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West Elm plants itself in Edina

By **JOHN EWOLDT**, Star Tribune

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Move over, Pottery Barn, Crate & Barrel, Restoration Hardware, Room & Board and Gabberts. Make way for West Elm. The home furnishings chain will open its first Minnesota store Thursday next to Macy's Home Store in an already crowded home furniture and accessories market along Edina's France Avenue.

It's a good bet that West Elm will be well positioned in this economy as buyers "trade down" to more affordable retailers, said David Brennan of the Institute for Retail Excellence at the University of St. Thomas. Adding more "cheap chic" near upscale retailers such as Gabberts and Macy's Home Store isn't shocking to shoppers anymore, he said. They're used to seeing a TJ Maxx next to Nordstrom in malls.

Is it too much of a good thing in one concentrated area?

Not at all, said Sue Hunter, owner of Home for a Change Interior Design in Minnetonka. "One look at the home furnishings at the recent Parade of Homes and you could see that dark, heavy and fussy had been replaced by light, clean and contemporary," Hunter said. West Elm adds that element.

For shoppers, another choice will be welcome. The competition might even lead to more aggressive discounts. Just as Maplewood is home to auto row, France Avenue will bring in shoppers from a greater distance to shop along one well-appointed stretch, said Brennan.

The selection at West Elm is similar to Pottery Barn (Williams-Sonoma Inc. is the parent company for both retailers), as well as Crate & Barrel.

You'll find table linens, bedding, bath items, vases, lighting, art, tabletop pieces, rugs and pillows. Furniture includes sectionals, sofas, chairs, desks, dining room tables and bedroom furniture, all ranging from \$100 to \$3,045 (five-piece leather sectional). Many sofas and beds with separate headboards are priced at \$800 to \$1,200. As with Ikea, many items, including sofas, are in stock to be hauled away. (West Elm stocks only certain finishes and fabrics on display. Others can be ordered via catalog or online.)

The stylish cheap chic will attract the design-conscious who shop at Ikea, as well as at Minneapolis-based Blu Dot and Room & Board.

With prices higher than Ikea and lower than Crate & Barrel, West Elm is Pottery Barn's younger, hipper sister.

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