

Furniture Showroom & Interior Design Firm Sets Up Home on Monroe

By **Charlsie Dewey** - September 6, 2018



Rodolfo Gonzales Interior Design Grand Rapids showroom.

A furniture showroom and interior design firm has moved into the former MoDiv space and it is quickly gaining attention from interested passersby.

Robert Gross, who co-owns Rodolfo Gonzales Interior Design with Rodolfo Gonzales, said the shop made its first sale before it had officially opened.

He noted a passerby called the store's number after spotting an ottoman through the window that he had to have.

The store opened last month at 40 Monroe Center St. NW, Suite 105. Visible from both Monroe Center and Division Avenue, the space was renovated to include a second entrance and large windows that allow for street views into the showroom.

"WE LOVED THE ARCHITECTURE AND THE DOUBLE LEVELS. IT'S KIND OF INTIMATE," EXPLAINED GROSS, WHO NOTED THE INTERIOR WAS REDONE WITH AN OPEN CONCEPT. "WE LIKED THE OPEN CONCEPT FOR PEOPLE TO LOOK AROUND AND WALK AROUND, THAT'S WHY WE DIDN'T PUT UP ANY WALLS."

He also said Monroe Center offers customers easy access to the store, with one-hour free parking in the nearby Monroe Center parking garage and heated sidewalks that melt the snow and ice in the winter.

"If you look at it when the sun is out, it looks very Parisian with the trees, and there are a lot of boutique merchants on this street from McKay Tower up to Division. We are trying to contribute to making this the premier retail shopping corridor in downtown. It's walkable. There are nice restaurants, wine bars and it's very park-like."

Rodolfo Gonzales Interior Design offers high-end furniture and is an authorized Baker, Milling Road and McGuire Furniture dealer. The showroom will also serve as an art gallery, representing local artists and talent from across the globe. Gonzales said what makes the business unique is that he offers his interior design services within the store.

"Our model is a design retail shop," Gross said. "We are high end, and our experience is that people want a designer helping them because they only want to do this once. They don't want to make any mistakes. A lot of times, they know what they like in terms of style, but they need a designer to pull it all together."

GONZALES ADDED, "WHAT WE ARE HOPING TO OFFER IS THAT ONE-STOP SHOPPING. PEOPLE CAN COME INTO THE SHOWROOM AND BASICALLY DESIGN THE WHOLE HOUSE UNDER ONE ROOF."

The store caters to a variety of tastes, from traditional to transitional to contemporary. Gonzales said he often helps clients blend existing pieces, such as family heirlooms, with other styles.

"That's another part of our expertise, blending what people already have with new stuff and giving them a whole new look, and that is really our forte," Gonzales said.

The Grand Rapids store is a coming home for both of its owners. Gonzales grew up in Holland, while Gross is originally from Grand Rapids. Both men are excited to be returning to the West Michigan area after several years away, including time in Chicago and North Carolina.

GONZALES'S DESIGN CAREER SPANS MORE THAN 30 YEARS. AFTER GRADUATING FROM THE HARRINGTON INSTITUTE OF INTERIOR DESIGN IN CHICAGO, HE BEGAN HIS CAREER IN CHICAGO'S MERCHANDISE MART AS THE LEAD INTERIOR DESIGNER FOR BAKER FURNITURE'S RETAIL AND TRADE SHOWROOMS. HE SAID HIS WORK AS LEAD DESIGNER FOR BAKER FURNITURE OFTEN BROUGHT HIM TO GRAND RAPIDS.

Prior to his involvement with Rodolfo Gonzales Interior Design, Gross was a corporate executive. He jointly opened Rodolfo Gonzales Interiors (the pair's first showroom) with Gonzales in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 2007.

Gonzales said when he decided it was time to open another showroom, he was drawn to Grand Rapids because of Baker's history in the area—Baker Furniture was founded in Grand Rapids more than a century ago and relocated production facilities to North Carolina in 2006—as well as all the growth the city is experiencing.

"There is so much happening here," he said.

While the internet allows people access to hundreds of home furnishing brands, Gonzales said there's been a return to the desire for a brick and mortar shop where people can see and feel the items they are looking at and receive professional help in designing the rooms of their home, especially when it comes to high-end designs.

"PEOPLE WANT TO COME INTO A SHOP LIKE OURS AND BE EDUCATED ON WHAT THEY ARE BUYING AND THEY WANT TO MAKE SURE IF THEY ARE BUYING SOMETHING THAT IS PRICEY, THEY KNOW WHAT THEY ARE GETTING," GONZALES SAID. "THEY ALSO WANT TO HAVE SOMEBODY SHOW THEM HOW TO PULL EVERYTHING TOGETHER AND BRING DIFFERENT STYLES AND VENDORS TOGETHER TO CREATE ONE LOOK, VERSUS GOING INTO ONE STORE WITH ONLY ONE BRAND."

While the storefront is open now, Rodolfo Gonzales Interior Design will host a grand opening celebration at the store in October.

**Photos courtesy of Rodolfo Gonzales Interior Design*

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Charlsie Dewey

After five years as a digital and print reporter for the Grand Rapids Business Journal, Charlsie Dewey decided to take on the challenge of helping to launch a brand new publication. She became the digital editor of Grand Rapids Magazine. With the shared goal of "celebrating city living," GR|MAG launched in July 2017. It provides daily coverage of the vast arts, entertainment, lifestyle, and culture offerings in Grand Rapids.