

arts news

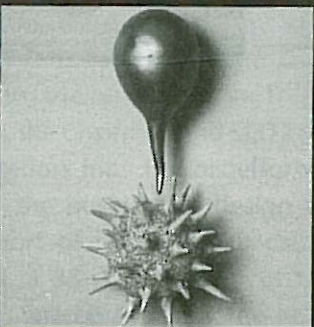
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what's doing in Westchester

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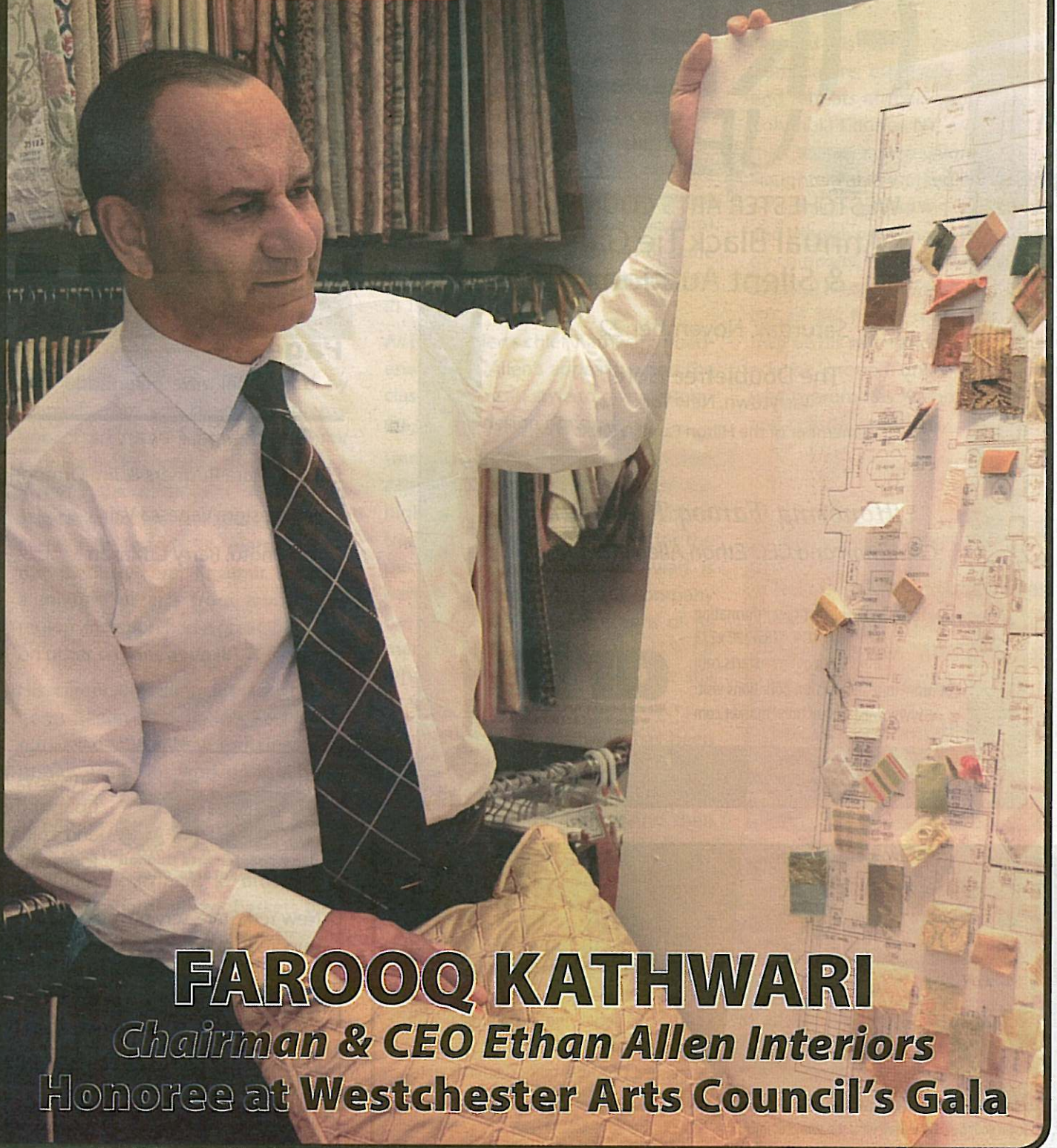
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FAROOQ KATHWARI

