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## SPOTLIGHT



### Strength in numbers

Aligning with retailer, distributor or even manufacturer groups could be the answer to some dealers' woes.

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Randy Merritt, right, with Vance Bell, Shaw Industries' CEO.

## RANDY MERRITT REFLECTS ON A 40-YEAR CAREER

It's not every day that someone sails into the sunset after a career that touched five decades. It's even more rare when the person spent all 40 years at the same company. But then again, Randy Merritt is a rare breed.

Merritt on Dec. 31 retired as president of Shaw Industries, the only company he has ever known. Merritt found his way to Dalton in 1977 upon graduating from North Carolina State, where he would enter the "real world" at Star Finishing, the precursor to Shaw Industries. He would rise through the ranks, from product development to the presidency with honesty, integrity and humility as his hallmarks.

In his final days in his corner office, Merritt sat back and took a walk down memory lane. His final interview at Shaw appears on page 20.

## Southeast Flooring Market

# Specialty retailers find there's value in regional show

By Lindsay Baillie

ATLANTA—The Southeast Flooring Market, now in its second year, was held Jan. 3-4 at the Cobb Galleria Centre here, exemplifying the importance of regional shows to the independent flooring retailer. Attended by 1,069 dealers from 19 states—a 52% increase from 2017—the market boasted 65 exhibitors showcasing both hard and soft surfaces.

The show was unofficially born to piggyback on Shaw and Mohawk's Southeast regionals, the only time in which both are held in the same venue. In the past, smaller suppliers would show product in various meeting rooms throughout the convention center and adjoining hotel. But last

year trade show company Market Maker Events was asked to come in and organize the smaller exhibitors in its own ballroom with Shaw and



The Southeast Flooring Market had a record 1,069 attendees from 19 states.

Mohawk as the bookends.

"The Cobb Galleria came to us and said, 'This has grown past our ability to manage it,'"

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## Hannover Fairs set to debut Domotex USA in 2019

MOVE EXTENDS EVENT'S BRAND BEYOND EUROPE, ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

CHICAGO—Hannover Fairs USA is planning to bring Domotex USA to America's shores. The event, which will be held at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta, Feb. 28 to March 2, 2019, will be focused on the U.S. residential flooring industry.

According to show organiz-

ers, Domotex USA will consist of exhibition space, conferences and education along with networking functions and activities. Domotex USA is an extension of Deutsche Messe's worldwide portfolio of flooring events. With the expansion of the brand, Domotex USA aims to leverage the power of the Domotex global portfolio in North America, complementing the floor covering shows in Hannover, Shanghai and Turkey.

Ray Bianchi, vice president, events and business development at Hannover Fairs USA, said launching Domotex USA in Atlanta "makes perfect sense" because it can offer industry players across the Midwest, Northeast and

Southeast the chance to both visit exhibitors on the show floor and to tour the area's manufacturing facilities.

Dr. Andreas Gruchow, member of the management board,



The launch of Domotex USA aims to leverage the power of the Domotex global brand in North America.

Deutsche Messe AG, Hannover, added, "Many industry representatives have been asking us for years to launch the Domotex

brand in the North American market as there has not been a flooring trade fair in the Eastern U.S. that demonstrates the quality and breadth of the world's leading carpet and flooring show, which is Domotex Hannover."

It's important to note the Domotex USA show will not include ceramic tile. Instead, it will display the latest machine-made carpets, wall-to-wall carpeting, textile floor coverings, handmade rugs, resilient flooring, design flooring, luxury vinyl tile, laminate flooring, parquet and wood flooring, as well as application and installation technologies designed for the residential flooring marketplace.



**LARRY BROWDER**  
chief sales and  
marketing officer,  
Karndean

Making sure we continue to have a forward-thinking, aggressive strategy that continues to keep us ahead of our competition.

**JEFF FENWICK**  
president/COO,  
Tarkett



Keeping our employees engaged and energized, especially in the environment we live in today where there is so much white noise. It's tough to keep people focused and engaged in this kind of world. For us we're really disciplined about measuring our employee engagement and making sure our folks have a voice.

**PAUL MURFIN**  
president,  
Mohawk resilient



As evolving as the category is, it's [about] staying in front of the curve so we continue to keep our product line relevant in the marketplace.



**DON MAIER**  
CEO, Armstrong Flooring

My biggest concern is also our greatest asset—our people. I believe deeply that it all begins with talent.

