

## LIFESTYLE &amp; ARTS

# STORE THAT REFUSES TO BE CLICKED AWAY

Abt's new 30,000-square-foot expansion makes a case for shopping in person.



On a stretch of land in Glenview known more for its quiet affluence than for retail theater, a family-owned electronics store has quietly rewritten the rules of how Americans shop for their homes.

At Abt Electronics, the addition of 30,000 square feet to its furniture and mattress showroom is not merely an expansion. It is, more precisely, an argument—about taste, about touch, and about the enduring seduction of the physical store in an increasingly frictionless digital age.

The new space, which unfurls across a carefully choreographed sequence of rooms, feels less like a showroom than a kind of domestic stage set. Living rooms are arranged with a studied nonchalance; dining tables are dressed for gatherings that have not yet occurred; bedrooms suggest a life of quiet

order. It is a familiar retail conceit, but here it is rendered with unusual conviction.

The effect is not aspirational in the traditional sense—there are no velvet ropes or hushed intimidation—but rather invitation-al. One is encouraged not to admire from a distance, but to sit, to linger, to imagine.

This is, in part, a response to a shifting consumer psychology. For years, furniture retail drifted toward abstraction: thumbnail images, endless scrolls, algorithmic recommendations. But a sofa, like a mattress, resists abstraction. It must

be felt.

The pitch of a cushion, the give of leather, the improbable alchemy of comfort and proportion—these are not things easily conveyed through a screen. At Abt, the expansion acknowledges this truth with a certain Midwestern pragmatism. If the internet

excels at selection, the store must excel at experience.

To that end, the showroom introduces a broader roster of premium brands—Bernhardt, Stressless, American Leather among them—alongside long-standing partners such as Flexsteel and Hooker Furniture, each now afforded dedicated space to articulate its aesthetic. These are not simply displays but small, curated worlds, where craftsmanship is allowed to speak in its own dialect.

At the center of the expansion is a new Design Center, a quiet, almost club-like enclave where customers meet with specialists to design pieces that are, in a sense, autobiographical. Fabrics are chosen, finishes debated, configurations adjusted until something approaching personal expression emerges. It is a reminder that furniture, at its best, is not just functional but declarative—a statement about how one intends to live.

Elsewhere, the showroom leans into a kind of tactile democracy. Mattresses are not merely described but tested; sofas invite collapse rather than inspection. Accessories—lighting, rugs, art—have been expanded into a layered assortment that suggests not

completion but possibility. The message is subtle but clear: a home is not assembled in a single transaction but composed over time, with patience and curiosity.

“Shopping for the home should be inspiring and enjoyable,” said Jon Abt, one of the third-generation leaders of the company, which was founded in 1936 with an \$800 loan and has since grown into one of the largest single-store retailers in the country.

It is the sort of statement that might read as boilerplate were it not so thoroughly embedded in the experience itself. Even the details—complimentary cookies on weekends, a staff trained to guide rather than hover—contribute to a sense of ease that feels increasingly rare in large-scale retail.

The expansion also speaks to a broader resilience. While many brick-and-mortar retailers have retrenched, Abt has continued to invest—in space, in service, in the idea that physical presence still matters. Its nearly one-million-square-foot campus, complete with a warehouse, recycling center and solar infrastructure, suggests a business that understands both scale and stewardship.

There is, finally, something faintly anachronistic about it all, and in the best possible way. In an era of instant delivery and disposable taste, Abt's new showroom proposes a slower, more deliberate model: come in, sit down, consider. It is less about acquisition than about inhabitation. And in that distinction lies its quiet appeal.

*Abt Electronics is located at 1200 N. Milwaukee Avenue in Glenview. For more information, visit [abt.com/furniture](http://abt.com/furniture).*

