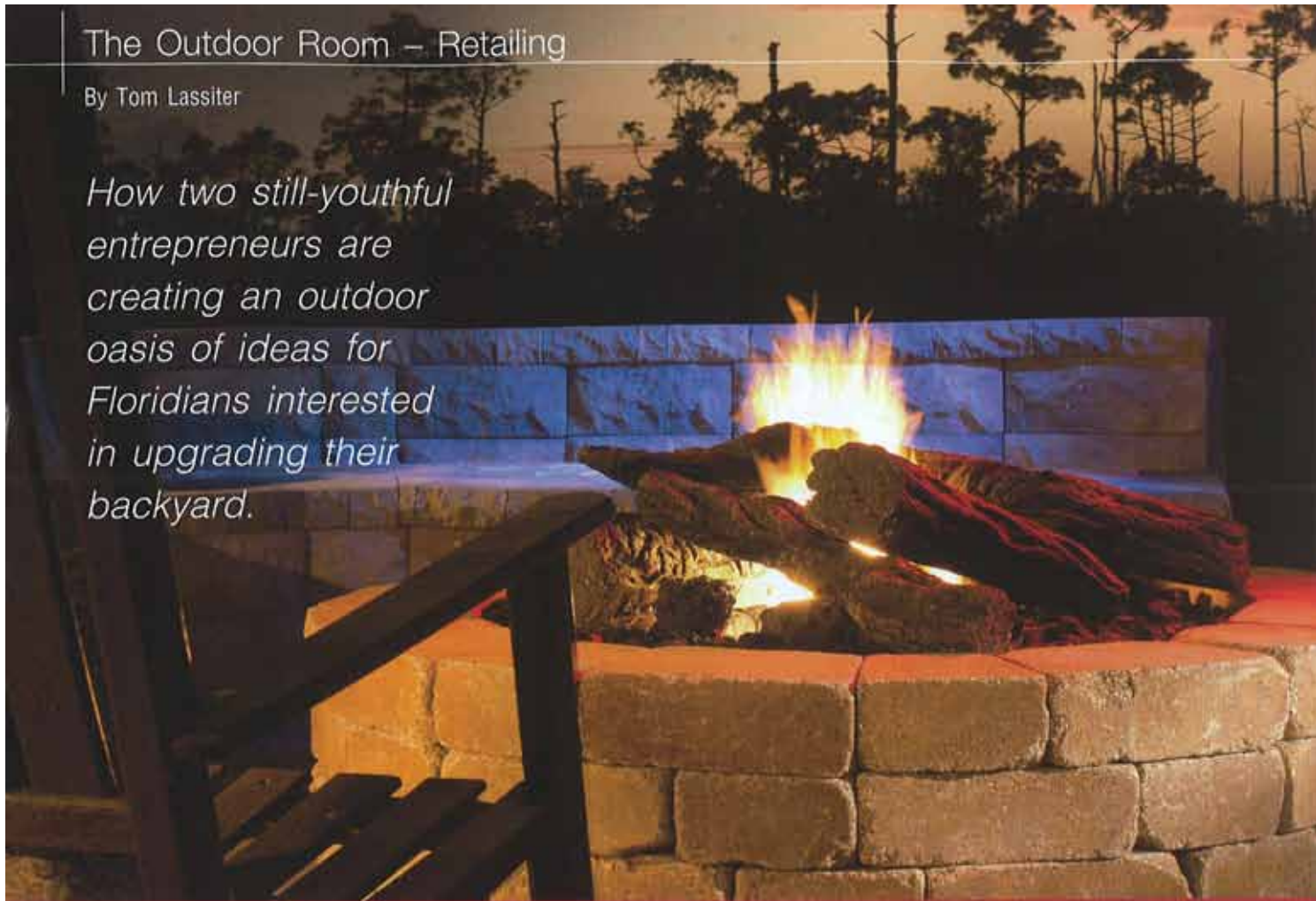


By Tom Lassiter

How two still-youthful entrepreneurs are creating an outdoor oasis of ideas for Floridians interested in upgrading their backyard.



Creating a Destination

State Road 60 slashes through Florida's midsection, connecting Vero Beach on the Atlantic Coast with Tampa on the Gulf. Along its route is the Florida not touted in glitzy tourism ads: sandy fields that stretch to the horizon, mature citrus groves, stately old towns such as Bartow, and the unglamorous phosphate mining industry.

That's one reason why the scene in Mulberry, about 35 miles inland from Tampa, is so arresting.

There, hard by the four-lane, is a sprawling outdoor lifestyle design center. The eye appeal is so intense that it interrupts travelers hell-bent on making it from one coast to the other. They stop and explore, amazed at what they've encountered. "We don't have anything like this in West Palm," they say.

