

Richard Wedler

From musician and fine furniture craftsman to woodworking tool inventor, Richard Wedler has always prided himself on precision.



Artful precision is a good way to describe Richard Wedler. In his guitar playing, his carefully crafted fine furniture, and most of all his Micro Fence branded router accessories, all is carried out with an exacting attention to detail.

Maybe that comes from being the son of an Ohio machinist, but it wasn't machining or woodworking that brought Wedler to California in the late 1960s – it was music. That career path didn't pan out, and he fell into woodworking, but even today, there are always guitars in his shop, and the shop is the regular scene of informal jam sessions, including some of L.A.'s premier session players. So, how did music turn into Micro Fence?

Woodworking roots

After helping on installs and other work in between music gigs, Wedler opened his own woodworking shop in 1980. The shop did everything from furniture and box work to sophisticated pieces for high-end clientele. With connections through the William Morris Agency and others, Wedler won commissions for stars like Bob Hope and Shaun Cassidy. His woodworking earned recognition in magazines, including *Fine Woodworking*. He particularly reveled in challenging projects. "We'd always find a way," he recalls.

It was some of those challenging projects that eventually led to development of the Micro Fence. "There wasn't anything to precisely adjust a router



Richard Wedler personally assembles bases for the precision Micro Fence router base he invented.

fence," he said. "I grew up in a machine shop, so I worked with my father to develop the basic edge guide."

From prototype to patent

Early prototypes had a wooden body with threaded micrometer adjustment. It attracted some interest from other woodworkers, but when Wedler showed it to another woodworking tool inventor, Mark Duginske, he told Wedler he should make the body out of aluminum. That led to a run of 500 samples and a debut at the 1993 AWFS show in Anaheim.

Wedler didn't really even know if he had invented anything significant, but the show told him. "I can remember standing at our booth and seeing the yellow shirts come down from DeWalt, blue ones from Makita, the suits from Bosch and Porter Cable. All of them were very curious about it," Wedler says. "It was a surprise to us; we had no idea what our position or value was."

When Wedler went to patent his new

Before he devoted most of his energy to the Micro Fence line, Wedler made custom furniture like this unit with tambour doors that was featured in *Fine Woodworking* magazine.

invention, he was dismayed by the process and the cost, but one of his customers, who was a retired engineer, jumped in to help. "He constructed a patent application with 20 claims and all 20 claims were approved," Wedler says proudly.

U.S. manufacturing

Wedler has resisted the temptation to have the Micro Fence manufactured offshore. He did experiment to have one part made in China, but the precision wasn't there, and the results were unacceptable despite lowered cost. Today, all the parts of the Micro Fence are made in the United States, and Wedler does the assembly in his own shop.

Just off the woodworking area, is a room set up with metalworking machines, including a mill and lathes where Wedler can work on prototypes for new products, as well as assemble and pack for shipping the current Micro Fence line.

Expanding product range

The initial Micro Fence product was a precision answer to setting a fence for a hand-held router. Subsequent products have taken that concept and expanded on it. "The system has grown since

At a glance

Who: Richard Wedler

What: Micro Fence precision router tools

Where: Arleta, Calif.

Website:
www.microfence.com



The heart of the Micro Fence system is a micrometer device that allows for precise, fine fence adjustments.

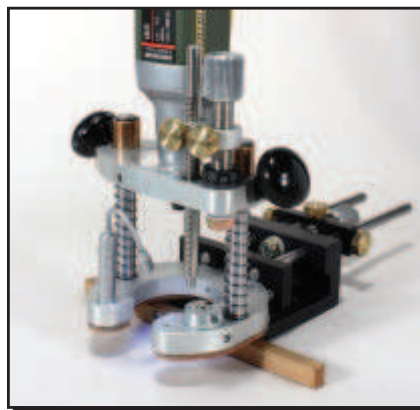


Micro Fence grew out of Wedler's fine furniture craftsmanship, and he still maintains a fully-equipped shop for both woodworking, metalworking, and even an ad hoc photo studio for product photography.

then," says Wedler. Today, the Micro Fence brand is attached the original edge guide, which will fit 65 different router models. There are also extensions, circle jigs, ellipse jigs, plunge bases, and the latest addition, the Micro Plunge Base, which works with high-speed rotary tools such as the Dremel and similar sized die grinders. The Micro Plunge Base won a Sequoia Award for innovative new products at the 2011 AWFS show in Las Vegas.

Wedler tried lots of different avenues to market his tools, but he found the best success on the road in trade shows where he could talk to customers face to face and show them what the Micro Fence does, a process he compares to being on stage as a musician. He took on a rigorous schedule of doing 15 to 25 shows a year.

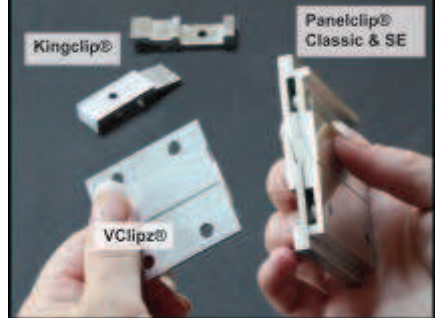
With a schedule like that, woodworking projects have taken a back seat to



The latest product in the Micro Fence line is this base designed for tools like the Dremel rotary tool, offering fine precision on a smaller scale than standard routers.

Micro Fence in Wedler's Arleta, Calif., shop, but there's still time for music, as he pulls a guitar down off the wall to pick another tune. <

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