Chairman & CEO Ethan Allen Interiors

Honoree at Westchester Arts Council's Gala

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GALA HONOREE FAROOQ KATHWARI

Chairman and Chief Executive Office of Ethan Allen Interiors, Inc.



Kathwari with his design team at Ethan Allen headquarters in Danbury, CT. Photo by Barry L. Mason.

by Jim Ormond

"Art has the power to bring people together—especially at a time when every effort is being made to divide people in the world," says Farooq Kathwari, the Chairman and CEO of Ethan Allen Interiors Inc. For his efforts to advance the business of design and his support of humanitarian causes, Kathwari, a 35-year resident of New Rochelle, will be the honoree at the Westchester Arts Council's Annual Gala to be held on November 22nd at the Doubletree Hotel in Tarrytown.

With about 300 design centers throughout America and the world, including 27 in China, ten manufacturing plants, and annual sales of nearly \$1 billion, Kathwari heads an art-based enterprise which he says "integrates design ideas from around the world and re-projects them in a distinctly American way."

You might say that Kathwari's insights about the arts as a medium for cross-cultural respect sprang naturally from his early years in a region situated at the geographic heart of Asia. A tradition in his Kashmiri family, he explains, was that "art, business and politics were inseparable."

"My upbringing was influenced by many factors which you might say impact art", says Kathwari. "Kashmir is beautiful in terms of the color...the flowers, the mountains. It also has a great history of art that goes back literally thousands of years. During the medieval era, Kashmir became a mixture of arts from around the region and soon had a great influence on other regions as well."

His career of selling art and design items began after he left Kashmir to pursue an MBA at New York University. At age 20 he was working as a bookkeeper at an envelope factory and attending classes at NYU at night. One day he arrived back at his one-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn to find twelve large wicker baskets filled with arts and craft items sent from his grandfather back in Kashmir. A note attached to the basket read "Sell these items and send us back the money."

Initially, he would place these items in small shops on consignment and would stop by every Saturday to check on them. He slowly grew this enterprise, while he worked full-time in finance at a Wall Street firm, through which he met Nathan Ancell, a cofounder of Ethan Allen Inc.

Ethan Allen and Kathwari formed a partnership which they located in a former bowling alley in Larchmont. The Ethan Allen brand had a reputation for producing quality furniture in a classic colonial American style. Kathwari's company, on the other hand, sourced Ethan Allen's non-furniture items, such as lighting, carpet and accessories. In 1980 the two companies merged and Kathwari became President of Ethan Allen Interiors Inc. in 1985.

As Ethan Allen's chief, Kathwari broadened Ethan Allen's appeal beyond the classic American style to give customers greater design options.

Under his financial stewardship, Ethan Allen has consistently posted the highest profit margins of any publicly traded furniture manufacturer for the past fifteen years. And Kathwari is particularly proud that the company has been able to keep a core of its manufacturing based in the U.S. Of Ethan Allen's ten plants, nine are still based here.

A guiding star for Kathwari has been to recognize that art is fundamental at every level of his business. "We combine great art and design. And then

we make it livable...that is what we do," he says.

He and his family draw inspiration from nature, especially during weekend retreats at their apple orchard in Columbia County, NY, as well as from their shared appreciation for the arts. Daughter Farah worked in the company's design area for more than 7 years, and though son Omar runs a technology company, he studied literature and classical music. The most active member of his family regarding the arts may be his wife Farida, who co-founded the group Funkar International, which promotes Kashmiri music, arts and cultural traditions.

Tickets & Table Sponsorships, for Westchester Arts Council's November 22 "All Fired Up!" Gala are still available.

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