

CULTURE

Israel's mattress for kings and clergy

By Karin Kloosterman November 13, 2008

The "King of the Artichokes" becomes the "King of Beds" - this is what vendors from Jerusalem's famous market, Machene Yehuda, will tell you if you ask them about Isaac Barsessat. His is a true story that reads like a legend.

Back in the '60s and early '70s, Barsessat was a successful artichoke farmer in Israel who suffered from serious back problems. Unable to find a suitable mattress in Israel, he journeyed to Europe and after scouring the region, located the perfect one in Holland.

Taking it back with him to Israel, he studied this mattress and then began building his own concept and line - not just mattresses, but sleep systems based on our bodies' pressure points, to give people the most enjoyable experience in bed. Bed is, after all, where we spend 30 percent of our time.

Building an empire of beds

He opened his first Hollandia store in 1981, and some 27 years later, Barsessat, now 78, and his son Avi - who joined the company in 1986 - have built a small empire. Hollandia mattresses today have a reputation as some of the world's most comfortable and luxurious. They can be found in exclusive residences and hotels, and are sold in 120 locations around the world, from Iceland to Australia, and Holland to South Africa.

"[My father] is working with full power," says his son Avi Barsessat, talking with ISRAEL21c from Sderot, where the mattress orders are processed and then manufactured.

While Israelis, famous and not-so-famous, have been sleeping on Hollandia mattresses for years, it's only been a year since the company has been active in America. There are now shops in Short Hills, New Jersey, and also the King of Prussia shopping center, Pennsylvania.

"My father came up with breakthrough ideas in the sleep industry," says Avi, noting that one of Israel's most famous rabbis, Rav Ovadia Yossef had just ordered a mattress to help his bad back. Custom-made and tailored to fit your body is Hollandia's trademark, says Avi.

Hollandia's factory, which employs 200, is located in the rocket-hit town of Sderot. Despite the threat of rocket attacks from Gaza, Hollandia continues to produce mattresses there, even though the company is aware that there's only eight seconds to spare when the siren sounds.

Jump into bed with a smile

While the "basic" latex mattresses lined with aloe, coconut fibres and organic materials of supreme comfort are available for purchase, expect to also find unusual and delightful bed frames, like Hollandia's bed on wheels that folds up with a press of a button making it easy

to reach the unhealthy dust bunnies (and mites) underneath.

"The people that work for the company are still ambitious and creative, bringing new design, and always acting like leaders in the market," says Avi.

And while he's busy in Sderot running the business - and sometimes around the world installing new franchises or showrooms, his dad, the King of the Beds, is staying active in Spain. "Sometimes he works more hours than you and me together," Avi jokes.

The labor of love is worth it: "A bed is a place that you need to get into with joy and love," says Avi. He believes it's easy to know which Hollandia bed is the right fit. "If you came into the bed with the right smile, this is the bed," he says.

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