

Fixtures firm's upscale design

Watermark taps stronger profit margins

AS THE HOUSING MARKET CRUMBLED and architects lamented fewer building projects on their drafting tables, Watermark Designs, a manufacturer of everything from bathroom and kitchen faucets to towel bars and other accessories, braced itself for a reversal of fortune. "Faucets are the tail end of the construction business," says **Avi Abel** (right, shown with his father, **Jack**). The younger Mr. Abel is general manager of the family-owned Brooklyn firm.

Preparing itself for a business downturn, Watermark stopped introducing items costing a few hundred dollars. Instead, it began manufacturing products imbued with a designer cachet—not only to justify elevated prices, but also to achieve stronger profit margins. A three-piece faucet set is tagged as high as \$1,500.

The firm's transformation rested not only on getting designers and architects to use Watermark to produce their fittings for residential and commercial properties, the 10-year-old company also sought licensing agreements that permitted it to market these items to its own network of plumbing wholesalers and retailers.

While sales have fallen since 2007, Watermark's branded, high-end offerings, which carry designer names like Clodagh, have enabled it to remain in the black and retain all but five of its 59 employees.

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