To support our growth, Armstrong Flooring needs to attract, develop and retain the highest level of talent in each and every position. I tell my team all the time I do not just want to have a winning season; I want to win the Super Bowl. To do this, we do not just need a great team, we need the best team. I see the most important part of my job is to ensure we win this war for talent.



**T.M. NUCKOLS**  
president, Dixie Residential

With the growth in hard surfaces, I am concerned with the replacement cycle of flooring in the future. Consumers will replace their flooring less frequently than they have in the past, which presents volume and profitability dilemmas for the entire value chain.

**PIET DOSSCHE**  
CEO, USFloors



How can I continue to lead and educate our industry to not fall into the trap of commoditization and price erosion of this exciting new product category: Composite Core Waterproof Flooring?



**CHRIS O'CONNOR**  
president/COO, Congoleum

The industry is changing at an unprecedented pace. Our continued success lies in our ability to stay ahead of the competition by not only understanding the needs of the market but also by leveraging our nimble size to respond to those needs faster and more completely than anyone else.

# What keeps top executives awake in 2018?

By Ken Ryan

There is no rest for the wicked or—it would seem—for the flooring executive with so much to consider: How the next big launch will fare in the market? How to keep your talented staff engaged and motivated? How best to navigate the digital landscape? Indeed, the daily grind can be daunting, especially when the decisions you render can have such great consequences.

**MICHAEL RASKIN**  
CEO, Raskin Industries



Executing all of the ideas that I have and choosing which ones to go with. No matter who you are, everyone is spread very thin today; the market is moving fast and the economy is good, and I think it's making sure everyone is following up and taking care of your customers' needs.

**DON FINKELL**  
president/CEO, American OEM



The big question is the impact of tax cuts and a reduced regulatory environment on the housing market. The risk is Congress might not be able to get all of these things passed—along with a disappointed stock market. But I am optimistic that the strength of the economy and the pent-up demand for housing will overcome the dysfunction in our political system.

**DREW HASH**  
VP, hard surface product  
portfolio, Shaw Floors



In laminate, the broad range of products available within the market can create misconceptions for this product category, making it increasingly important for manufacturers and flooring retailers to be able to effectively communicate the benefits and attributes of each product line.

**BRAD WILLIAMS**  
VP, sales and marketing, Boa-Franc (Mirage)



While politics dominated 2016, weather led the way [in 2017] with the most active hurricane season since 2005. This major flooding coupled with heat and dryness on the West Coast fueled some of the largest fires we have seen. These catastrophes will lead to new construction and renovation. seems to put things on hold in the short term.



**DEREK WELBOURN**  
CEO, Inhaus

Competition is often the most challenging; however, in the bigger picture I think it helps keep everyone focused and ultimately results in creating better products and service. This helps the categories overall and results in more business for everyone. With new product developments, there is more competition across product categories than ever before.

**WADE BONDROWSKI**  
director, U.S. sales,  
Mercier Wood Flooring



Our challenges come from quantifying what is a hardwood floor vs. imported stained plywood or cheap rotary peeled products, along with the pricing pressures they bring. The others are the wood knock-offs—LVT, WPC, ceramic, etc. All have wood lookalikes that are good in styling and design with a lower price. But I wonder why our industry is so concerned with going to the basement and trading dollar down, per square foot.

**PAUL REZUKE**  
director of sales, U.S.,  
Wickham Hardwood  
Flooring



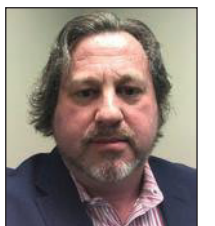
The market remains strong and most economists believe that barring any unforeseen issues things look solid right through 2019. What concerns me is the uncertainty regarding potential trade regulatory restraints.

**BOB BALDOCCHI**  
chief marketing officer/VP business  
development, Emser



We have 70-plus locations and five different segments that have their own sets of challenges. I wish I could point to one thing; there is still a lot of business out there to be captured even with the labor shortage.

**DARRELL LOCKE**  
VP, residential sales,  
Lexmark Carpet



Industry consolidation. As the industry continues to narrow, consumers and retailers will continue to feel the pinch with limited suppliers and less fashionable selections. Consumers will be forced to settle.

**JOHN TURNER JR.**  
president, Dal-Tile



The changing environment in retail. With the emergence of Floor and Décor or Tile Shop, and with Lowe's and Home Depot competing with those models, it's going to create stress on flooring retailers. Those who invest in well-trained RSAs ... will win.