

KEEPING IT ALL IN THE FAMILY

BY BRIAN CALDWELL / SENIOR WRITER

Russell Hudson and his two sons love nothing more than working together at Hudson Cabinetmaking in New York

For Russell Hudson, life doesn't get much better than getting out of bed in the morning, having breakfast in the custom kitchen he built, walking through a room filled with furniture he made and then down a flight of stairs to his shop, Hudson Cabinetmaking, in Carmel, N.Y. Once there, he enters an entirely different world to do what he loves — creating custom designs and assisting his two sons with the woodworking process.

"Quite frankly, our love is to do very high-end, well-articulated stuff, whether it is screwed to the wall or not. We really love to do the stuff that someone is willing to pay us to do that is really high-end work, which you see less and less of. I love it and that is why I do what I do. And that is why my sons are still with me," says Hudson.

Hudson was once a filmmaker and worked for an advertising agency in New York City. But he grew tired of the "crazies of Madison Avenue" and started Hudson Cabinetmaking in the early 1980s.

"When I came home from the advertising agency, having worked so many hours on Madison Avenue, I would often go down to the basement and it was actually my way of getting sane again," says Hudson.

Design approach

Hudson's greatest strength lies in his ability to visualize projects and put them on paper. He doesn't use any CAD programs, but his 3-D renderings are phenomenal. The majority of his work is built-ins.

"I'm really good at interior designing and one of my sons is particularly adept at knowing the proportions," Hudson says. "I have the ability to visualize things in the mind's eye.

Quite often, a client is talking to me and I'm looking up and they're wondering why I'm looking away, but I'm looking because I can kind of picture things, like yeah, the arch will be there over the top and I can kind of picture what we are talking about. Being especially conscious of the ability to visualize is a big part of the game. But you have to foster that."



Hudson Cabinetmaking's primary products are built-ins and kitchens.

Every project he takes on starts with a hand-rendered drawing. He does a quick rough sketch of it and then e-mails it to the potential client. If they like it, he'll give an estimate and then spend nearly two hours putting together a detailed drawing with three dimensions from an angle, not head on.

"I don't charge anything for that because we land between three or four out of five people that I visit. And, yes, there have been times when I've designed something and someone else builds it because they love my designs so

much, but are willing to do it for half the amount. You put yourself out a little bit more and let the universe take care of you. It's hard, but I don't want to be a lawyer."

Family affair

Hudson works with his two sons, Russell Jr. and Brian. Both have been working with their dad for more than 10 years. Quite often, working with family ends up as a disaster, but in the case of the Hudson family, things seem to be just fine.

"As I get to be 60 and they're in their 30s, I'm so grateful that I have them. I can let them go with a client now. I can't lift up 4x8 sheets for eight hours straight anymore because the next day I'll be on my back. Eventually I'm going to be the guy who comes in twice a week and sweeps a little bit and it will be their place."

Hudson is a firm believer in face-frame cabinets with inset doors. He's been doing it for years.

"The whole game is articulation," he says. "No one wants to buy a locker room from you. You got to have some depth. It needs to look handmade and have some soul to it. All they are is boxes with molding on them, so how do you do this so it has some character? We like to build face-frame stuff all the time. Instead of bringing it flat to the face, now we set them 1/4" back because it gives them even more texture. I bet we do 19 out of 20 inset."

For face frames, Hudson uses veneered furniture-grade plys for all side walls, backs, floors and shelves. He says they will stay nice and flat forever. Anything that can be hit — outside corners, the face frame — is made out of solids.

Hudson estimates about two-thirds of what he produces ends up being painted.

"We use poplar for all of our face-frame stuff and these days you go with maple pre-finished for interiors, which makes sense money-wise. When you show people the painted piece and then they open it up, they

continued on Page 44



Russell Hudson Jr. assembles pieces for a fireplace mantel at his father's shop.



The Hudsons: Russell Jr., Russell Sr. and Brian.

PHOTO: BRIAN CALDWELL (BOTTOM LEFT)

HUDSON CABINETMAKING INC.

Owner: Russell Hudson Sr. • Location: Carmel, N.Y.

Years pro: 28 • Employees: Two

Shop size: 2,100 sq. ft.

