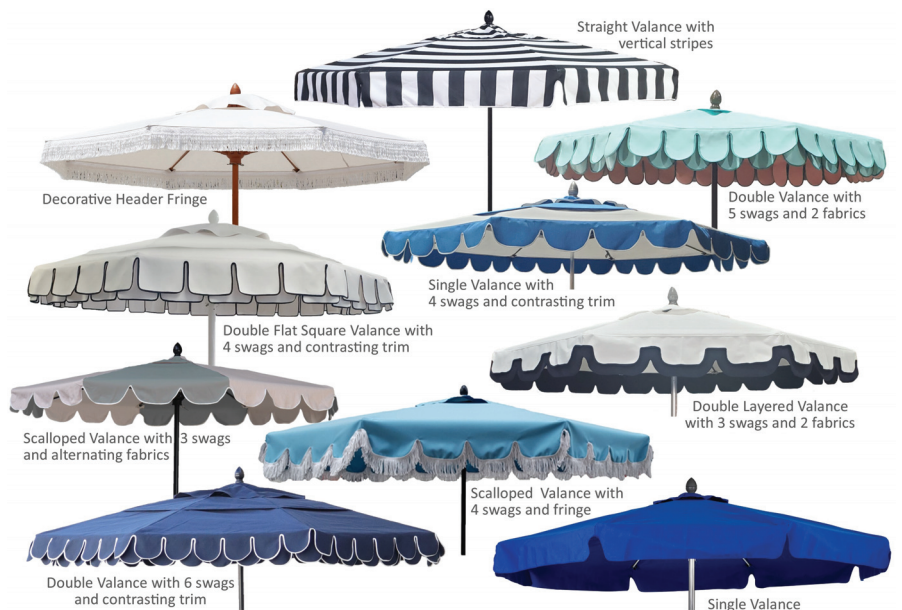


SHADE & Beyond

For over two decades, FiberBuilt's wide array of stylish and sturdy outdoor products have been customer favorites. *BY SHARON SANDERS*



THE COMFORT OF SHADE

is at the heart of a relaxing outdoor space. FiberBuilt Umbrellas & Cushions (Pompano Beach, Florida) is an expert in the science of shade and luxurious open-air spaces. *Patio & Hearth Products Report* spent some time with Chantell Holmes, retail sales manager, to uncover what makes this company a favorite of customers looking for innovative shade solutions and outdoor products that stand out from the crowd.

Who is FiberBuilt Umbrellas & Cushions?

Holmes: For more than two decades, FiberBuilt has been the leading manufacturer of fiberglass-ribbed umbrellas, but we are much more than that. We continue to expand our line of shade products to enhance the outdoor room with large-scale shade, elegant canopy designs, and cantilever options. As our name implies, we also manufacture a huge array of custom cushions and decorative accessories such as pillows and poufs.

What put the company on the map in the shade industry?

Holmes: FiberBuilt's reputation in the industry was founded on the quality and durability of our flexible fiberglass ribs. That was quickly followed by the development of our proprietary FiberTeak simulated wood finishes. These textured teak, bamboo, and coconut palm poles provide the look of wood without any of the drawbacks of the natural materials

TOP LEFT: *FiberBuilt Gusto*

TOP RIGHT: *FiberBuilt offers a variety of customizations with straight and scalloped valances, and fringe on Market and Prestige Collection umbrellas.*

(checking, warping, and cracking). The warm wood tones effortlessly coordinate with a variety of casual furniture collections carried by our retailers.

What is the company's niche?

Holmes: FiberBuilt's umbrellas are contract grade to hold up to the demands of high traffic hospitality applications and harsh weather conditions, including high winds. Those strengths speak to our retail partners who realize that FiberBuilt can be relied on for superior performance that delivers value to their customers for years of problem-free operation. We work with brick-and-mortar retailers and e-commerce sites on a personal basis. Any order can be customized to the homeowner's preferences and unique requirements.

Our knowledgeable sales and customer service departments furnish expert guidance to any questions the retailer may have. We easily assist with inquiries such as: Can we customize the canopy for the customer; what umbrella is recommended for in-pool use; which umbrella style should we suggest for wind-prone locations; or can FiberBuilt produce cushions to coordinate with the customer's umbrella order?

Describe the anatomy of a good umbrella.

Holmes: FiberBuilt is committed to manufacturing the highest quality, commercial-grade umbrellas so that the end user, whether hotel, restaurant, or residence, can enjoy years of excellent service.

What sets our Prestige umbrellas apart are the components that support their structural integrity, including: One piece aluminum poles with a .125 wall thickness available with anodized, powder-coated, or FiberTeak finishes; eight ½" or ¾" fiberglass ribs that can easily be replaced so that the umbrella can be put back in service rather than be discarded; a

heavy duty hub; a canopy with a double vent for use on rooftop, oceanside or other locations that experience gusty winds; and all of these features are reinforced with a five-year warranty.

