

Furrier gives new life to old pelts abroad

By JAMES A. WALSH
Of the Courier-Post

CHERRY HILL — When Leonard Finkel shops for furs, he favors old and out-of-fashion pelts, has-been hides that are generally unwanted and gratefully unloaded by their former owners.

And that's just fine by Finkel, for the Moorestown man peddles those decades-old furs — usually at an attractive profit — to an eager European market.

Finkel, 27, is a third-generation participant in his family's fur business, the New York Fur Salon of Cherry Hill. At its Chapel Avenue headquarters, however, the business sells only new and fashionable furs to a local clientele. The used furs are marketed abroad by a separate operation called Nilo D'Nard, a more recent enterprise for Finkel and his father, Daniel. The name Nilo D'Nard is a scrambled version of the two men's first names.

"WE'RE the only ones in the country who do this," says the younger Finkel. The bearded furrier tours the nation in search of passe pelts, usually setting up shop in distant hotel rooms, advertising heavily and then paying from \$25 to \$1,000 per fur.

He describes the sellers as "a lot of senior citizens, people who have inherited coats or gotten tired of them, people who got too thin or got too big," and he adds, "The fur is usually something obsolete to them."

But those same furs may still be attractive to Europeans, who prefer the old styles — and the sharply reduced price tags of a second-hand product. "Over here, the fitted styles are very popular," Finkel observes, "but in Europe they still like the big, boxy coats with a broad sweep."

AND BORN-AGAIN pelts are more affordable for Europeans because new furs there can carry extravagant price tags. "A (new) fur that would cost \$5,000

here could go for \$15,000 over there," he says in an almost-shocked tone.

Finkel goes far for furs. He's visited such cities as Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Minneapolis and Louisville, Ky., choosing destinations based on their reputation among furriers and the climate. Cold Rochester, N.Y., turned out 150 old furs, for instance, but Finkel has also done well in Sun Belt cities full of transplanted Northerners.

After a layoff of several months, Finkel is now planning another buying excursion for later this week — his first local jaunt to a hotel in Cherry Hill.

HE HAS FOUND that Europeans won't buy just anything — so neither will he. For instance, he disdains chinchilla or black Persian lamb because those materials don't hold up well over the years. And apparently nobody likes stoles, so Finkel doesn't touch them. "I wouldn't give you \$5 for one," he snaps.

And he cautions, "The used fur market is very different than the new one. You really have to know what you're doing."

Even that doesn't always help. Finkel once traveled to San Francisco, only to find a travel agent had reserved his hotel room in Washington, D.C. Despite the mix-up, Finkel went ahead with his buying effort — but collected only four furs.

AND THERE WAS a period when Nilo D'Nard lost several thousands of dollars, which prompted him to suspend its operations. "I've been shish-kebabbed in Chicago and blitzed in Baltimore," he exclaims.

The problem: Italian wholesalers — who represent his best market — paid him in lira that plunged in value against the dollar, short-changing the furrier.

Still, Finkel sees the foreign enterprise as a profitable sideline, one that will generate income even when sales in Cherry Hill enter a warm-weather slump.

"It's only a sideline," he says of Nilo D'Nard. "But it should keep me busy in the summer."