

# Vermont view exceeds its borders

## Ann Roche Casual Furniture expands



Ann and Paul Roche

IT IS evident Ann Roche, president and co-owner of Ann Roche Casual Furniture in Shelburne, Vt., has taken her business to the next level.

Nearly three decades ago, while raising her six children, Roche began the casual furniture journey. With her natural selling ability, her knack for design and her husband Paul's expertise in accounting/finance, a new business was created when Roche began selling furniture from the garage of their Vermont home, never anticipating the company would grow into a million dollar enterprise.

Over the years Roche vacated various retail spaces, and in 1994 gave ARCF a home that would remain for the next 14 years. Satisfied with all aspects of the building except its size, co-owner Matt Monohan and Roche recently relocated

the business. Initially the decision to move was bittersweet but the transition has been remarkable.

Roche left behind her 3,700-sq.-ft. building and entered her new two-story space, occupying more than 17,000 square feet. The new store is across the street from the old location, which has also been convenient for her valued customers. The open floor plan and increased square footage makes it possible to market a substantial amount of inventory.

"People want to touch the furniture, sit on it and physically see the options available to them," Roche said. ARCF has provided the area with the largest selection of porch and patio furniture as well as accessories. "It is important that my customers are 100% satisfied with the product they are purchasing," she said. "To accomplish that, I encourage people to explore their options before making their final decisions."

This no pressure policy is passed down to all ARCF employees. The store's environment is warm and friendly as the team works together to make their customers' shopping experience a pleasant one.

ARCF currently showcases a broad range of furniture, from traditional to contemporary styles. The store is known for representing a variety of new and upcoming trends. This can be attributed to Roche's yearly buying trips to the Casual Furniture Market in Chicago.

Roche extends her gratitude to the wonderful group of representatives she

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Colorful Adirondacks line the drive leading consumers to Ann Roche Casual Furniture.

## RETAIL PROFILE

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has worked with through the years. “Just like any business, it can be cutthroat but I have been fortunate to work with people who love furniture and take pride in what they sell.”

ARCF originally considered its core vendors Telescope, Laneventure, Lloyd/Flanders, Meadowcraft, Woodard, Brown Jordan, Winston, Tropitone, Gloster and Seaside Casual. With her new location, she is able to display and stock more product, allowing ARCF to carry several other vendors including Riverwood, Alfresco Home, Braxton Culler, Cape May Wicker, Emu, Ficks Reed, LaFuma, Trica, Treasure Garden and Hatteras Hammocks. Outdoor lighting is one of many accessories that appear throughout the store from vendors including Shady Lady and Olympia. ARCF is filled with product beyond furniture, such as tableware, placemats, wall fixtures, candles, mirrors, outdoor showers and weathervanes. “There is something for everyone here,” Roche said.

Telescope Casual Furniture became the first line Roche stocked and remains her biggest-selling vendor in terms of volume of pieces sold. The Granville, N.Y.-based company continues to supply furniture to customers on both a personal and commercial level. People are familiar with the Telescope name and are always amazed at the quality of its product, Roche said.

“I purchased Telescope furniture over 25 years ago and, believe it or not, it appears to be new,” Roche said. With a 15-year warranty on framing and its history of customer satisfaction this does not come as a surprise, she added, ARCF is an exclusive dealer in the area and has access to the company’s entire line.

Roche names all-weather wicker furniture as her best-selling category “Dining



Teak collections like Gloster Ventura appeal to consumers investing in their homes and second homes.



Deep seating collections in all-weather wicker are best sellers.

used to be No. 1, but now it’s all about the comforts of deep seating,” Roche said. Her customers love gliding rockers, love seats, reclining lounge chairs and the durability of all-weather wicker. ARCF carries both the natural wicker, treated in a vinyl-based paint, and synthetic wicker. Laneventure continues to be a top seller in both categories.

Gloster teak furniture is her top seller in dollar volume, with its synthetic vinyl woven and teak combination being a favorite. “Gloster teak is a category all its own,” she said. Unlike some companies, Gloster sets itself apart by its unique designs. Pieces put together with wooden dowels rather than hardware add to its elegance.

ARCF relocated just in time to meet the demands of the 2008 casual season. New England has long and cold winters, and people are very anxious to spend as much time outdoors as possible. Business begins to soar as early as March, and will continue right through the summer. Fortunately, many people are investing in four-season rooms, which keep them shopping year-round.

At the end of each July, the store hosts a huge warehouse sale, which attracts people from many areas of the Northeast and Canada. The event will take on a new dimension this summer and will promote unbeatable savings.