

Vance

October 1997

CWB

Custom Woodworking Business



Custom Cabinets Beyond the Kitchen

Special preview: CWB Conference and Expo – Dallas. See page 34

Mesquite horses capture Texas spirit

Outsourcing doors and drawers

Millwork shop enjoys 'Texas-size' growth

Solid surfacing materials

Visit Industrial Strength Woodworking at www.iswonline.com

HOLLYWOOD
WOODWORKER
SPECIALIZES IN

COVERING CREATIVE

RICHARD WEDLER CAME TO CALIFORNIA TO RECORD AN ALBUM, BUT SAVED HIS BEST 'PERFORMANCES' FOR THE FIELD OF WOODWORKING.

By Tom Caestecker Jr.

It was the spirit of a creative era that brought Richard Wedler to Hollywood, CA, in 1970 to record a folk music album. When that career path proved slow to develop, he combined a knowledge of metalworking, an inclination towards woodworking and his natural ingenuity to instead create his own company, Richard Wedler Cabinetry.

"To stay afloat early on, when the album didn't gel and while I also did some documentary filmmaking, I would do woodworking," Wedler recalled. "I worked part-time for a cabinetmaker, Robert Stevenson, in Hollywood who was a superb craftsman. He could really tailor a piece towards a certain style. While working for him, several Hollywood furniture designers asked me to help on-site with installation. Gradually, designers started to come to me directly to build their pieces, and eventually, my own shop evolved."

Wedler credits much of his success to the experiences above, as well as to his exposure to his family's machine shop, which he says gave him a background in tolerances that were unknown to the woodworking field when he became involved with it.

"My dad and I would grind shaper knives to our own patterns," Wedler said. "We could take any given moulding and reproduce it."

Wedler's 1,000-square-foot shop is located near Warner Bros., Universal and Disney Studios in North Hollywood. Although he mostly works alone, he often has part-time employees on hand. For many years, the company did a lot of work for designers whose commissions often involved the many talent agencies located in the area. But in the economic crunch in the early 1990s, the main design firm that Wedler worked with went out of business. Since then, his company



Richard Wedler has many contacts within the entertainment industry. This desk unit was made for Tony Thomas, son of Danny Thomas. It features lacquered maple and birch veneers.



OUTLETS



This library bookcase at St. John's Seminary is made of cherry and came in eleven different compartments, including the pediment, to accommodate a second floor installation. It features raised panel doors and moulding details made to match the building's architecture, which itself was designed by Wallace Neff.

has focused mostly on residential jobs. Wedler also has developed the Micro-Fence, a micrometer-adjusted edge guide for hand-held routers, which he has been marketing to other woodworkers. Together, these aspects have helped to cover the loss of the designers' business.

"The mistake I made was that I allowed nearly 75 percent of the business to come from one firm," Wedler said. "It was almost impossible to avoid; we had four or five jobs scheduled for them, and there often was not enough time to accept work from anybody else."

Wedler still has many contacts within the entertainment industry and does residential commissions for them, as well as



This buffet/entertainment center is for a William Morris Agency conference room. It is made of white oak with a washed finish and features a travertine backing and posts turned and tapered in a neo-classic design.

for other furniture companies that contract their jobs through him.

"We did a big entertainment center for Danny Thomas's son, Tony," Wedler said. "We also did a bench for a country club in Japan that went around a tree on a 12-foot radius, and which was sectioned in accordance with Japanese protocol."

"We do free-standing anything, as well as some built-ins. There is no signature thing; everything is custom," he added. "But we steer away from the commercial market now, due to the installation requirements."

Richard Wedler Cabinetry's radius of business is generally in the 100-mile range, although he has had projects

shipped to the Far East and Saudi Arabia, as well as to Colorado and Utah. But 95 percent of his work goes locally, or to a nearby city, such as Palm Springs.

"Most of the work that goes out of state is for former residents of the Los Angeles area who were clients or friends here and then moved away," Wedler said.

As far as wood species, Wedler said that cherry and beech have both become very popular. Whatever the species, Wedler said most Californians want styles that are either neo-classic, modern or "something whimsical." In addition, most on the West Coast prefer lighter finishes and a more natural appearance. The company will also

RICHARD WEDLER CABINETRY

grain and color match any woods in a particular piece.

