

Shop brings pieces of China to Elkridge

Rosewood City specializes in Asian furniture

By EDWARD LEE
SUN STAFF

Peter Cheung is trying to follow the path blazed by the people who founded stores like Scan and Ikea — bring the furniture of one's heritage from a far-off land and sell it in America.

Cheung has followed such a path from China to Elkridge. And while U.S. 1 might be the last place you would expect to find intricately carved furniture made from an exotic hardwood, Cheung finds it a suitable locale.

"There's more traffic and it's a bigger place," he said. "Before, we were behind an industrial park."

Cheung moved the store — called Rosewood City — from what might seem to be a more suitable location: Snowden River Parkway in Columbia, where his father opened it three years ago.

In the Elkridge shopping center, he found a much bigger storefront to display his exotic wares and 4,000 square feet of space inside.

The U.S. 1 corridor is a popular location for such specialty businesses. Earthscape Candles on U.S. 1 in North Laurel sells hand-crafted candles. And Ann's House of Nuts in the Baltimore-Washington Industrial Park in Jessup specializes in exotic imported nuts.

Howard County locales like Ellicott City's Main Street and Savage Mill are packed on weekends with shoppers looking for antiques and home furnishings.

Such businesses are a valued commodity, said Richard Story, executive director of the Howard County Economic Development Authority.

"They are what makes a community unique," he said. "I'm looking all the time for unique mementos to give to visiting dignitaries, and I want those types of businesses in Howard County."

Rosewood City is the only store in the Baltimore metropolitan area that sells authentic Asian furniture.

"This is something different," Cheung says. "You don't go to someone's house and see stuff like this."

His showroom might look like a



ELIZABETH MALBY/SUN STAFF

Shopping: Jan Traini of Jessup (left) and Barbara Richards of Marriotsville inspect a rosewood desk at Rosewood City in Elkridge. The store opened five years ago on Snowden River Parkway in Columbia. The founder's son moved the store to Elkridge.

typical furniture store, but amid the elaborate bureaus, mini-bars and dining room and living room sets you can find granite temple desks, silk screens and nesting tables.

As the name suggests, the business specializes in selling chairs and tables made of rosewood, from a tree that grows in tropical and subtropical regions such as India and Vietnam.

Jean Leslie, a horticultural consultant for the Home and Garden Information Center in Ellicott City, said rosewood is a valuable wood.

"It's a very hard type of wood — like mahogany," said Leslie. "Its color and graining is superior. Overall, it's much more desirable than other woods."

Cheung says the furniture he sells is built and carved in a factory in Canton, China. Artists carve intricate dragon or butterfly designs on tables and chairs.

Because of rosewood's density, the pieces are specially grooved and fitted so that they snap together to form the tabletop or chair. When the product is finished

it is shipped to Los Angeles, where it is transferred to a train to Baltimore, and finally trucked to Elkridge, Cheung said.

The manufacturing process is painstakingly long. Depending on the detail of the designs, it can be as much as six months between placing an order and its arrival at the Elkridge store, Cheung said.

And although Cheung acknowledges that the furniture is slightly more expensive than conventional home furnishings, he points out that rosewood's durability makes it an investment.

"A person could buy a dining room set, and it will last their lifetime," Cheung said. "Then they can pass it down to their kids, and that's how traditions get started."

But the lone drawback, said I-Kuang Liang, president of the Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce of the Greater Washington Area, is that the rarity of Chinese furniture gives people the impression that the home furnishings are too valuable for practical use.

"If you have Oriental furniture in the living room, you don't sit there," said Liang, who is also

chairman of the Asian American Business Development Council. "You just look at it. It's more like showcase."

The store's clientele is ethnically mixed, with about 40 percent being Asian and the rest Caucasians. But more than two-thirds of the Caucasian base are millennial personnel, Cheung said.

"They go overseas, they see the craftsmanship, and they like it," he said, noting another advantage to his Elkridge location — F Meade is only 20 miles away.