



FLOW BATH AND KITCHEN DESIGN STUDIO

This metro Philadelphia business is small but mighty and epitomizes showroom excellence.

BY RUTH MITCHELL



ABOVE: Lucks-Hecht wanted to break the mold of what a typical showroom would look like; by creating a welcoming and warm space that one can see all the way to the back – mission accomplished.

THERE IS A SAYING: If you cannot find it, build it yourself. And that is exactly what a husband-and-wife team did. Their family-owned and -operated plumbing wholesale distribution business in the Philadelphia area didn't have a showroom. Not satisfied with the service their contractor/plumber clients and their customers were receiving from other companies while shopping for fixtures, the duo decided it was time to expand and open a showroom and do it their way.

So Rachel Lucks-Hecht and her husband, Lee Hecht, set out on the adventure, building it on the philosophy of "just be nice." What they created is Flow Bath and Kitchen Design Studio, a single luxury-fixture storefront located in a small suburb of Philadelphia that has caught the attention of its community — and from coast-to-coast. It also caught the attention of *The Wholesaler* magazine — naming Flow Bath and Kitchen Design Studio as our Showroom of the Year.



If you build it ...

Hecht understood the plumbing industry — his family lineage is that of Able Plumbing Supply in Philly. Lucks-Hecht was not as familiar, as she is a former schoolteacher and school administrator. In 2016, they purchased a former hardware store in Glenside, Pa., a Philadelphia suburb; in 2017, Flow Bath and Kitchen Design Studio was opened.

The couple, whose twin boys were two years old at the time, would go all-in working together to get the showroom started. Flow is a woman-owned, family business, with Lucks-Hecht and Hecht as co-owners. Lucks-Hecht would run the company — and she soon learned everything about designing, operating and running a showroom.

She leaned into high-end trade shows and

groups focused on luxury showrooms, and would absorb information and drive deeper conversations with manufacturers' representatives about their product lines. Lucks-Hecht would search the Internet for showroom websites around the country that looked "cool;" she would call and ask their opinions on things.

At the same time, she was doing extensive research on the Philadelphia market and discovered that it was a neglected market from a design standpoint: "I knew designers were driving to New York for their high-end clients and for the products. I thought, 'Why?'" Lucks-Hecht realized a luxury product showroom was needed in the marketplace.

Taking her knowledge and research, she applied it while working with a designer to create the Flow showroom. "I wanted it to be an open, welcoming and warm space, when you walk through the front door you can see all the way to the back," Lucks-Hecht says. She adds that her goal was to break the mold of what a typical plumbing showroom should be.

In 2017, Flow opened its doors on a 4,000-square-foot open concept, highly curated decorative plumbing product showroom for the kitchen and bath. With seven employees and shared truck drivers with Able Plumbing, the six-year-old company delivers high-end products and offers a knowledgeable staff. And, as the showroom is by appointment only, it is designed to maximize the customer experience by immersing them in curated, endless possibilities.

The design of the showroom includes floor-to-ceiling windows around two sides, allowing the gallery to be flooded with natural lighting and passersby to admire its stunning beauty. The ability to see into the showroom would also allow for a welcoming environment — encouraging individuals to want to learn more. In addition, the showroom boasts original brick walls, and repurposed woodwork from its renovation became conference and workspace tables — honoring the past through its artistic design.

Breaking the Rules

The highly curated, luxury brand showroom is mostly unbranded. Showcasing products in vignettes without brand names and typical wall boards was intentional. "I'm not big on displaying products on boards," Lucks-Hecht explains. "Once you get past that branded board, if they are not familiar with the next product, which typically has more finishes and

“The biggest asset we had was my not having experience. I had no preconceived notions of what a showroom should be. People told me you’d never sell modern, and you will never sell high-end — you are in the wrong market. I said, watch me.”

Rachel Lucks-Hecht

options for them, they will not consider it. They are losing out on so many other gorgeous things.”

Carefully selecting and displaying the fixtures is an art form, and the showroom has clean lines and a calming and friendly environment with varying finish options on display. “We don’t need to have every version on display as it will overwhelm our customers,” she says.

