



B Braithwaite brings European look to Atlanta

Up Close

Modern aesthetics prevail at Atlanta's B Braithwaite

Custom designs, service and style build boutique's biz

By Lisa Casinger

Mother and daughter team Nancy and Chaffee Braithwaite decided to start their infant boutique in October 2005 after a buying trip to Europe.

"We were actually getting ready to open a different kind of store, antiques and adult furniture," Chaffee said. "I quit my job as a marketing manager under contract with Cartoon Network and we went to Paris and London to shop for the store. It went badly and we decided we'd made the wrong decision; we didn't want the adult store to compete with Mom's interior design business. By this time we already had a contract on a three-story building we were days away from closing on."

This chocolate and white room pops with vivid textiles from Soft Idea and B Braithwaite and Stokke furniture.

While in Paris, Nancy, who's been an interior designer for 35 years, stopped in a baby shop to make a purchase for her grandchild and was impressed with the store. It was all white, beige and black. The duo came back to Atlanta early and started researching the juvenile industry and what was available in their area and discovered there was a niche to be filled.

"From a design standpoint I wanted something sophisticated and European," Nancy said. "I wanted to bring that to Atlanta with a store that carried furniture and accessories."

The B Braithwaite concept is based on offering clients everything they need to customize their nursery. The store features classic, contemporary and country décor schemes that showcase different ways of using lighting, rugs, furniture and wall treatments to create a unique room. With Nancy's design background, the store also offers a high level of customer service, pro-

viding hands-on assistance from designing their linens to picking the paint color for their rooms.

The store is devoted to infants through toddlers and the product mix includes furniture, 40%; room décor, 35%; and linens, 20%. Products from vendors like Stokke, Serena and Lily, Kissy Kissy, Nurseryworks and Bugaboo are arranged in about five different room settings that

are redesigned 2-3 times a year.

"Customers can walk into the rooms and they're all different looking," she said. "We can show how the same furniture can look different depending on the accessories and we change the rooms when vendors come out with new looks."

Custom designs are a big part of B Braithwaite's appeal. About 90% of the bedding sales are custom, and the duo

spends a lot of time in the store with clients helping them design their nurseries.

"If someone wants to hire me to do their nursery, that's done at my regular interior design rate," Nancy said. "That's separate from the store and not a service we offer through the store."

The store does offer delivery and installation as well as signature gift wrapping.

Though the store has a clean, European feel, Chaffee said it is a mix of traditional and contemporary looks. They offer Corsican and Morigeau sleigh cribs as well as the Stokke and Nurseryworks lines, but Chaffee said it's not necessarily the customers who are driving the modern trend.

"There aren't a lot of vendors doing updates on the traditional or cottage looks and there are so many modern options," she said. "Our customers are coming to us for a custom look for their nurseries."

Since Nancy is a well-known designer, the store has enjoyed a lot of free press from consumer publications such as *Veranda* and *Southern Accents*. Her name also is a draw for customers and to that end the pair has not invested a lot in advertising or in-store events. There is a store Web site, though, and based on inquiries from that, Chaffee is gearing up to offer some smaller items for sale online.

"We'll venture into e-commerce on a small scale," she said. "We won't sell big items like furniture, but certainly gifts. Gifts have been a good business for us."

Like many retailers, one of Nancy and Chaffee's biggest issues is receiving their



Furniture, like these pieces from Nurseryworks, accounts for about 40% of B Braithwaite's business. Gifts also are big sellers and a category Chaffee is hoping to do well with online.

orders on-time and damage free.

"The hardest part of the job is that our clients are pregnant so there is a finite timeline to work with," Chaffee said. "It can be a challenge when you don't get your orders on time or the product comes in damaged, especially when clients wait to find out what they're having before they'll place their order."



B Braithwaite at a glance

Founded: October 2005

Location: Atlanta

Size: 3,000 square feet

of employees: Three

Annual sales compared to previous year:

"Business is great," co-owner Chaffee Braithwaite said. "It takes awhile to get a store in line and it took some time to find our niche in the furniture market, but our gift market has always been good."

Major vendors for furniture, accessories, textiles, gear: Stokke, Serena and Lily, Kissy Kissy, Nurseryworks and Bugaboo

Trade shows: N.Y. gift, Atlanta gift, ENK, Bubble, ABC Kids Expo, Atlanta apparel

Percent of budget spent on advertising: "We have been lucky. Because of Nancy's reputation, we've gotten a lot of free press from magazines like *Veranda* and *Southern Accents* so we've not spent a lot on advertising," Chaffee said.

Major competitors: High-end infant furniture and gift stores



Chaffee and Nancy Braithwaite modeled their Atlanta boutique after a Parisian store. The monochromatic look showcases the product that ranges from furniture and accessories to clothing and gifts.



Rooms, like this one featuring Morigeau furniture, are redesigned two to three times a year.