

Allegro lures shoppers, students

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Music is in the air on Long Ridge Road in Stamford.

Ori Bukai's new Allegro Pianos showroom at 1068 Long Ridge has combined an impressive collection of high-end pianos with a music school that features top-flight acoustics.

Seventy-five pianos handcrafted by European manufacturers, including Bosendorfer, Bluthner, Steingraeber, August Forster and Estonia, are displayed in the 10,000-square-foot building.

The building also houses a recital hall and 10 practice rooms for the business' 200 students, and many of those rooms are equipped with the same quality of pianos sold in the showroom. The windows are fitted with inch-thick glass to deaden outside noise.

Equipping the rooms with a Bluthner or Bosendorfer is a way to excite students and encourage them to continue their efforts, Bukai said.

"When kids have to deal with clicks and clacks, they stop," he said, "and teachers don't want to teach in dungeons."

Working with acoustics designer [John Storyk](#), co-principal in [Walters-Storyk Design Group](#), Bukai wanted to create an at-home feeling in the showroom.

"I designed something very specific. It almost looks like a house," said Bukai, a musician and piano technician who moved here from Israel 16 years ago and opened his first store in North Stamford in 1998.

The Allegro showroom presented Storyk with design challenges.

"From our initial meetings, Ori Bukai was extremely clear on the point that Allegro was not a piano warehouse," Storyk said. "This building required professional-level acoustics. Many of the pianos on display are rare and costly. We needed to customize an acoustic ambience that would meet their needs, and compensate for the many large windows that bathe the interior in natural light."

The practice rooms needed to be semi-isolated to prevent sound leakage from concurrent piano lessons and demonstrations, he said.

"The trick was to not make it look terribly acoustical and to make it look as comfortable as a showroom could be," said Storyk, whose company counts New York's Electric Lady Studios, Jazz At [Lincoln Center](#), [Alicia Keys](#) and [Celine Dion](#) as clients.

The acoustics plan has played a major role in attracting students to the music school and providing assistance to the Stamford Symphony.

"We've become internationally known for having something unique," Bukai said. "People come here on a plane from all across the country."

Those discerning visitors shop on an appointment basis, served by Bukai -- he has no sales staff.

"I meet each of my customers. They have to call ahead. We have good pianos that start in the low teens, and we have some that cost \$100,000 or more. A lot of people who buy our high-end pianos are adult beginners," said Bukai, 42, who has managed to weather the economic downturn. "Our sales increased in 2008 and 2009 and have continued in 2010. We're the largest Bluthner dealer in the world."

Allegro is featured in the June edition of [Music Inc. magazine](#), which focuses the issue on the retail piano industry.

"Allegro Pianos simply put one of the most beautiful store designs I've ever seen," said [Zach Phillips](#), editor of the magazine, a business-to-business publication for music instrument retailers and suppliers.

Bukai appears to be bucking a downward trend in piano sales, he said.

"The piano market has been decimated, but the high, high end of the piano market may be more resilient," Phillips said.

Greater Stamford is the ideal location for the business, said [Jack Condlin](#), president and chief executive officer of the [Stamford Chamber of Commerce](#).

"This is a very wealthy section of the United States. Pianos are a very important part of peoples' lives in the more affluent areas," he said.

Bukai's role in the international piano market is another indication of Stamford's place as a player in the global economy, Condlin said.