

# ProSales

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Sheldon Kahan  
Interstate + Lakeland Lumber

## Honor the Past, Embrace the Now

A Connecticut showroom  
bridges the generations



Sheldon Kahan



# Something Old, Plenty New

Interstate + Lakeland Lumber transforms a piece of company history into a one-of-a-kind showroom, bridging generations in the process.

2008  
ProSales  
Excellence  
Awards  
Showroom

Sheldon Kahan describes his showroom in Greenwich, Conn., as a labor of love. Nearly three years in the making, it's easy to see why, particularly when Kahan gives you a guided tour filled with the zest and passion of a man who is behind what's arguably a piece of art unto itself.

Kahan, who has run Interstate + Lakeland Lumber for the past decade, is

the third generation to guide the 86-year-old business his grandfather, Leon Kahan, founded in 1922. Born as a mill shop, Kahan has gone far beyond just preserving the business' roots. He has honored them in a showroom, the Interstate Design Center, which has garnered this year's PROSALES Excellence Award for Showroom Design.

Kahan pays tribute to his father Jack

as well, refusing to put the title of president on his business card and remaining vice president, since his father still visits the business from time to time.

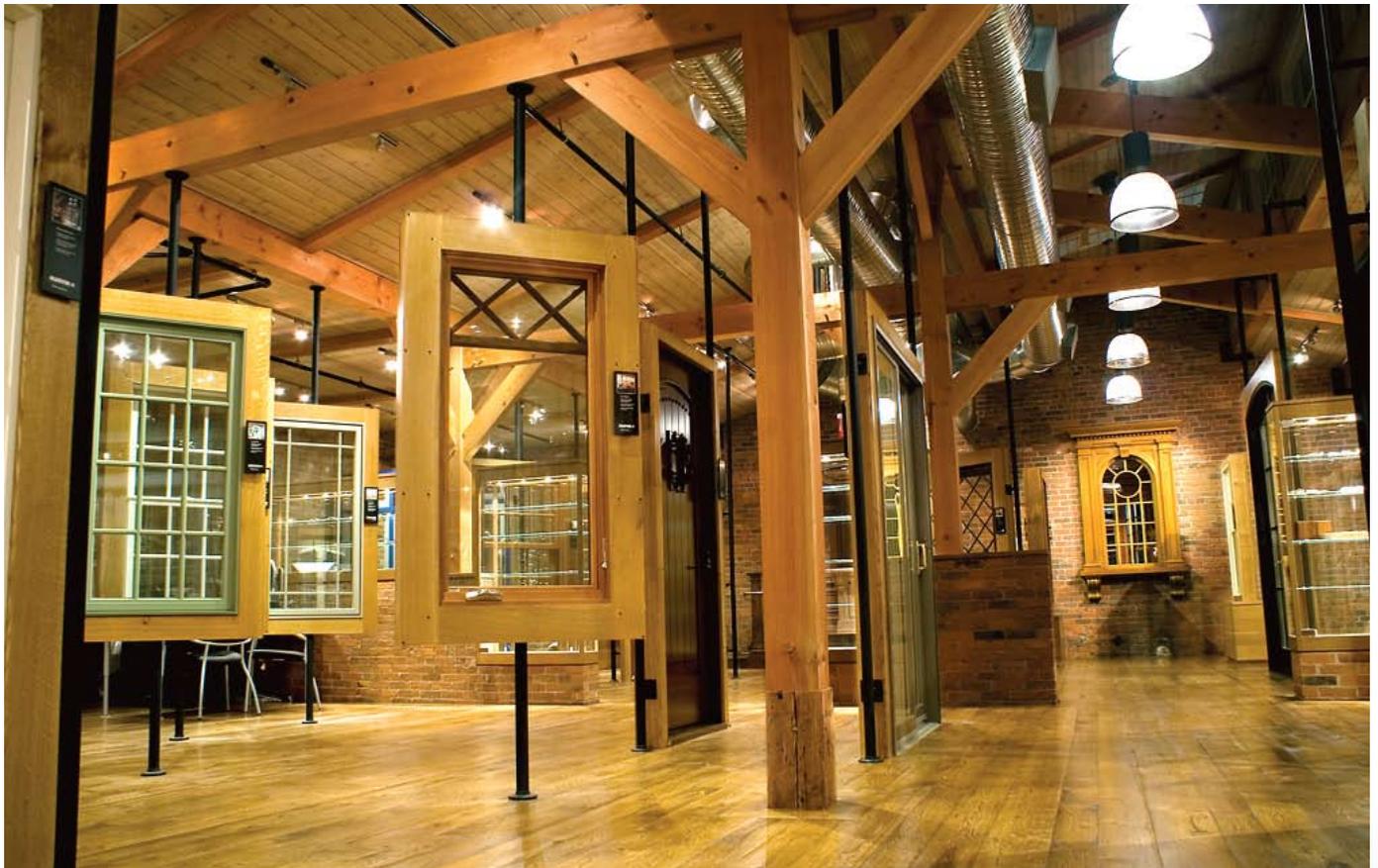
"I have a deep respect for this business and this industry," he says. "I really wanted to create a showroom like no other."

Drawing inspiration from the window display cases of Manhattan's jewelry stores, as well as artifacts displayed in New York's American Museum of Natural History, Kahan has created a museum and gallery of his own. His grandfather's hand tools have been recessed

into some of the building's original brick walls and encased in glass.

