

Gold in Them Hills

What do you do when you want a serious slice of the second-home market, or maybe even the third or the fourth? Like Mohammed, you go to the mountain. Which is exactly the point behind Mountain Comfort Furnishings: Set up shop in affluent altitudes like Vail or Taos, pack the stores with hearty, stylish furnishings befitting a home away from home, and wait for snow.

The strategy appears to be paying off. Mountain Comfort Furnishings, gunning for \$20 million in sales this year, just opened its eighth store in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho—and perhaps most significantly, is ready to consider life beyond the slopes.

"I don't feel that we are limited only to mountain communities," says Bill Jarski, who founded the retailer in 1984 and began franchising in 1991. "We believe that lakes regions and small metro areas can also sustain a Mountain Comfort. We also have the support of our custom vendors. They are encouraging us to venture out into other markets."

Jarski got the idea for Mountain Comfort while selling pillows and mattress pads out of his basement to condo owners in the Frisco, Colo., area. When customers starting complaining about the paucity of their local furniture choices, Jarski saw an opportunity.

Mountain Comfort grew by depending on independent owners to consider regional tastes in tailoring the assortment, which includes familiar names from High Point as well as local sources. And if Mountain Comfort feels like a family operation, it's with good reason. Jarski and his wife Heather own the Frisco and Taos stores, while their son Andy Jarski owns the new Coeur d'Alene store with his wife Heidi.

Still, Jarski is eager for his retail family to grow: "Now that we have established a quality base of stores, we will be actively promoting franchisee development." Mountain Comfort has also brought on an in-house marketing consultant to assist the chain. But Jarski will likely follow the slow and steady approach that's worked so far, adding, "We will always think carefully about Mountain Comfort's growth."