With products on pods to move around and see how products can complement one another, while asking questions and listening to the customer’s wants and style, the team can bring customers’ visions to reality, making for a more enjoyable experience.

“The team at Flow curates products that are a mix of what they think will sell in the marketplace, different from what vendors tell them to display,” notes Jeff MacDowell, executive director of Luxury Products Group. “They didn’t bow down to the floor space requirements of a major vendor. It is truly a boutique shopping experience; hopefully, more showrooms will follow suit.”

Employee Experience and Training:

Finding and hiring employees isn’t done through traditional channels, instead, a different approach is implemented. Lucks-Hecht explains: “Most employees come in without extensive knowledge of the industry, if any, but have the personality that fits in with our commitment to a warm, friendly environment with excellent service. Lucks-Hecht learned the business through training, taking every opportunity to expand her knowledge base, and she offers the same to the team at Flow.

With a motto of “Just be Nice,” it’s all about the customer experience and taking ego out of the process.

“Our sales consultants typically work by appointment only, so we can devote as much time as needed to our clients,” she says. “Most appointments take about two hours or more, and our main goal is for our clients to select items they love! Educating the customer on the quality, history of the manufacturers and styles is what we are great at, but our engaging and knowledgeable staff tops it. We have both affordable and high-end products, and no matter

what the budget is of our clients, we provide them with identical experiences.”

Knowledge is key, and training is vital to the success of the company and the client. Before opening the showroom, Lucks-Hecht read product books and relied heavily on manufacturers’ representatives to teach her more about the uniqueness of their products — how they worked and what made them different. She watched product videos and asked many questions. She instilled into her team the need to understand how and why a product works, how it will function and what is needed in the space it is in. This deep knowledge base would be the foundation of educating customers on the details of products and how and why high-end brands demand their price point.

“Training includes shadowing during appointments, manuals explaining the different areas of products we sell, online training from our manufacturers, product knowledge sessions with reps, and talking through each project and product in detail,” she adds. “We are educated on our products, and we stand by what we sell.” Lucks-Hecht emphasizes that customers will demand luxury products if they understand the nuances and that, over time, luxury lasts.

“If a customer asks us a question and we don’t know the answer, we will pick up the phone and call the manufacturer directly, while the customer is in the store,” she notes. “We don’t pretend to be somebody that we’re not. We’re just friendly, knowledgeable people helping you pick gorgeous things for your bathroom and kitchen. Whatever we don’t know, we’ll find out for you.”

She adds, “It’s all in the details if you want it to flow.”

The Personal Touch

The company’s active social media presence helps bring the showroom’s personality to light. “Our Instagram page is very active, and I feel we’ve found the perfect mix of showing off our beautiful products while getting across our approachable ‘vibe,’” Lucks-Hecht explains. “You’ll often find a funny reel or photos of our family and friends mixed in. I credit Instagram to



The team members of Flow understand that knowledge is key in taking care of its customers, and excel at providing unparalleled customer service. Pictured above: Grace James, Rachel Lucks-Hecht and Kellie O’Heron.

“She said, ‘It’s really warm in here,’ and it wasn’t the temperature in the showroom and its built of steel and brick. She felt the energy! And that is the best compliment I have ever received.”

Rachel Lucks-Hecht

being the best way we’ve become known in the industry.”

Flow’s beautiful website compliments its social media presence, but the company doesn’t sell online.

“Each project is specialized and unique, and we wouldn’t be able to achieve the same level of attention and service through e-commerce,” she says. The customer base is cultivated from builder customers, including those from Able Plumbing Supply, as well as architects and designers. It knows the selection process to actual installation can take a long time. “This is not a quick sale, and getting the customer’s wants and needs right takes time,” she adds.

Each customer and project is unique, and since customers will be spending the money, it should be on something they love. “This is why we don’t accept a ‘That’s fine’ answer; people are spending money, and they should be thrilled with the purchase,” Lucks-Hecht notes. She equates it to purchasing an item for your wardrobe — you like it but don’t love it, it will sit in the back of your closet, and you won’t get any joy out of it.

“We connect with our clients and walk them through the showroom to touch and feel the fixtures and work through how they interact within one’s space,” she explains. “Tell us what you want, and we will tell you how we can help — and that is what makes us different from other showrooms.”

