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CoverStory



Tradition

Custom cabinet and furniture company's success tied to relationships and practical solutions

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Shop Snapshot



Company: H&B Woodworking Company
Location: Plainville, CT.
Founded: 1968
Proprietors: Lydia Witik and Matthew Malley
Primary products:

Custom residential cabinetry and furniture

Employees: 4 •
Annual sales: \$800,000
Shop size: 5,000 square feet
Key equipment:

- ▶ Striebig vertical panel saw
- ▶ SCMI edgebander
- ▶ Festool Domino tenon tool
- ▶ Kremlin finishing equipment

Traditional or not — H&B does both face-frame and frameless construction, traditional and more contemporary, like this closet unit. The common denominator is working closely with clients to meet their needs.

Fits right in — Painted custom woodwork, like this mantel and shelf unit, is a specialty at H&B Woodworking, where they relish solving design challenges.

Solving the hiring puzzle

Lots of shops say it's difficult today to find good help, and H&B Woodworking Co. in Plainville, CT, is no different. But co-owner Lydia Witik has an interesting strategy to sift out the best prospects while conducting interviews. She's had some success in hiring using the online resource Monster.com, but she's

found what's on a resume may not be the only indicator of a good employee.

"I ask them, 'What was your favorite subject in high school?'" she says. "If they say 'English,' I don't hire them. Then I ask, 'Do you like to do puzzles?' A lot of what we do is like figuring out puzzles."

of attention to detail

Shop Tour



Go online to
www.cabinetmakeronline.com/hb.aspx
to see a tour of the shop at
H&B Woodworking.

Not every shop has gone hi-tech. At H&B Woodworking Co. in Plainville, CT, the emphasis is more on personal touch, close relationships with customers and practical, no-nonsense shop solutions. Shop partners Lydia Witik and Matthew Malley are proud of the decades-old tradition of quality in the shop that was founded by Witik's father in 1968.

Witik and Malley have both worked in the shop for 24 years, and over that time have developed a system that connects pragmatic manufacturing solutions with hands-on design that is closely tied to efficient construction and installation methods.

Hands-on design

Witik's father came to this country from Austria in 1956 from a tradition of cabinetmaking going back several generations. Witik continued her father's legacy, growing up in the shop and beginning work immediately after high school.

Although she went to school for interior design and currently handles all the sales and design for the company, she knows her way around the shop and on an installation crew.

"I know how to put it all together,"



Tradition continues — Lydia Witik now runs the business her father started. Although she's worked in the shop and on installations, today she specializes in sales and design, and prefers paper and pencil to computer for drawings.

she says. "That has helped me tremendously on the design side."

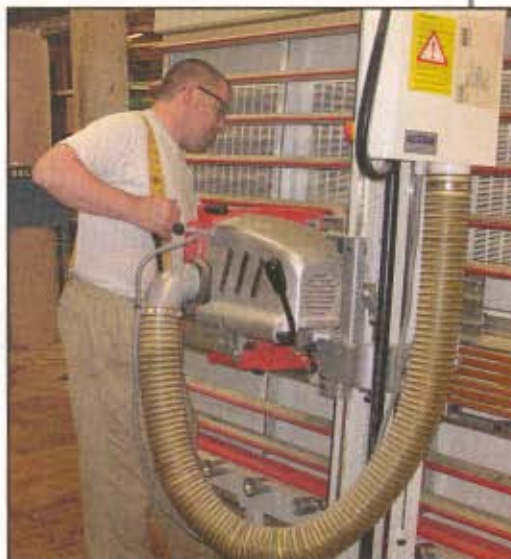
Her approach is unabashedly old school: paper and pencil. Sitting at her desk, flanked by a collection of potted plants and a wall of moulding samples for their Williams & Hussey moulder, Witik draws every project by hand. "I think with my pencil," she says.

Working with a handful of interior decorators and directly with some customers, she says the close relationships she builds with clients doing it this way, are a powerful tool.

