Kriss Kokoefer, President and Owner of Kay Chesterfield, introduces "Workplace Pillows by Kay Chesterfield, Inc." – a capability devoted to managing and producing custom corporate pillow programs, initiated by the explosive rise in pillow popularity within business environments. Kay Chesterfield was established in 1921 in Oakland, CA.

The Rise of Pillows in the Workplace

by Mallory Budy

Residential influences in the workplace dictate that more ancillary furniture be present, and a big piece of that scene is comfort. This movement has translated to designers specifying many more pillows in the workplace. But what do we know about the pillow business?

Kay Chesterfield, Inc., a contract pillow maker and upholsterer since 1921, recently announced the launch of **Workplace Pillows from Kay Chesterfield, Inc.**, featuring a series of specialized resources devoted to the fabrication and project management of office pillow programs for national corporate clients. We spoke with **Kriss Kokoefer**, Kay Chesterfield's President and Owner, to learn more about the biz. Ms. Kokoefer purchased Kay Chesterfield seven years ago, and in that time, the growth of the pillow side of the company has exploded.

"The company was known for reupholstery, but over the course of the seven years I've owned it, pillows have become more and more a part of the order," Ms. Kokoefer said. "The company has really evolved into something new. When I bought the company, I didn't know I was getting into making pillows. I loved the idea of this company for many reasons – it was local, it involved reuse, and I could see things being made. I was excited to be creating something."

Last year Kay Chesterfield produced thousands of pillows for the offices of clients like Visa, Google, Airbnb, Salesforce and other global employers. The company's pillow sales rose from just above $50,000 in 2014 to close to $900,000 in 2018, and continues that strong trajectory as 2019 ends. Over the past three years, the business has witnessed a dramatic increase in custom pillow production following the rise of residentially inspired office interiors.

workplace
pillows
from Kay Chesterfield, Inc.

Workplace Pillows by Kay Chesterfield, Inc. shows off its many custom contract pillows. Each pillow program is created and managed to the specific requirements of clients from global corporations to small regional businesses and institutions. www.workplacepillows.com

officeinsight

"Ancillary furniture became a way to attract and retain employees – with less time at the desk and more time on a sofa," said Ms. Kokoefer. "These spaces need cushioning and comfort, and pillows.

Ms. Kokoefer noted that pillows in the office were once used very sparingly, but they've now become an essential part of the modern workplace for many reasons. They're an economical way to bring color and texture into spaces. They offer comfort and an opportunity to adjust or customize a seating or lounging arrangement for each employee, just like moving and plumping a pillow at home. Pillows bring flexibility to the office, for example by making floors or stadium seating more comfortable, and they can be easily swapped out to bring a new look to a space. They also provide noise reduction, particularly in hard-surfaced

Slack HQ, San Francisco. Photographer: Garrett Rowland. Design firm: Studio O+A. Dealership: Two. The San Francisco headquarters of Slack features pillows fabricated and managed by Workplace Pillows by Kay Chesterfield, Inc. Office design: Studio O+A. Décor: Two Furnish. Photography: Garrett Rowland. www.workplacepillows.com

Square Headquarters, San Francisco. Photographer: Matthew Millman. Design firm: Bohlin Cywinski Jackson. Dealership: Two

The new tower of a cloud-based technology leader in San Francisco. Photographer: Todd Johnson. Design firm: The Wiseman Group. Dealership: One Workplace

spaces. And aesthetically, they help carry a theme and can be used almost like art to bring punch and a final level of finesse to a space.

Alongside the growth in demand for pillows in the workplace, Ms. Kokoefer has grown her business to match by adding equipment, growing her team of project managers and developing a new website.

In putting together more residential-inspired ancillary spaces, designers face a surprisingly stiff learning curve when specifying pillows.

"It's super complicated to get a pillow order right, and I don't think a lot of people realize that before they're trying to do it," said Ms. Kokoefer. "The size of each pillow, the fill, the fabric and sometimes multiple fabrics – all of these details need to be ironed out for each pillow. Every line of a purchase order is super custom."

"There is a ton of hand-holding with designers because they're used to working in commercial environments," said Ms. Kokoefer. "They aren't residential designers and so they have pillows are more commonly specified. Organizing these orders is very labor intensive – for designers and for us. We have a professional project manager who works with designers to come up with what they want. We know how to make adjustments to make it work with contract environments. A lot of our work is in educating our clients on things like what a larger person can do to a pillow when they sit up against it."

"Another thing we talk about with our clients is that pillows need to be fluffed in order to keep their shape and look how they're supposed to. We ask if the cleaning staff can fluff the pillows as part of maintaining the space. It's a small thing, but it makes a difference on how each space looks."

As in most areas of product and interior design, pillow design and specification is more complex than meets the eye. Commercial interior designers must educate themselves on the nuances of this growing market, and companies like Kay Chesterfield will thankfully continue to expand to meet industry needs. ■

About Kay Chesterfield / Kriss Kokoefer

Kriss Kokoefer has more than 20 years of expertise in both contract furniture and architecture-and-design businesses. As the fourth owner of Kay Chesterfield she is dedicated to upholding and advancing the company's role as a national supplier of custom pillows, cushions and contract upholstery to all sectors of the commercial furniture industry. Fabrication is performed entirely in Oakland, California.