Specialty products: Built-ins and kitchens. To a lesser degree, custom furniture and fireplace mantles

On being 100 percent custom:

"We don't [have an] assembly line here whatsoever. Either we're not clever enough or I don't want to do it or both. I don't want to see how fast I can make boxes."

go, 'Oh, this is the real thing' instead of particleboard."

He cuts everything 1" rough and mills it in his shop. He can't stress enough how everything has to be as true as it can be.

"The only way to make a cabinet is to have all your parts dead-on square so that when you screw it together, it comes up dead square and the door fits right inside it.

"I now get all solid stock from Leonard's Lumber in Connecticut. We buy 800/bf every couple months from them because we get the poplar a lot. We don't use pine here; that's silly unless someone wants the pine look. And we never use oak because I personally hate oak. It looks like every cheap condominium from the 1970s. We probably use cherry second [most] and we use maple often, especially if we don't know how they're going to stain the thing. And some walnut. We go with Atlantic Plywood for our plywood."

Back for more

Hudson Cabinetmaking is 100 percent high-end residential with most of the work coming from the wealthy suburbs of New York City: Westchester County (N.Y.), Chappaqua and



This large built-in case piece was built for a client's family room. The entertainment center is on the left and the potential for a library is on the right.

Armonk (N.Y.), and Ridgefield and Greenwich (Conn.). Repeat business, the sign of a satisfied customer, is the norm.

"The second time we do something for someone, they have never looked at anyone else. It's word of mouth and when people see their neighbor's stuff and they say they like this guy, he was a nice guy and they were polite and everything. They did it when they said they were going to do it. So that really helps."

Hudson subs out his finishing work and countertops, but is adamant about doing his own installation.

"If you really like doing this, you couldn't stand to have someone else do the installation. I want to see it done. There is a hit you get when you stand back and look at the whole thing you installed and say, 'Bang!' I mean part of what I do here is because I love doing this; I love the way it turns out. Seeing

it go from conception to a completed project so many times — that's the aha [moment]."

Hudson works with interior designers and contractors, but rarely architects.

"I must tell you, in the last year-and-a-half, I have gone through the phone book and called every architect in there, but one out of every four or five wanted to know if I had any work for them. That's happened with designers, too; everyone is starving."

Tough stretch

As with most professional shops, the last three years have been difficult because of the slowdown in the economy. It has prompted several changes at Hudson Cabinetmaking, especially in the bid phase.

"We had to do something because you could hear crickets in the shop; there was just nothing going on," Hudson laments. "For four or five months, we were bidding the way we always had and weren't even close. The [competition] would come in at \$28,000 and we were at \$45,000. We've discussed going with pre-built cabinets, but in the end we're just settling for less [profit]. My sons are not making a whole lot of money these days and sometimes I make \$125 a day. It still beats the [heck] out of nothing a day."

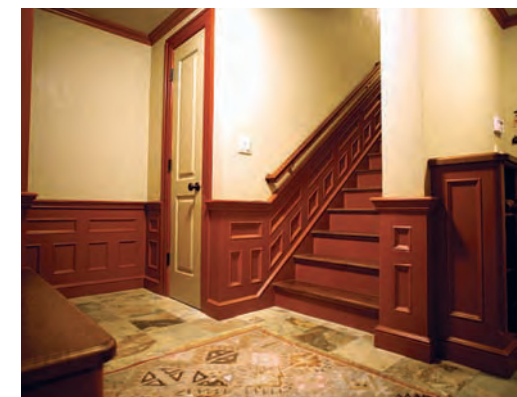
Hudson says it has been really rough and scary for two straight years. Previously he has had periods of three weeks or even two months when things were bad, but never two years.

"And so we had to go all the way out to the Hamptons and build a kitchen that would have been every bit short of \$50,000 and do it for \$30,000. I was down to \$37,000 and they said 'Nope.' And I couldn't argue. I don't have the money or other work to say I'm not going to do this. So, tough, get there and make only \$200 a day and do whatever you have to do and at least you'll keep the guys working and you won't be biting your nails worrying. At least you'll be actively doing something. It was that bad."