Lucks-Hecht adds: “I’ve had some people tell me their favorite item purchased here was their toilet; not even a bidet- just



With an open space concept, and floor to ceiling windows, it’s easy to see how passersby can glance into the welcoming showroom and see its beautifully curated products on display.



By removing brand names from displays, the Flow team can showcase the nuances and benefits of each product without customers focused on selecting only certain brands.

a toilet. They love it because it has the look and quality they want and need, and it fits perfectly within their project.” She counters it with calls she receives from others who purchase from the big-box stores or online themselves. If there is a problem with quality or installation (oops, they selected the wrong item), they need to backtrack and purchase another. “I encourage them to come to Flow the next time, so it gets done right the first time.”

An example of the personal touch for customers can actually be found within the hiring process for team members. Lucks-Hecht received a Facebook request from a young woman starting her career in the design industry. She had been following Lucks-Hecht via social media, was impressed and inspired by her, and reached out to ask if Lucks-Hecht would mentor her on her journey.

She did more than that. The two connected, and soon Lucks-Hecht realized that this young woman was precisely the personality and fit for the showroom and hired her as her assistant. Soon after, Grace James would be one of the four team members who rock the showroom, and it goes back to “Just Be Nice.”

It also goes back to being involved within one’s community. As stated earlier, the showroom was designed to be open and airy, and the inner beauty was an open invitation to those walking by to stop in. Being part of the community includes hosting parties and events for its plumbers and contractors, members of the National Kitchen and Bath Associ-

ation and the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, and offering continuing education courses for architects, builders and designers.

The company is active in its small-town community and participates in events such as local food truck festivals, art festivals and holiday events that take place outside its doors. “We love being part of these events, whether it helps in planning, setting up tables to show off some products, getting to know the community and giving out water and goodies,” says Lucks-Hecht.

Flow also supports the local police and fire stations through donations, as well as and donations to local organizations and houses of worship. It has also offered up its showroom to host events for local politicians’ fundraising efforts and participate in food and clothing drives.

Being involved within the community is essential; during one of the events, what Flow had set out to accomplish was brought to fruition. A guest expressed to Lucks-Hecht what the couple had tried to accomplish. “She said, ‘It’s really warm in here,’ and it wasn’t the temperature in the showroom, and its built of steel and brick,” Lucks-Hecht notes. “She felt the energy! And that is the best compliment I have ever received.”

The Power of Partnerships

While Able Plumbing is part of IMARK Plumbing, it was familiar with its Luxury Product Groups (LPG) arm. During the construction of Flow Bath and Kitchen Design Studio, the couple went to an LPG meeting.



Rachel smiles when she tells the story of how she and Lee built the business when their twin boys were two years old. Here the family is enjoying some time together on a recent family trip.

“Being a part of the group is huge for me,” Lucks-Hecht explains. “Some of the best practices they discussed were things I had thought about, so it confirmed I was on the right track. And I’m meeting owners of other showrooms, some just like mine — and others a bit different. I’ve been able to connect with them and we can share information. I called one member and said, ‘I’m having trouble with my terms and conditions,’ and she sent me theirs. The group is a great resource.”

MacDowell notes: “Flow is a remarkable showroom. It doesn’t look like a cookie-cutter showroom full of white laminate and zero personality. It is warm, using the brick walls and black ironwork Rachel had custom-made to make the large space feel intimate. Rachel didn’t follow the rules, which makes this LPG Destination Showroom so special. It feels like Philadelphia.”

Lucks-Hecht adds: “Every aspect of our business is just as important as the rest. From our website, making appointments, the showroom itself, the sales process, the ongoing communication, the delivery process and follow-up all hold equal weight. We don’t consider our job finished until the items are installed, and the customers are happy and satisfied with their new spaces.”

While the showroom is located in the Philadelphia area, it’s common for its customers to ask Flow to help design their homes across the country, allowing this standalone showroom to have coast-to-coast visibility.

Congratulations to Flow Bath and Kitchen Design Studio for your showroom excellence; *The Wholesaler* magazine is proud to showcase you as our Showroom of the Year. 🍀

