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Enterprise Zone: Jim Dahlgren and Allan Duck of Dahlgren Duck & Assoc.

High school buddies Jim Dahlgren and Allan Duck used their love of the finer things to create and grow Dahlgren Duck & Assoc.

Premium content from Dallas Business Journal - by Jaimie Siegle, Staff Writer

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When it comes to furnishing the aircraft, ranches, yachts and homes of the rich and the uber-rich, designers often enlist the expertise of **Jim Dahlgren** and **Allan Duck**, who co-founded Dahlgren Duck & Associates in 1983.

The company's beginnings actually date back to the late 1970s when Dahlgren and his wife Phyllis started Dahlgren International from their home, making calls to luxury vendors through a now-defunct Telex machine in the closet.

Dahlgren and Duck's relationship goes back to playing high school football together in Springfield, Mo.

Although they attended different colleges and initially moved to different cities — Dahlgren to Dallas and Duck to Atlanta — the two rekindled their friendship in Texas. They piled everything they had into the Dahlgren Duck entity, Duck said.

"We both agreed that if the business marriage failed, we wouldn't disrupt the friendship we'd had all these years," Duck said. "The first year was slow to get off the ground; we pretty much lived out of our pocket. Then things just began to click."

Duck said a local designer hired Dahlgren Duck to furnish a CEO's private aircraft, and soon yacht and ranch projects fell in line.

"In today's environment, what we're finding is affluent people ... want to see things that are different and unique," Dahlgren said.

The company's Design District showroom houses one-of-a-kind accessories from some of the most expensive and exclusive European manufacturers.

It can't, however, sell a dozen Baccarat crystal glasses to individual shoppers. Some contracts with vendors and distributors prevent them from doing so.

"(Dahlgren Duck) is oriented to the designer, and the showroom is set up as such," said designer Deborah Walker of Deborah Walker and Associates, who's worked with Dahlgren Duck for the past four or five years on various projects. "It's easy to bring the client into their showroom, but they're really there for customizing," she said.

Clients range from Saudi Arabian royalty and heads of state to prominent Dallas-Fort Worth families.

Regardless of their title or profession, they're always interested putting money in the details and won't flinch at the price tag.

"Some affluent people may tend to gravitate to the finest (things) exposed to the masses," Duck said, citing Hermes as one of the most well-known luxury brands that Dahlgren Duck carries. "Then you've got the uber-rich, who may be happy to dine with Styrofoam cups, but some want totally custom stuff that no one else has. It becomes the focal point of the dining experience."

Requests for custom dinnerware — or "table jewelry" as Duck calls it — made with malachite, mother of pearl or Tiger's eye are not uncommon; neither are requests for gold flatware adorned with semiprecious stones and illuminated champagne glasses. Dahlgren even called [NASA](#) once to see if he could get actual moon rocks to shave down for custom dinnerware on a private aircraft. He almost succeeded.

Although the recession caused a decrease in local project requests for the company, the drive to luxury has begun to flow back into the market, Dahlgren said.

The market in general has become more casual over the past few years. Walker said that Dahlgren Duck has adapted to the trend.

"Yes, they can do everything in cashmere with the highest-grade linens, but they can also take in the budget, if necessary," Walker said. "There aren't as many people wanting to spend \$4,000 on bed linens. They might spend \$2,000. But no matter how much money people have, they're not just going to throw it away."

Dahlgren said he and his wife have multiple sets of flatware in their attic, but they're not like their clients'.

"We're like a lot of companies. You may build a Bugatti sports car, but you don't get to own one."

As for Duck and Dahlgren, they take turns attending international trade shows in Europe and the Caribbean. And they play golf together now instead of football.

"There's no one else I'd rather play golf with than Jim," Duck said.

jsiegle@bizjournals.com | 214-706-7117