What is the latest news from FiberBuilt?

Holmes: In 2022, we were awarded a patent for our Flight umbrella that sports an advanced inverted rib system, with polished aluminum upper ribs, solid aluminum hub, minimalist canopy silhouette and one-piece, 2" diameter anodized aluminum pole. The visually striking upper ribs convey an architectural intention that is ornamentally dramatic and highly functional. The ¾" lower fiberglass ribs are concealed within the canopy's fabric. The structure is superbly engineered and features a locking pulley lift mechanism that keeps the sleek mechanicals as contemporary as the refined profile.

What do you see as your biggest successes over the past few years?

Holmes: FiberBuilt has been expanding the exclusive shade products we manufacture as an OEM supplier to other respected industry brands. We have also doubled the staff of talented and skilled sewers in the cushion department to accommodate orders for large quantities of custom replacement cushions with Sunbrella fabrics for resorts, hotels, condominiums, and individual backyards.

Are there any emerging/growing trends in shade products?

Holmes: Scalloped valances are definitely a trending design detail that customizes the umbrella in ways that can either provide a retro vibe or a truly modern aesthetic. The other trend that FiberBuilt is out in front of are umbrellas with flat, level canopies.

We have four models—Flight, Unico, Contempo, and Gusto—to meet the demand for this chic profile. Flight and Unico have an inverted lift system, meaning the rib structures are above the canopy. Contempo has a 1½” diameter pole so it can be used in-table, and Gusto’s 2” diameter pole provides shaded comfort to lounge areas and beside chaises poolside without obstructing the view.

What new shade products are you most excited about for 2023?

Holmes: The new Olympia In-pool umbrella has been designed to be mounted into the sleeve of the shallow sun-shelf or baja-shelf installed by a pool contractor. These umbrellas have a 1½” diameter, one-piece aluminum pole with an elongated height of 108” so that when lowered into the sleeve, it maintains sufficient clearance for the pool users. It also features a marine locking pulley lift. The Olympia comes in 8- and 9-foot octagons and 6-foot-square sizes.

What other products do you sell?

Holmes: In addition to umbrellas,

bases, and replacement cushions, we have a division that specializes in upholstery for indoor furniture and draperies for interior and exterior applications at residences and aboard yachts.

When did you expand into different areas? Why?

Holmes: In 2010, FiberBuilt launched into e-commerce retail sales of umbrellas and bases. In 2012, we began manufacturing cushions, pillows, and poufs for commercial and residential use. In 2020, we acquired a designer-focused custom drapery and upholstery workroom. This allowed us to increase our sewing workforce and in-house capabilities by including a designer to assist clients with higher-end, sophisticated residential furnishings. For 2023—stay tuned. More big news is coming.

Why do you think specialty retailers like FiberBuilt products?

Holmes: Quality. Durability. Performance. Pricing. Service. While most of those items have been addressed earlier, it’s important to recognize the smaller interactions we have with our

retailers. For example, FiberBuilt is so committed to the end-user’s long-term satisfaction with our umbrellas that we manufacture protective covers for customers who want to safeguard their purchase and extend the life of their shade products by storing them during non-umbrella season. We stand behind our products with excellent warranties, and we also stand with retailers. We encourage their salespeople to take advantage of our custom capabilities so that each homeowner can create an ambiance unique to their style and budget.

What do the next few years hold for the shade industry?

Holmes: The need for shade products is strong and will continue to be in high demand. The lesson that homeowners learned during the long COVID lockdown and by working remotely from home was how essential their outdoor space is for daily living. They are more willing than ever to invest in their own comfort with beautiful, well-made casual furnishings and accessories.

Also, large-scale shade, as well as cantilevers, continue to be popular for com-

mercial and residential locations. We have noticed an increase in retail dealers who are marketing to hospitality properties and broadening their shade business from strictly homeowners to condominiums, apartment complexes, timeshares, and boutique hotels, and we expect that trend to continue.

What’s next for FiberBuilt?

Holmes: From our perspective, research, and interaction with our retail partners, the future is filled with positive signs. We’re continuing to build our network of sales reps who call on retailers around the country. Our customer base continues to grow, and our commitment to R&D remains purposeful and determined.

The objective, as it always has been, is to bring to market shade products with superior designs, graceful silhouettes, and innovative features at the competitive prices that customers are drawn to and that make our products valuable and profitable offerings for retailers. Our ribs may be flexible, but our dedication to forging lasting relationships with retailers and building the best umbrellas available is our driving force. ■