuel & Sons tradition of quality and selection as the brand previously provided a selection of trims, fringes and tassels through the Holly Hunt showroom. However, with the company opening its own location, now designers have the opportunity to see virtually every product offering in person and in large scale. In fact, that was one of the major design focuses of Cohen and the architectural firm. The team created a modular shelving system similar to that in the New York showroom. The units can be changed to allow for the height of the fringe trim spools or the flatter tape spools. In contrast to the New York location, the interior design team, Searl Blossfeld, an arm of the architectural firm, chose light-colored wood. This added to the contemporary feel of the showroom while also, and most importantly, allowing the color of the products to stand out.

The team also made an alteration from the Manhattan flagship lay out by pulling the workstations away from the walls so that designers can see everything up close from floor to ceiling. This detail creates an inviting feeling; designers can be comfortable pulling sample options from the shelves and get to work creating. Additionally, the workstations are smaller and sleeker than before, concealing all work supplies except for the computer flat-screens within the units. The squared edges of the sturdy Crema Marfil countertops create a sophisticated appearance. Instead of the typical ruler along the edge of the countertop to measure sample lengths, simple steel dots are embedded in 6” increments into the counter’s edge for a clean, minimal aesthetic.

Continuing with the artistic elements, the team included a dramatic mural of the Samuel & Sons advertising campaign. One of the features is an old-fashioned typewriter with Samuel & Sons tape as part of the antiquated mechanism. The result gives the showroom an urban edge while including delicate touches and it further draws clients through the showroom. This juxtaposition of artistic elements with practical components tells the story of the compelling product offerings and, subsequently, the brand.

Samuel & Sons is known for having stock on thousands of product. The finished design subtly conveys that dedication to the client. With their new Chicago home, the company has mixed the tradition of an old-world passementerie shop with the utility of today’s technology. It’s all in the details, and the Chicago design industry is the lucky beneficiary.

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167 Madison Avenue, Suite 603, New York, NY 10016
Phone: 212.696.0006 Fax: 212.696.0013
www.spreadpr.com