It's 20,000 sq. ft. of carefully crafted

hardscape, stone walls, winding paths and pavilions that showcase outdoor kitchens and rooms. Ponds and water features reflect the glow of flames at night, when the site becomes the venue for non-profit benefits. The amphitheater and stage come in especially handy for those events. Elvis (or someone who could be mistaken for The King) recently was spotted there.

This is Danielle Fence, a decades-old company but a newcomer to the Outdoor Room business. Brothers Marc and Paul Glogower, unsaddled by traditional notions of retailing outdoor living products, are creating what may be a new business model for integrating and presenting all the components of the Outdoor Room.

"We don't come at it from the fireplace side," says Marc Glogower. "We

come from the fence world. We're building everything ourselves, from scratch."

That's the way the Glogower brothers started when they were teenagers, building fence sections for do-it-yourself installers. They were 13 and 17 then, in the mid-1970s.

The family had moved from New Jersey to Florida, where the boys' father saw more opportunity for his above-ground swimming pool business. It was Paul who realized that pools and backyards often need fencing.

"Paul found a company that would sell him lumber, and we built wood fence panels on the back porch," Glogower says. "People would pick them up to install themselves."

These days, firepits are in great demand.

When customers asked for installation, the boys – still in high school – hired their dad to provide that service. In their third year in business, they purchased an acre on State Road 60. Danielle Fence Manufacturing Co., named for their sister, now rambles along 1,500 feet of road frontage.

Danielle Fence had 105 employees building fences and hardscapes during the boom years before 2008. Like everyone else, the brothers Glogower saw all those cable TV shows dedicated to home remodeling and turning the backyard into a resort for family and friends. They became familiar with the concept of the Outdoor Room. That's something we ought to get into, they said. But Danielle Fence was going full-tilt and there wasn't time and energy to branch into something new.

Then came the crash and the ongoing Great Recession. Danielle Fence Co.'s sales fell off a cliff, right behind home construction. Retail sales, which made up the other half of the business, limped along. The number of employees fell by half.

Danielle Fence needed more business, but from where?

The brothers considered their options and saw that the Outdoor Room idea was still on the table. They thought they were still young enough to try something new.

"When you start at 17 and 13, you're not that old 30 years later," Glogower says. "You've got to plan for the next 15 or 20 years. This helps us carry on for the next phase of the company."

His business card identifies him as president of Danielle Fence. Brother Paul's business card carries the same title. That's just the way they operate.

The brothers went to hearth and patio trade shows to educate themselves and seek out possible vendors. They were as interested in reputations as they were in products.

"We're a long-term planning company," Glogower explains. "We're looking at a 20- to 30-year program. It's better to find a partner that's going to help you for the long term."

He mentions Nebraska Plastics, which for more than 20 years has supplied Danielle Fence with PVC fencing. Danielle Fence has installed "millions of feet" of product made by Nebraska Fence. "I haven't had one warranty claim," he says. Satisfaction builds trust and good will, which the Glogowers

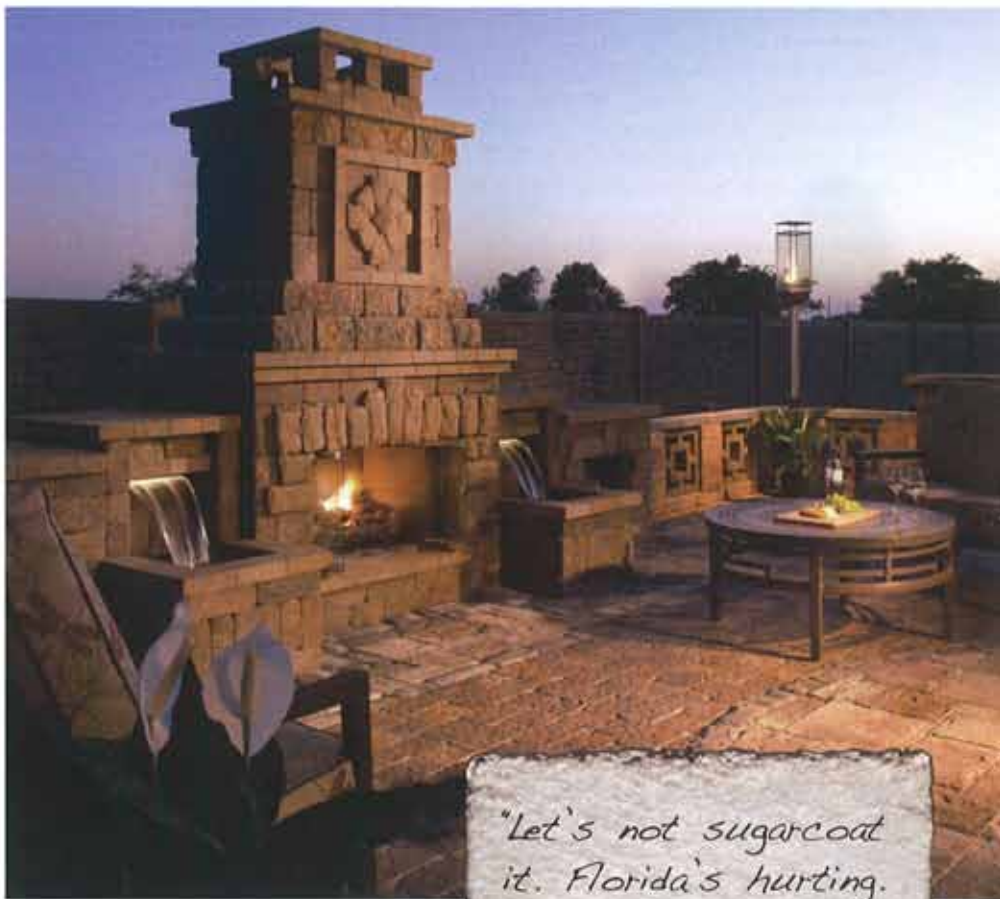
cultivate relentlessly. It's always better for a builder or homeowner to deal with a trusted vendor than start the process anew, he says.