A believer

But the economic climate for Hudson has improved somewhat during the last three or four months. Things are far from what they were five years ago, but there definitely seems to be a slight uptick in business and inquiries. And, after 28 years in the business, Hudson remains optimistic.

"I'm going to keep believing in this. If you get three weeks or even two months of being kind of negative about stuff and it gets better and you say OK, I came out of that little peri-



This doesn't look like your average mudroom, but this is what Hudson built for owners of an extravagant home.

od where I wasn't feeling too great about everything. But two years? I'm not out of it yet; I'm still looking over my shoulder. I'm working so hard now that I am driving traffic to the website to make sure it looks wonderful. I want to make sure I'm booked a few months out." ■

Contact: Hudson Cabinetmaking Inc., 84 Glenvue Dr., Carmel, NY 10512. Tel: 845-225-2967. www.hudsoncabinetmaking.com

SATA Discover the Difference

NEW!

SATAjet® 4000 B

Made for the Best!

- Very soft and even spray pattern
- Light as a feather
- Better ergonomics
- Higher precision
- Durable
- Matched nozzle sets
- 3 year warranty
- Perfectly suited for waterborne or solvent borne material
- HVLP or RP (reduced pressure technology)

Dan-Am Co.®
Exclusive Independent Distributors of SATA Products in the US & Puerto Rico

Call 800-533-8016 or visit www.satausa.com

If you are in a woodworking business... this could be the most valuable tool in your officesm.

Please call 1-800-321-9841 for your 800 page catalog. Mention code wsn11

FREE to woodworking businesses. visit us at pro.woodworker.com/wsn11

List your Events in our Calendar

Woodshop News welcomes event notices. Entries must be received by the 15th of the month, three months prior to the event.

Mail to: Calendar, Woodshop News, 10 Bokum Road, Essex, CT 06426
Fax to: Calendar, 860-767-0642
E-mail: j.hicks@woodshopnews.com
Subject: Calendar Item

The events are also listed at no charge on the Internet: www.woodshopnews.com
Be sure to include: event name, date, location, sponsor, contact name and telephone number, and Web site URL if applicable.

REMANUFACTURED Sandingmaster Wide Belt Sander Model 2075-C

37" x 75" Belt. This machine also has Veneer sanding capabilities. Combination Head allows for light thicknessing as well as fine sanding.

Professional Quality At The Right Price

Remember the line of Sandingmaster Wide Belt Sanders we sold from the mid 80's to the mid 90's? We now sell them remanufactured to new specifications (subject to availability), along with many fine, accurate woodworking machines new and remanufactured. **Call us for parts, service, and advise on your woodworking needs.**

WOODSHOP SPECIALTIES

P.O. Box 70, Rutland, Vermont 05701
(802) 773-3240
www.woodshopspecialties.org

Forrest Blades

For building cabinets and fine furniture, nothing beats Forrest saw blades. Craftsmen appreciate the way our blades deliver smooth, quiet cuts without splintering, scratching, or tearouts. They know our unique grade C-4 micrograin carbide, proprietary manufacturing process, and hand straightening produce exceptional results. In fact, independent tests rate us #1 for rip cuts and crosscuts.

"From the first cut on, I realized that this blade was a bargain at any price! Nothing else I have cuts comparably." Calvin Brodie, Spanaway, WA

Our blades are manufactured in the U.S.A. and backed by our 30-day, money-back guarantee.

Forrest Quality Shows

Woodworker II—Best rated, all-purpose blade for rips and crosscuts.
Chop Master—Perfect for tight, perfectly cut miter joints without splinters.
Order from any Forrest dealer or retailer, online, or by calling directly.

Woodworker II Fine Woodworking **EDITOR'S BEST OVERALL CHOICE**

Chop Master Woodshop News **WOODSHOP NEWS 2007**

Duraline Hi-AT Woodshop News **WOODSHOP NEWS 2007**

Dado King Wood Magazine **TOP TOOL APPROVED 2008**

FORREST The First Choice of Serious Woodworkers Since 1946

www.ForrestBlades.com
1-800-733-7111 (In NJ, call 973-473-5236)

© 2010 Forrest Manufacturing Code WN