There are also vintage black-and-white photos of Leon Kahan during his days as a young furniture maker in Brooklyn—"That's where it all started," a beaming Sheldon Kahan says—and the early years of Interstate in Greenwich.

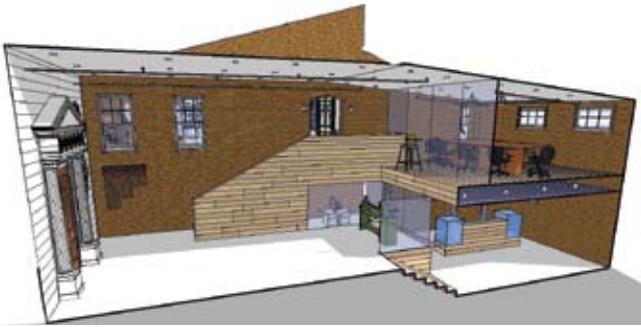
Posts and beams, including some that first lined the space more than eight



Show of Showrooms: Sheldon Kahan drew inspiration from the Museum of Natural History and Manhattan jewelry shops when creating a showroom that tied Interstate + Lakeland Lumber's present to its past. The area has 45 windows and doors on display, along with custom millwork, and tools once used by Kahan's grandfather and company founder Leon Kahan.

PHOTOS: COURTESY INTERSTATE + LAKELAND LUMBER, EXCEPT KAHAN PHOTO: GAIL ZUCKER / WWW.GZUCKER.COM

# 2008 Excellence Awards Interstate + Lakeland Lumber



**The Concept:** Interstate + Lakeland Lumber worked with local architects to bring Sheldon Kahan's showroom concept to life. Today the showroom plays host to the latest Andersen, Jeld-Wen, Marvin, Prodomo, and Unilux products, along with Interstate's custom millwork offerings.

decades ago, were used to maintain the brick walls of the 5,000 square-foot space. The roof was literally ripped off and raised, allowing for a new upper level to host large windows that flood the space with natural light, "a heavenly experience," as Kahan describes it.

During the roof-ripping process, Kahan says he was "howling at the moon and stars for a few days and nights." From start to finish, the entire project took nearly three years. (The cost of construction wasn't disclosed.) Rustic oak planks line the floor of the space but feature an antique finish, lending to the showroom's museum quality.

The lumber and hardware store that the showroom shares a building with might as well be a universe away. Before the renovation, the space the showroom now occupies had become a cluttered junk room. At that time, Interstate + Lakeland didn't have a single showroom conducive to comparative shopping. If a customer wanted to see how one manufacturer's window measured against another's, he would have to drive to a separate showroom. While the voyage between locations was not very far by driving standards, Kahan says it was a hassle for customers, especially when trying to find parking.

About 99% of Interstate + Lakeland Lumber's customer base is contractors,

with a 60-40 split between home builders and remodelers. Most of the homes are spec or custom homes ranging well above the \$1 million mark—no surprise since this region of Fairfield County, Conn., has become known as "The Gold Coast" because of its wealthy and elite. With six locations, Interstate + Lakeland serves Westchester County, too, another posh part of the greater New York metropolitan area.

The showroom encourages a touch-and-feel aspect. Each window and door—all 45, to be exact—is mounted within oak frames that stand on steel polls mounted to the floor. This lets the end user or contractor touch the window, spin it, and get a feel for all sides. The hardware is completely functional as well. Want to find out how a window opens? Take the hand crank for a spin right there.

Each unit features black, rectangular identification tags that give the make and features of the product. "People want to make informative, comparative decisions," Kahan says. Additionally, the display method lets Interstate + Lakeland easily change door and window models as new product lines are developed.

With six salespeople at the location, it's not difficult to get someone's attention at this showroom. "We listen to what our customers want. We are good

listeners, and we try not to force the issue," Kahan notes. "You're not going to go to a big box, a showroom in a strip mall or a lumberyard. It's an important decision to be made in a quality environment."

Interstate + Lakeland doesn't play favorites, either, when it comes to manufacturers. Andersen and Marvin (including its Integrity line) have nearly equal display space, and there is separate but nearly equal areas for Jeld-Wen windows and doors, and custom mahogany products from Unilux and Prodomo.

The latter lets sales personnel up-sell the customer to a much higher-end product.

The rear of the showroom is perhaps its pinnacle. Dubbed the "River Room," since a nearly complete wall of windows offers a view of Byram River separating Port Chester, N.Y., and Greenwich, this space gives a plentiful taste of Interstate + Lakeland's capability in custom architectural millwork. Custom panels, arches, and cabinetry made from oak created from the dealer's millwork production facility in Bethel, Conn., adorn the walls and ceilings.

Other showroom features include large flat-screen televisions mounted in multiple locations. The monitors deliver constant information about Interstate Design Center's offerings, but also can be used for presentations. Aside from their practical purpose, the televisions serve another need. "I like a little kinetic space," Kahan says.

A glass meeting room on the same level as the floor of the showroom, but rising above the main entrance and reception area, allows for a view of nearly the entire interior of the building from multiple angles. Kahan says the room is one of his favorites, and he can spend an entire day in it. In fact, members of the community have made offers to rent the space for meetings and parties.

"We have successfully presented a strong case for why we are the place to buy your windows and doors," Kahan says.—*Andy Carlo*