The brothers reexamined the central Florida economy. Was it really a good time, early in 2010, to consider investing precious time, energy and money in a big new venture?

"Let's not sugarcoat it," Glogower says. "Florida's hurting. But if you wait for what you think is the right time, you

"is just to give you an idea, Mr. Homeowner. There are very few places where you can go and see anything of this magnitude before you spend the money on it. Here, it's all in one location. It allows the consumer to see what is available instead of guessing what they are going to end up with."

In casual furniture, Danielle Fence chose to represent Brown Jordan, Lloyd/Flanders, Poly-Wood, OW Lee, Telescope and Casual Creations. "They're



The Glogowers understand that consumers have a need to see, and touch, items prior to purchase.

won't have time to do it. Business is about taking risks, and hoping you make the right decisions, and you move along."

So here it is 18 months later, with just one Outdoor Room season behind them, and the brothers have no regrets.

"We feel like we made the right decision," Glogower says.

The Design Center, with its four pavilions, fireplaces, outdoor kitchens, and fire and water features, is the focal point of the 15-acre site.

The Design Center, Glogower says,

"Let's not sugarcoat it. Florida's hurting. But if you wait for what you think is the right time, you won't have time to do it. Business is about taking risks, and hoping you make the right decisions."

— Marc Glogower

local, manufactured in Sarasota,” Glogower says of the latter brand. “Anytime you can give business to a local company, that’s nice.”

In grills, the brands include Broilmaster, Summerset Professional, Fire Magic, American Outdoor, Big Green Egg, Evo and pizza ovens by Chicago Brick and Quintessential.

“We’ve found some nice, first-class companies that try to support their dealers,” Glogower says.

When constructing and outfitting a true Outdoor Room, there’s much more to consider. Danielle Fence offers shade-making louver and screen systems, fireplaces (outdoor only), firepits and low-voltage lighting, wine cabinets, under-counter refrigerators and icemakers, plus evaporative cooling systems (mistlers) to keep everyone comfortable when the mercury climbs. The mistlers are installed in the four pavilions, of course, to demonstrate their effectiveness in Florida’s heat.

“It can be July, and with the shade and the mist, it feels like 75 degrees,” Glogower says.

The reason for such an expansive presentation is to plant ideas and to get homeowners to plan their Outdoor Rooms as comprehensively as the Glogowers have planned their business.

“The idea is to put together a master plan first,” Glogower says, “for the long term. You don’t have to do everything at once. You can phase it in.”

Planning the ultimate Outdoor Room

enables the homeowner to make intelligent choices about materials and the placement of features. Even if the homeowner makes a modest start, each construction phase anticipates the next, making the process more satisfying and cost-efficient.

“Give us an idea of what you’d like to have for the long term, and let’s build from there,” Glogower tells customers.

While Danielle Fence can build the majority of a tricked-out Outdoor Room, the company doesn’t do it all. So it has formed relationships with carefully chosen partners who can provide certain specialized services, such as low-voltage lighting.

For water features, Glogower says, Danielle Fence has “a pond master. He’s a team partner. We work together

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(L. to R.) Marc and Paul Glogower near one of their water gardens.

and try to grow sales for each other. When you get four or five different companies working toward the same goal, we all win. And by bringing in these relationships, we can provide a turnkey package for the consumer.”

