

Windy City Blows Big Success to Alcalá's

This Chicago retailer goes beyond the traditional Western template.

By Paul Wahl, Editor

More than 33 million visitors find their way to Chicago each year. Not every one of them has “visit Alcalá's Western Wear” on their to-do list, but a growing number do. That's because Richard and Robert Alcalá and the 35 employees (many of them family) who are part of the business have a vision that goes beyond that of the average retailer.

The 10,000-square-foot store is strategically located minutes from downtown Chicago and its posh hotels,



Robert and Richard Alcalá are the patriarchs of the family's Western store in Chicago.

trend-seeking businessmen and tourists. When the Alcalás determined they needed to expand their customer base, they cast their eyes toward downtown.

To crack the market, they advertise in two large publications distributed to guests and concierges at hotels such as the Drake. Customers from across the world, including Germany, Japan, Ireland, Dubai and Australia, to mention a few, stream into the store on a daily basis.

“They want to take something back home that's American and this is American,” said Richard Alcalá, sweeping his hand across the array of hats, boots, clothing and accessories that fill the shop.

Vision has played an important role in the success of the business. When Richard's father, Luis, opened the store, men's dress clothing filled the shelves.

“We were competing with every other men's store all carrying the same things,” Richard said. “A suit is a suit ... the brands may change but the styling doesn't.”

From one customer's request for a Western shirt, the idea was hatched to convert the entire store. Richard's vision was a hard sell. He told his father, “I have all the faith in the world we need to change over to Western wear.”

They've never looked back.

Today, Western boots are king at Alcalás. From an original selection of a couple hundred pair, the store now carries thousands of styles for both men and women.

The shop is one of the few Sendra Boot distributors in the United States. The Spanish-made styles have been around since 1913 and feature a unique look urban customers particularly favor.

“Most of Western wear is very traditional, but what sells in Texas does not sell here and what sells here probably would not sell in Texas,” Richard said.

The Alcalás credit Lucchese for providing brighter and less traditional styles and colors. Other popular