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## Two men into tubs

### Father-and-son business fills demand for old-fashioned looks in bathrooms

 By Joy Kraft  
 The Cincinnati Enquirer

Finding just the right bathtub for an 1889 Victorian bed and breakfast was no simple task for Dottie Musser, owner of Bradford Place in Sonora, Calif.

She eventually found it ... in Covington.

Her shopping list of requirements was steep: a tub roomy enough for two (it is a romantic B&B) that would blend with the historical ambience of the inn, snuggle up to a small wall (44 inches), extend into the adjoining sleeping room, but still look appropriate for the space and light.

And the clinker in the world of heavyweight cast-iron antique tubs - it had to be light enough to be wrestled up to the refurbished home's second story.

Her World Wide Web search ended in Northern Kentucky at Clawfoot Supply ([www.clawfootsupply.com](http://www.clawfootsupply.com)), owned by father-son team Mike and Matt Butler. There is one of the more than 300 businesses and services at the Fifth Third Bank Cincinnati Home and Garden Show, opening today and running through March 14 at the Albert B. Sabin Cincinnati Convention Center, downtown.

"I didn't find another company that matched the durability" of Clawfoot's tubs, says Musser, who ordered a 6-foot-long cast-acrylic rolled-edge tub on claw feet.

A key factor was that the tub wouldn't bend or warp when filled with water and the weight of two adults, she says. "And the cost and weight of cast acrylic is significantly less than cast iron."

Glowing reports like hers have landed the 3-year-old company in national publications, including *Home* magazine's list of 100 Tips, Products and Hidden Treasures in 2003, and a spot in a photo spread in the same publication this month.

The father-son team combined strengths to form Clawfoot Supply. Mike owns Butler Plumbing, Heating and Air Conditioning, well-known to Northern Kentucky renovators, and Matt's an accomplished computer jockey.

"For many years we (in the plumbing business) had problems getting clawfoot, old-fashioned tubs, so we'd tell customers, 'You go find it and we'll install it.' So (joining forces to form a tub business) seemed like a natural," says Mike.

A trip to a national kitchen and bath show confirmed they were on the right path, and they made connections in Portugal, South Africa and England, where the tubs are manufactured.

The biggest percentage of their customers are people renovating an older home and looking for something that looks like an antique, but with a modern personality and convenience.

Cast acrylic is for them.

It doesn't stain or discolor, is lighter than cast iron and can be painted.

But, when authenticity is paramount, the Butlers sell cast iron with a porcelain interior, a heavier product, as well as a few antique tubs and pedestal sinks.

Shipping doesn't end the company's client interaction. The staff often talks buyers through installation and adaptations.

"We offer plumbing assistance on the phone. We can practically install it by phone," says Mike.

"We had a woman recently building her own shower rings out of copper, and she called us for support pipes, so we're handling that for her."

The Butlers have added faucets and hardware to their line, as well as shower rods, bowls, basins, bath accessories, even a line of Thomas Crapper bath and shower gels, soaps, hair conditioners and metal polish, named for the plumber often credited with inventing the flush toilet.

"We were looking for something unique, that people were interested in," says Mike.

They found it ... in the bathroom.

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**Mike and Matt Butler (in tub) specialize in reproduction cast acrylic and cast iron bath tubs at Clawfoot Supply in Covington.**

The Cincinnati Enquirer/CRAIG RUTTLE

#### IF YOU GO

**What:** Fifth Third Cincinnati Home & Garden Show presented by GMC, with more than 340 exhibits. Also, Olay Garden Market, with more than 100 merchants, Wednesday-March 14 only.

**When:** Today-March 14. Hours: 10:30 a.m.-9 p.m. today and next Saturday; 10:30 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday and March 14; closed Monday; 5-9 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday; noon-9 p.m. Wednesday and Friday. Paige Davis appearance 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Sunday.

**Where:** Albert B. Sabin Cincinnati Convention Center, Fifth and Elm streets, downtown.

**Tickets:** \$10, \$3 ages 13 and younger. **Information:** 281-0022; [www.hartproductions.com](http://www.hartproductions.com).

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