



Q&A WITH AN EXPERT

Custom woodworking adds a touch of class

By **MARSHA FOTTLER**
Correspondent

Tom Mottern got his start in woodworking while living on the historic island of Nantucket, Mass., where he worked for high-end home builders. Some of the homes were 300 years old and part of his job was to match existing interior architecture.

"I was the foreman of the trim and finish phase of home building for Sand Castle Construction for seven years while on the island," he says. "In addition to working on private homes, I did interior work on many of the island's bars and restaurants, as well as some of the yachts in the Nantucket boat basin. Eventually I started building custom pieces in my shop, such as entertainment centers, hutches and dining room tables."

He moved to Sarasota in 2000 with his family after 25 years on the island and opened Osprey Custom Woodworking (www.ospreycustomwoodworking.com; 586-4791).

Q: What kinds of services does Osprey Custom Woodworking offer?

A: In addition to designing and building custom wood-



Tom Mottern | COURTESY PHOTO

working pieces, I do furniture repair and refinishing. I also do kitchen and bath remodels, whether it be all new cabinetry or cabinet refacing.

Q: What do you love about your work?

A: The fact that every piece I build is different. My custom woodworking pieces are just

that, custom. You're not going to find what I make in a store. The piece I build for a customer is unique to that client.

Q: You like bamboo plywood — why?

A: It has amazing strength and durability and makes beautiful furniture and cabinets, which makes it an ideal building material. Bamboo

plywood comes in natural, referred to as blonde, and in carbonized, which is bamboo that undergoes a steam treatment that gives it a darker color, called amber. It is a low-resin, open-grained material that takes stains and finishes exceptionally well. Over the past few years bamboo plywood has become one of the most talked-about building materials in the industry. It's a green alternative to the ever-dwindling supply of hardwoods, so it's an environmentally friendly choice.

Q: What is your favorite wood to work with?

A: Bamboo and cherry top my list.

Q: Are wood countertops making a comeback in kitchens?

A: In the years since I've been in Sarasota, I have done three wood countertops, all in bamboo.

Q: What is the most popular piece that homeowners ask for?

A: Entertainment centers, built-ins or stand-alone pieces. These units are most of the time the focal point in a person's home, so the client



Bamboo, as used in this counter top, is a green alternative to the ever-dwindling supply of hardwoods. *COURTESY PHOTO*

really wants something nice yet functional.

Q: Do you design as well as fabricate pieces?

A: Every new piece that I do is designed by me along with the client. I also have taken existing pieces and fabricated them to fit a new situation, but that is possible only if what the client has is made out of wood and it is structurally possible to do what that homeowner wants. I get this situation a lot when a client buys a larger television and wants to utilize the existing entertainment center.

Q: What's the price range of jobs you do?

A: From \$50 for a furniture repair job to \$25,000 for some custom pieces.

Q: Do you work with just homeowners?

A: I work with architects, home builders and designers, but the majority of my work is dealing directly with homeowners.

Q: What is your house like?

A: It's situated on two acres in Osprey. It was built in 1980 and was in desperate need of a facelift when I bought it in 2001. A friend from Nantucket helped me gut the interior and in five weeks we painted every room, installed laminate flooring, remodeled the kitchen with all new cabinets and appliances and remodeled the two bathrooms. Subcontractors came in for the plumbing and electrical.

Q: What custom woodworking

pieces are in your home?

A: I have a bamboo table that is outside in the pool area and a bamboo coffee table in the family room. Additionally, I have a large piece in my office that was our entertainment center when we lived on Nantucket Island, which I've since fabricated into filing cabinets/office storage. I have a maple entertainment center with recessed lighting, glass shelves and smoked-glass doors and also a black walnut dining room trestle table that I designed in an octagon shape. I have made several of these tables for clients. I also built a floor-to-ceiling, built-in armoire in the master bedroom suite. And I remodeled the closets, customizing them with more shelves for storage.

Q: What is the biggest thing

you have ever made?

A: A mahogany entertainment center that was 16 feet long and 10 feet high and also a library for a rare book collector. They were built in my shop, not on site.

Q: When homeowners are considering kitchen cabinets, what wood is the best value?

A: The best value and beauty for their investment is getting the wood and finish they want. Everybody is different. When homeowners get exactly what they want, they have made a good investment.

Q: If you weren't a custom woodworker, what would you like to be?

A: Full-time musician, or I'd restore antique cars.