

business insider

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Architect gives shoe store the boot

• Designer James Dayton helps shoemaker Allen Edmonds put its best foot forward — in more ways than one.

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When Allen Edmonds Shoe Corp. was looking to open its first new store since 2007, CEO Paul Grangaard tapped an architect whose family name has been synonymous with Minnesota retailing for generations: James Dayton.

Dayton heads James Dayton Design Ltd. (JDD), a Minneapolis-based, 11-person architectural design firm that he founded in 1997. A protégé of architect Frank Gehry, Dayton spent five years working for Gehry's California design firm before returning to Minnesota.

One of the first marketing initiatives Grangaard launched at then-struggling Allen Edmonds was to open a new retail store in the City Center in downtown Minneapolis. That store opened in September 2010.

"Good store design and good retail display and good fixturing promote a lifestyle," said Dayton. "My whole goal in that City Center space was to try and get all that skyway traffic to stop in their tracks and say, 'Wow!' — not to just run by on their way to lunch."

The store coincidentally is just across a skyway from the former flagship store of the old Dayton Hudson Co. (now a Macy's store). Grangaard said that Dayton's design of the City Cen-

ter store became the template for six more Allen Edmonds stores that have opened in the past 16 months across the country, and will be used in at least four more stores in 2012. Grangaard says all of the stores using Dayton's design have performed above projections.

"We think Jim's done a great job presenting us to the customer in the way that the brand should be presented," said Grangaard.

Said Dayton: "We're trying to make the stores reflect the values of the company, which is very well made everyday shoes."

Success with the store design led

Dayton continues on D4 ▶

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Architect James Dayton with the Dalton dress boot he designed for the Allen Edmonds shoe stores.

Architect gives Allen Edmonds its new look — and its popular boot

◀ DAYTON FROM D1

Grangaard to the next logical step: Ask the architect to design a new shoe.

"He came up with a boot, which we've named in honor of his heritage the 'Dalton,'" said Grangaard. Dalton is a derivative of Dayton and was also the name of Dayton Hudson Corp.'s bookstore chain — B. Dalton Booksellers.

Introduced earlier this year, the wing-tip dress boot became the company's top-selling boot and the seventh-best selling style of the fall season.

Turnaround since 2008

Grangaard has led a turnaround of the Port Washington, Wis.-based manufacturer of men's shoes and accessories.

After a painful restructuring in 2008, Grangaard has rejuvenated Allen Edmonds sales and increased employment. E-commerce sales have tripled since 2009, and the company expects to end 2011 with record sales of \$100 million. The company has added 120 jobs since January and increased company-wide employment to 730.

The City Center store has played a key role in the turnaround.

"That is our lab store," said Grangaard. "We introduce products there to see how well they'll do."

Dayton's work with Allen Edmonds is an example of how the architecture industry can grow despite the scarcity of new construction projects.

"Architectural thinking has

expanded a lot to include fashion, retail and product design and furniture," Dayton said.

Designs of all kinds

JDD specialties include architectural design, integrated interior environments, planning and custom furniture. The firm's projects include work for the Blake School, the Crown Plaza Hotel in Bloomington, the MacPhail Center for Music, and Highpoint Center for Printmaking.

James Dayton also did the design for his cousins' new restaurant, the Bachelor Farmer, in the North Loop neighborhood of Minneapolis opened by Gov. Mark Dayton's sons Eric and Andrew. (James Dayton is the son of Bob Dayton, who founded the women's special-



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The interior of the Allen Edmonds shoe store in downtown's City Center was designed by James Dayton.

ty retail store Harold in the old Conservatory shopping center in downtown Minneapolis.)

Grangaard keeps Dayton's original shoe design sketch in his office and says they'll continue to work together. He's al-

ready gotten Dayton to agree to do more shoe designs as well as window displays for the store.

That would take Dayton back to his high school and college days designing win-

dow displays for his father.

"It feels very normal for me to be doing window displays," Dayton said. "That was the world that I grew up with."

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