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THIRTEEN YEARS AGO, WHEN FRED COONEY MOVED into the renovated Chatham Arch industrial space he now calls home, he wasn't thinking about operating any businesses on Mass Ave – let alone playing a major role in the reshaping of the commercial corridor that is now one of the hottest spots in the city.

But squabbles with his back-door neighbor, a bar known as Betty Boop's, led to his purchase of that building and its renovation into Agio's. Cooney sold that business a few years ago, but today he's once again knee-deep in another Mass Ave trendsetter, Euroloft, where he marvels at the number of people who come through the door ready to buy a \$6,000 sofa.

The lessons learned have come from doing; Cooney believes they are lessons for anyone wanting to help Mass Ave continue to evolve.

"Things go as well on the Avenue as you have the nerve enough to put on the Avenue," he said from Euroloft, his store located at 643 Mass Ave, which specializes in high-end contemporary furniture, focusing on Italian offerings from companies such as Incantato and Calligaris.

Euroloft sits in space formerly used by 3S Reproductions, which specialized in making architectural blueprints. The renovated building is just up the street from Agio, where a decade earlier Cooney and associates spent many difficult hours "turning a nasty place into fine dining."

That lesson was not lost on Kristin Kohn, who operates Silver in the City/At Home in the City in the 400 block of Mass Ave, in the building which not all that long ago was a shuttered "Section 8" apartment house.

"Agio was a big draw for me," said Kohn, who first opened Silver in the City at 715 Mass Ave before being able to move and expand into the Davlan building. "Agio had just been named the best new restaurant, which was a great indicator."

Kohn doesn't think of her store as upscale, but her stylish operation does attract young professionals and other people from all over the city. Although she is well-acquainted with Mass Ave's "regulars," what strikes her the most is the number of new faces she constantly sees.

"On Friday and Saturday nights I almost don't recognize it, almost feel like I don't fit in," she said with a smile. "There are so many visitors from other parts of the city, all dressed up and headed for a big night out."

They come to shop, or to dine in one of many Mass Ave eateries – restaurants which attract a huge number of people. Mass Ave's official moniker may be the Art & Theater District, but restaurants deserve their own piece of that title. Agio opened in 1998. Three years later, Regina Mehallick opened R bistro on the East End of Mass Ave. Scholars Inn followed in 2002. Elements arrived on the scene in 2003. Each has walls of

The **HIGH END** *of* **MASS AVE**

**Stylish stores
are changing
the ambiance**



▲ Contemporary furniture at Euroloft, one of the newer ventures on Mass Ave.

awards and strong restaurant reviews. Now comes FortyFive°, a swanky new restaurant-sushi-bar-lounge at the corner of Mass and College avenues.

“I love the fact that they’re all locally owned,” Cooney said of the cluster of restaurants that pepper any legitimate list of the city’s very finest. Cooney also loves the fact that another furniture store, Interior Life, recently opened a half-block away at 614 Mass Ave. He would like to see another

store or two of the same ilk.

“Wouldn’t it be nice if we became a destination – the decorating and design center of Indianapolis?” he said. “And, by the way, you can stay for lunch or dinner.”

That would be just fine with Interior Life’s Shannon Roark. His store offers furniture lines such as Vanguard, Zocalo and Rowe, but also a wide variety of home furnishings – as well as interior design services. The latter aspect of

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the business takes Interior Life all over Central Indiana – attracting people who in turn gravitate to Mass Ave.

Roark, no newcomer to the field, said the store's reception on Mass Ave has been remarkable. "I've never felt such a reception," he said. "People who come in really want us to succeed. We've been received

Upscale shops broaden appeal of the 'Art and Theater District'

in a real, warm way."

Roark said he is pleased to be on the same street as stores such as Silver in the City. "Mass Ave is a great street," he said.

Jessica Hamm, who opened Sage, a women's boutique, in 2004, agrees. She said the stylish restaurants along the Avenue contribute to her business, as do the residents of the Mill No. 9 and 757. The many events Downtown also help.

"And the neighborhood has been very generous," she said. "I wanted to base my business on people who live and breathe here, including the people who work here." Many of her customers live or work within a five-mile radius – and a good percentage of those work on the Eli Lilly campus.

Hamm doesn't think of her inventory as upscale, with prices she calls "moderate." But she's not TJ Maxx, either. The key, she said, is going with styles that will stand the test of time and not be out of style in a season or two. "My customers are making an investment in a piece that will last a lot longer," she said.



▲ Sage offers an array of stylish women's clothing which owner Jessica Hamm said attracts buyers because of their timeless appeal.

◀ Interior Life opened earlier this year in the 600 block of Mass Ave, where Shannon Roark learned how the Avenue's neighborhood setting affects business. "People who come in really want us to succeed," he said. "We've been received in a real, warm way."



Hamm was also pleased with last summer's opening of Tantrum, another stylish clothing store located at 757 Mass Ave, the upscale condominium building at the corner of Mass and College avenues.

"Mass Ave has always been somewhat of a destination," said co-owner Jamie Rae, "but it was still a hidden secret for many." New businesses such as hers and others, she added, are cutting that "many" down to size.

Rae's memory doesn't go back far enough to remember a day – not all that long ago, when Mass Ave was dominated by empty storefronts, taverns and professional offices.

The landscape was anything but vibrant when David Andrichik opened the Chatterbox Jazz Club in 1982, or when Bazbeaux Pizza came to the 300 block in 1989. Around that time, a cluster of art galleries in the 400 block earned Mass Ave the "arts district" moniker, and in the mid-1990s the Avenue was transformed by the renovation of the Murat Centre, including the restoration of

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its historic theater into a major venue. The Athenaeum flourished with American Cabaret Theatre and the long-standing Rathskeller Restaurant, while Theatre on the Square and the Phoenix Theatre enriched the image as a destination for live entertainment.

Retail attractions, however, are a more recent occurrence. In the 400 block, Global Gifts, Mass Ave Toys and the newer Eye Candy jewelry store team with At Home in the City/Silver in the City to form a critical mass for shoppers. On the East End, the 800-block stores such as The Best Chocolate in Town, Mass Ave Wine Shoppe and Circle City Baskets have boosted the foot traffic and number of shoppers.

The combinations feed off each other.

“Multiple attractions give people reason to come down and spend time here,” said Rae, who in mid-June was celebrating the opening of FortyFive° next door. “There’s a buzz going on, and there are going to be big changes – Downtown and on Mass Ave. We’re excited to be a part of it.”

Fred Cooney, too.

– Bill Brooks



◀ Tantrum, opened late last year by Jamie Rae and Lynzy Ramser, is helping attract consumers who weren't necessarily familiar with Mass Ave.