"If we have a drawer requirement, the drawer sides are virtually always a solid material that is either the same or complementary to the species we are using,"



Wedler said. "Occasionally, we will get into some decorative things if the client wants to get playful — perhaps we'll use a contrasting wood for the drawer sides."

The company uses roughly a half-and-half mixture of veneers and solid wood, the former usually encasing a burl or a figured wood in a frame. The average price for a job is around \$5,000, but Wedler

said he will try to accommodate any customer for virtually any request.

"We place a limit on orders for smaller-scale pieces or projects so they will not seriously interrupt our scheduling," Wedler said. "If you are swamped, you cannot do a \$100 job that takes up half the day."

The shop's array of equipment includes many homemade machines that illustrate the inventiveness and creativity of both Wedler and his father. He also has much in the way of older machinery that he has tinkered with to accommodate his method of assembly.

"We have altered much of the machinery for tolerance control," he said. "Now, each one has been fine-tuned to where it runs like a jeweler's lathe."

"Tooling is where we spend our money, on carbide and things of that nature. We use both three-way carbide and our own ground shaper knives. The latter are more compatible with matching older styles of mouldings in the homes where we typically work. We have taken machine tooling and brought it into the wood-working field for ourselves. We are not pioneers, but shy of CNC equipment, we can make nearly anything, considering we are a manual shop," Wedler added.

The shop's machinery includes a Delta Unisaw table saw, a Crouch edge sander,



Wedler's shop features much in the way of homemade equipment. Above left, Wedler uses an oscillating spindle sander to perform radius sanding. It is actually an upside-down drill press. Also pictured above is an 8-in. Powermatic joiner.



This Brentwood, CA, residence features a mahogany desk that conforms to an odd-shaped ceiling. It has a built-in Formica-inlay top, over-counter low-voltage lighting and built-in file drawers.



Lately, many of Wedler's big jobs have been for St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, CA. Pictured here is a circulation desk featuring a radiused, white oak veneer and a granite top. Behind the desk are display cases made of solid oak. Wedler built these pieces to the design specifications of James Nardini of Charles Walton Associates.



For many years, Richard Wedler Cabinetry did work for designers whose commissions involved the many talent agencies in the area. Here, a Santa Fe-style office storage/entertainment center made of pine and featuring pocket doors adorns one of the offices at William Morris Agency in Los Angeles.



Pictured is what Wedler calls a linen press that is constructed of pine and has an ebony and holly inlay.

a Kuster drum sander, a planer from Parks, a Logan turret lathe, an 8-in. Powermatic joiner, a 5-hp compressor from Falcon, a Murphy-Rodgers dust collection system, a homemade doweling machine and several air sanders and pneumatic tools.

Wedler also has more than 1,000 router bits and several hundred shaper knives. The company's hardware is often home-made as well, but it also uses Gerber reproduction hardware, JADO hardware for a contemporary look, Soss invisible hinges and, when frameless cabinets are made on occasion, it installs hinges from Grass.

One interesting home-made machine is an oscillating spindle sander, which is actually an upside-down drill press that raises and lowers for unique sanding capabilities.

"It really is great for doing radius sanding,"

Wedler said. "The drill press is quite old — from the 1930s."

The company has a fair share of work outsourced, including any veneer layup, as well as finishing.

"I have access to a vacuum press," Wedler said. "But for bigger layups, I take the work to a big Hollywood company that does monster orders. They have a huge selection of exotic veneers to choose from, so there's no reason for me to play with a clamping mechanism when they can finish a job for me in an hour.

"We also contract out finishes. We will do some simple finishes here, such as hand rubbing. But finishing regulations are so strict in California that it would be too costly for me to put in a spray booth. I'd rather contract the work," he added.

It was a creative impetus that spurred Richard Wedler's move from Ohio to California in 1970. Although he came to the West Coast to make music, his creativity actually found its outlet through woodworking. He still is quite the musician, however, as he may sit down and play a tune on the guitar or perhaps the musical saw, the latter a sort of synthesis of his musical acumen and his woodworking skills.

"When I was here early on, woodworking was a kind of 'safety net,'" Wedler said. "But it eventually became the 'big net.'" ♦