Marketing by referral

"We've never advertised," she says. "It's strictly word of mouth. That's good for the customers because they know other customers.

continued ➤



Accurate cuts — Matthew Malley uses a Striebig vertical panel saw for most of the cutting chores at H&B Woodworking in Plainville, CT. Malley is co-owner of the business and runs the shop.

And it's good for us because they are not going to refer a deadbeat."

Witik thinks a lot of the shop's success has to do with paying attention to customer needs and finding solutions. "We think outside the box. We do both face-frame and frameless. We solve the problems," Witik says.



Level assembly — To make up for the uneven wooden floors of the shop, there are special level platforms for assembly and staging to make sure everything is right before cabinetry is installed in a client's home.

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Work in the shop flows in a circular pattern, beginning with a loading dock and lumber storage. Malley says one of the biggest improvements they made was installing a humidifier system from American Moistening. The resulting increased stability of wood products has made machining and assembly much easier.

Most cutting is done on a Striebig vertical panel saw located near the loading and lumber area. Malley says the saw is very accurate and easy to use. An old horizontal panel router and boring equipment are located at the next position on the circular construction path.

From there, parts that need edgebanding go to the SCMI Olympic K208 edgebander. For face frames and other parts that need joinery, Malley's favorite new tool is the Festool Domino. Working much like a biscuit joiner, the Domino makes precise and strong loose-tenon joinery a snap. Malley also uses a Lamello biscuit joiner for assemblies where that is more appropriate.

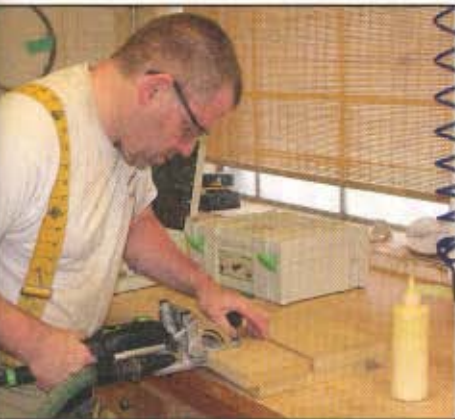
Sanding and finishing

Past the assembly and joinery areas, the circle continues through a Timesavers widebelt sander and on to the finishing area.

Wood flooring is typically uneven in the old brick factory building where

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Speedy joinery — Malley likes the Festool Domino for fast, efficient and strong loose-tenon construction when he makes face frames and other joinery.

H&B is located, so in the center of the production circle are a number of specially leveled low platforms to fully assemble and stage cabinets and furniture before delivery. The shop can make its own doors but frequently outsources them to Conestoga.

"It's like adding a man to the shop," says Witik.

Custom finishes are a specialty of H&B. Finisher Robert Witik prides himself on matching custom looks. He uses a Kremlin spray system to which he has added pivoting metal access gates for easier inspection of finish levels and adding material.

While Witik and Malley are happy

For more information on products mentioned in this article contact the companies below, or go to www.cabinetmakeronline.com

American Moistening Co., humidifier
704.889.7281 www.amco.com

Colonial Saw Inc., Striebig vertical panel saw, Lamello biscuit joiner
781.585.4364 www.csaw.com

Conestoga Wood Specialties Corp., doors
800.964.3667 www.conestogawood.com

Festool USA, Domino tenon tool
888.337.8600 www.festoolusa.com

Kremlin, finishing equipment
800.573.5554 www.exel-na.com

SCM-Group USA, edgebander
800.292.1850 www.scmgroup-usa.com

Timesavers Inc., widebelt sander
763.488.6600 www.timesaversinc.com

Williams & Hussey Machine Co. Inc., moulder
800.258.1380 www.williamsnhussey.com

without computerized design and automated production, they acknowledge a place for CNC.

When they encounter projects where CNC manufacturing would be advantageous, they outsource those services.

But with pencil in hand, Witik is

ready to meet the challenge of working with the next custom customer. She and Malley are convinced that their success in the past and moving into the future is really a formula for customer satisfaction.

"We build it and they're happy with the results," she says. □

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