



# THE SEARCH FOR SPECIAL THINGS

BY ANDREA LILLO

In the Westside area of Atlanta, a fledgling home furnishings district, one retail newcomer looks to bring a new perspective to this city, a mission that has already sparked attention.

"We're not beige and safe," said Bradley Odom, owner of Dixon Rye, of its merchandise. "We're trying to push the envelope in Atlanta."

Located in an original ironworks building on Howell Mill Road NW, Dixon Rye brings raw and refined looks together in an open, 4,700-square-foot space. With his mantra of "buy better, fewer things," Odom has an affinity for unique items, and Dixon Rye delivers, with half of its merchandise consisting of antiques and one-of-a-kind items mixed among new products.

Dixon Rye may be less than a year old—it opened last fall—but its founder has an extensive retail resume, having spent 10 years with J. Crew and another 10 with West Elm. "Retail is in my blood," Odom said.

The product is eye catching, as is the store itself. Odom included original pieces in the store's design from the ironworks when possible, so the former garage door now hangs in back of the register, and exposed beams are seen throughout.

The ironworks' metal window casings were constructed into a house shape at the front of the store to both welcome customers and serve as a shop within a shop. It showcased entertaining items in May, but could easily be used to highlight holiday gifts, art or more. The store's reclaimed hardwood floors hail from a horse farm in Kentucky.

Even with its industrial feel, Dixon Rye retains its Southern flavor. Its name was derived from the Mason Dixon line and one of Odom's favorite books, "Catcher in the Rye."

"We all have a lot of stuff," Odom said, making it even more important to offer merchandise that is special. Each piece in its Astier de Villatte tabletop line—the store is the exclusive dealer in the Southeast—takes two days to make, he said. The rugs are all one-of-a-kinds made in Turkey. In early May, Odom was excited about its new shipment of antiques from High Point. "We're doing really well with antiques."

One-of-a-kind items have really performed well, he said; limited pieces are among

**1** The view from the mezzanine shows the store's sleek, industrial layout.

**2** Inside the store's house-shaped display area in front, entertaining items were the focus in May.

**3** A look at the back of the store, including its mezzanine, which houses the design studio

**4** Dixon Rye is the exclusive Southeast dealer for Astier de Villatte tabletop.

**5** The garage door from the building's former ironworks hangs in back of the register.

its biggest draws. "It proved that people want special unique things."

That includes fun items as well, such as the flavored toothpicks that were sold for Father's Day.

About 70 percent of the merchandise is furniture, and brands include Vanguard Furniture, Cisco Brothers and Mrs. Howard, as well as his own line called the Dixon Rye Collection. In addition to private label upholstery, the retailer also has private-label candles and pottery.

The store is slowly adding decorative accessories, so if a customer "is not ready for an heirloom she can still take something away." Lighting performs well for the retailer, he added, and artwork, textiles and objects are among the mix at the store.

Both new and vintage pieces are shown together throughout. "We want to show how raw and refined can live together," he said.

Beyond the merchandise, the customers' experience is key. Creating the right atmosphere—from the packaging to the music played to even having its name in the cement outside the front door—is essential. "You have to give people reason to come to the store," Odom said. "Retail has changed—it's hard. I want this to be a showplace to inspire you."

That includes hosting store events. During the Atlanta International Gift & Home Furnishings Market last month, the retailer hosted acclaimed New York photographer Trevor Forrest, who spoke at the store with customers about his work. Dixon Rye has also had a book signing with Hilary Robertson, author of Monochrome Home.

Odom also plans to hold workshops so people can learn about how things are made, he said, adding to consumers' store experience. "We're passionate about how things are made and who made them."

Dixon Rye further connects with consumers through its weekly e-newsletter, called Quiet Decency, which showcases favorite things and has gotten notice from interior designers. Social media has also been a big boost for the store; posted pictures before the store's opening created intrigue.

It has a thriving designer business as well, and two of the four store employees are interior designers, including Odom.

The response overall has been overwhelming, Odom said. "Ninety-nine percent of people come in and say, 'Thank you for the fresh perspective.'" He added, "we wanted to bring something new to Atlanta." It's important to be "passionate about buying what you love." ■



Retail veteran Bradley Odom opened Dixon Rye last fall, wanting to "push the envelope in Atlanta."

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