Even in this soft economy, the visionary presentation at Danielle Fence is paying off. Shoppers are driving in from Orlando and Orange County, more than an hour to the northeast. They’re also coming from Clearwater and St. Petersburg, on the other side of Tampa Bay.

The company uses direct mail and e-mail, targeting its huge database of existing customers. It uses billboards and TV spots and depends on word-of-mouth. “We have a very high rating – about 98.9 – for customer satisfaction,” Glogower says.

He credits a strong Internet presence for helping to draw customers from such a broad area. The well-executed Danielle Fence website features superior photography, brief but professional-quality videos, and examples of the animated space planning services offered.

“A customer found us online, saw the photos and knew they had to come,” Glogower says. “Everybody says there is nothing like this in the state of Florida. The idea is, we’re building a destination.

“It can’t be a place where you’re in and out in 20 minutes. That’s why it’s all done in a first-class manner, so customers can get a value when they come to the facility. As people become aware, one friend tells another.”

Every effort is directed to make Danielle Fence and its Design Center



One of four pavilions in the Design Center with installed mistlers for fighting the heat.

stand out from the competition. “In the fence industry, we compete against 50 to 60 contractors in the area,” Glogower says. “Maybe five are storefronts; the rest work out of their house or car.”

“We have to distinguish ourselves from the pack, to show that we are solid and stable and here for long-term growth. How do we capture that customer for long-term sales? The only way is to provide full service.”

Getting people on the site to explore and experience first-class products and design is crucial to building the relationship. Some customers return four and five times, “just looking and hanging out,” before making a purchase, Glogower says. “The more they come back, the more comfortable they become with you.”

“You start building desire,” he explains. “We’re Americans, and we’re consumer-driven.”

entertainers. The latter-day Elvis appeared on the 16-by-24-foot, pergola-sheltered stage. That September event benefitted the Mulberry Community Service Center. Glogower was tickled when he received e-mails asking about reserved seating.

“It’s all about charity and donations,” he says. “If you want front row and are willing to pay for it, I’m sure the organization will provide that.”

Despite the splashy, upscale presence and industry buzz that the Design Center has generated, Glogower cautions that this is still a new venture, but he feels confident going forward.

“We didn’t do stupid things when it was a good economy,” he explains. “We’re still learning on the hearth and furniture side. One year in the industry does not make us experts. The more educated we become, the smarter we are.”

Here’s an example of how Danielle

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Desire. That’s why the Design Center has its own putting green. Isn’t that what every weekend duffer yearns for?

Desire. That’s why the company did a cooking event with Big Green Egg. “A little Eggfest,” Glogower calls it.

“We advertised it a little bit, and we had a decent turnout. The idea was to get people to come to the facility. At the end of the day, you want to sell something. But you want them to tell their friends about it.”

The Eggfest did not disappoint. More than two-dozen Big Green Eggs were sold, and the good-will reverberations should continue for months, if not years.

Danielle Fence provides the Design Center as a venue for fund-raising events for local non-profits. The pavilions and numerous other architectural vignettes provide versatile spaces for charity auctions, beverage and food stations, and

Fence tackles new categories, each one with a regular stream of new products and features. Rather than expecting every salesperson to become expert in every product area such as kitchens, firepits, grills and furniture, Danielle Fence designates one salesperson to become the “product champion” in that area. That gives product knowledge responsibility to one person who, in turn, trains others and becomes the go-to person on details.

Product champions allow Danielle Fence to divide and conquer what otherwise might be an overwhelming amount of data.

Thirty-plus years of experience in Florida’s business cycles convinced the Glogowers that a smart launch in a down economy would serve them well come better times. They interpret the constant television presence of outdoor



Putting greens attract all members of a family.

living topics and programs as free advertising. They also knew that, despite foreclosures and bankruptcies still in the news, millions of homeowners are securely situated.

“All those people who bought prior to the boom, they shouldn’t be upside-down,” Glogower explains. “They’re still out there, and they’re not buying a new house because they can’t sell theirs and get what they need out of it. So they think, let’s spend (for an Outdoor Room) and get something we can enjoy.”

Glogower finds that “the average guy who works hard for his money” makes up most of the market these days. “He’ll spend \$2,500 to five grand and be comfortable with his purchase. The customer who can spend \$15,000 or \$20,000, he’s not spending it. The person who can spend \$30,000 or \$40,000, he can still do it, but he’s doing it slower.”

Danielle Fence helps customers decide to buy with a 12-month, same-as-cash program.

Taking the long view assures the company that better days lay ahead.

“The down economy can only stay down for so long,” Glogower says. “When the economy comes back, Danielle will be ready to capitalize on that opportunity. Whether it comes back today, tomorrow or 10 years from now, we’re ready.”