

# THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

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## SMALL BUSINESS CORNER

### Voltage selling international flavor

#### Furniture store brings home a touch of Europe

By Val Previsk  
*Enquirer Contributor*

**OAKLEY** - As a young architect, Jeff Hinkel was inspired by the European furniture designers he studied in school at the University of Kentucky, and while studying abroad in Europe.

Hinkel wanted to bring the fresh, modern designs he loved to his Cincinnati hometown, so in 1989, only a few years after graduating from college, he opened Voltage, one of the only retail outlets in the region to offer contemporary high-design lighting and furniture.

"When you're in architecture school (modern design) is the vocabulary," he said. "It's about what's current, not Queen Anne. I like classic modern style, and nothing was available in Cincinnati."

Although he first started his store with just a few hundred square feet on Hyde Park Square and only sold contemporary lighting fixtures, demand for the look quickly compelled him to extend his offerings to furniture and accessories, which led him to relocate two more times to keep up with his expanding inventory.

Today, Voltage occupies 12,000 square feet in a renovated commercial building on Madison Road. Hinkel and his wife, Julie, oversee a staff of nine and specialize in European-made furniture from select designers such as B&B Italia, Cassina, Mascalto, Montis Poltrano Fran and more. They do business with both residential and commercial clients throughout the region.

Since moving to Oakley roughly six years ago, Hinkel said sales for Voltage have nearly doubled, hovering around \$5 million in 2007.

While the slow economy and the weak U.S. dollar will make things a little tougher this year, Hinkel said, Voltage has developed a loyal following. Even with the euro surging against the dollar and making overseas goods more expensive, Hinkel said he expects sales to remain steady because he caters to an affluent clientele.

With an average couch costing in the neighborhood of \$6,000, Hinkel said, Voltage is not the first stop for bargain furniture hunters. Many of his clients are between the ages of 45 and 65, he said, and often come in because they are ready to cast off their old furniture and adopt an updated, more sophisticated style.

"They may have lived the traditional lifestyle and want something new," he said. "A lot of them are travelers, and they've seen these things all over the world and they want them in their home."



Julie and Jeff Hinkel, owners of Voltage Furniture Inc. on Madison Road in Oakley, do business with both residential and commercial clients throughout the region. Even with the euro surging against the dollar and making overseas goods more expensive, Hinkel said he expects sales to remain steady because he caters to an affluent clientele.

#### Voltage

Address: 3209 Madison Road, Oakley  
Phone: 513-871-5483

Web site: [www.voltagefurniture.com](http://www.voltagefurniture.com)

Owners: Jeff and Julie Hinkel  
Employees: Nine

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Julie Hinkel said the same type of customers may also come in to find furniture for a second home that they want a completely different look for.

Susan Covatta of Hyde Park was one such customer.

She and her husband, Anthony, decorated their one-year-old vacation home in northern Michigan in a Scandinavian beach house style that she said she had long admired.

"I had always wanted to build a Scandinavian beach house," said Covatta, whose home in Hyde Park is decorated in a Southwestern style. It's a very clean-lined look. It works very well for our house set in

the dunes on Lake Michigan."

Covatta said she bought much of the furniture for the house at Voltage and was impressed with their knowledge and service.

"It's a one-of-a-kind store in this area," she said. "Jeff has an incredible eye, and he's built a wonderful business. No other store in Cincinnati compares. You'd have to go to a big city elsewhere to find what they have."

Pamela McDonel, interior designer for BHDP Architecture downtown, said she has worked with Voltage for years to design interiors for corporate clients who want an international look for their offices.

"If I want that look, I always go there," she said. "It's one place I can go that I know they'll always do the research and find what I want. They have great customer service. The clients can see the products, and they have pieces that I

can't get anywhere else."

Is Hinkel worried that newly opened Ikea will take away some of his business? Not at all, he said.

"We look at Ikea as a positive thing, because it brings more acceptance of this style," he said. "Ikea educates people."

The two stores draw different types of customers who appreciate contemporary styles in furniture, he added.

As the riverfront and downtown areas continue to be developed into new loft living spaces for upscale buyers, Hinkel said he sees that as a positive trend that could increase sales of his products, too.

"Riverfront condo buyers are also buying this furniture," he said.

Julie Hinkel added: "As downtown becomes more popular, that urban feel is going to work in our favor. This look works well in that loft style."

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## VOLTAGE

► inspired living spaces

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