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May/June 1995

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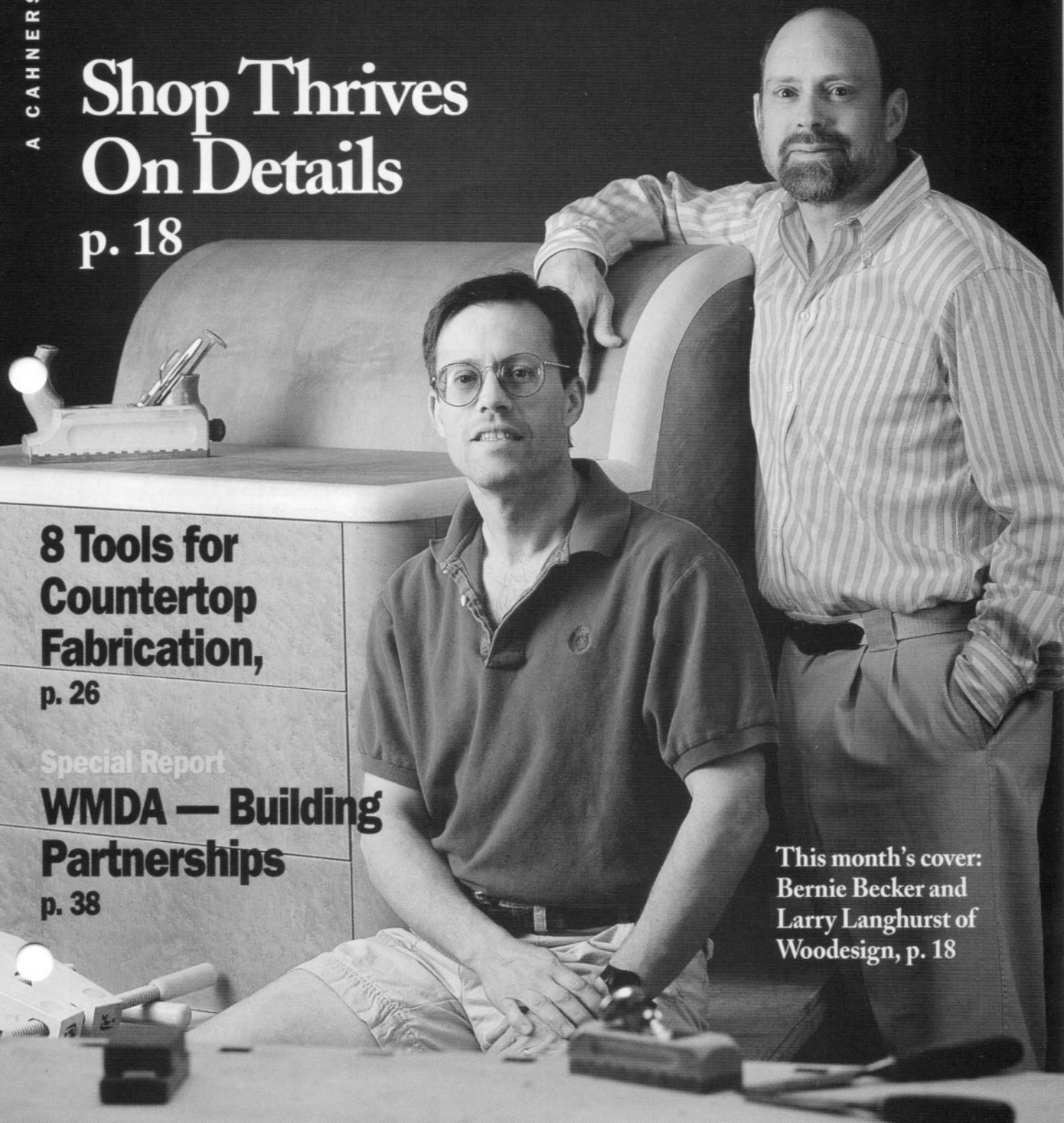
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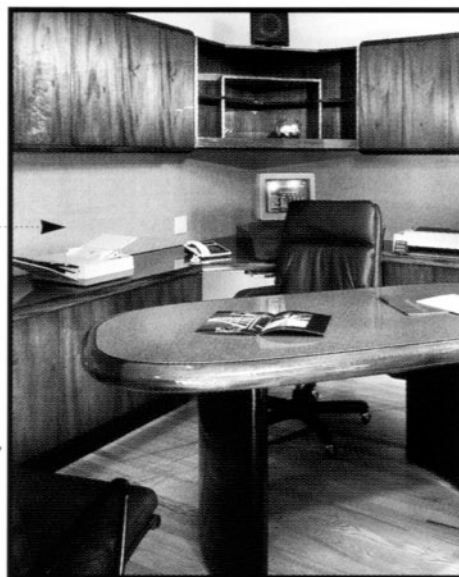
This month's cover:
Bernie Becker and
Larry Langhurst of
Woodesign, p. 18

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The Proof Is in *The Details*

Woodesign's innovative use of veneer and curves puts the company in a class by itself

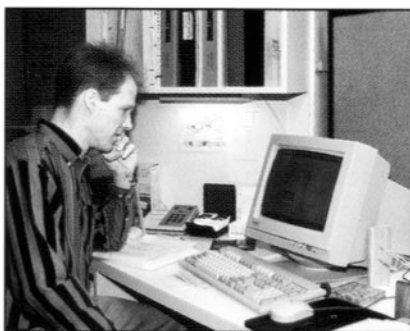


Curved cabinetry, furniture, and staircases show off Woodesign's craft. Careful attention to veneer and joinery techniques make this shop's products stand out.

By Sacha Cohen

In 1979 Bernie Becker and Larry Langhurst put their collective strengths into a custom cabinet business built on the premise that quality craftsmanship and dedication are everything. Now, 16 years later, they've proven these traits never go out of fashion. The premise has also proven lucrative for Woodesign, which had \$700,000 in sales at the end of the 1994 fiscal year.

Woodesign may be small, but its projects are anything but. Take, for example, the 70-foot yacht that was refit with matched lacewood sycamore veneer with a fiddleback pattern or the Manhattan condominium outfitted with cabinets, tamboured entertainment center, mouldings, furniture, and built-in bookcases in fitch-matched elm and elm/ash



Tim Huber, project coordinator, consults with a client while running designs through CabnetWare software. The software is used to schedule and to eliminate errors.

burls. Commercial projects have included an art deco interior job for the Bice Ristorante and cherry fixtures for the Scottsdale Fine Arts Center. Not bad for a 7,000-square-foot, 9-man shop in the heart of Phoenix.

Becker learned engineering and woodworking from his father, a woodworking enthusiast. Langhurst earned a degree in fine arts from Arizona State University. Langhurst's love of design and Becker's engineering talent gave birth to Woodesign. The business melds two fundamentals of woodworking — great design and the ability to put those designs to work.

The bigger, the better

Over time the projects have grown, says Becker, who's happy with this trend. "We like to get the bigger jobs, to go in and do a complete house. We did an 18,000-square-foot mansion, and we were able to do all the cabinetry with one fitch of veneer. All the cabinetry matched, and looked great."

► How to market veneer

For Woodesign's 15 year anniversary, Becker and Langhurst created a binder filled with information on veneering and different types of

veneers. Langhurst and Becker personally distributed the veneer book to interior designers, architects, and builders.

According to Langhurst, the book gives clients a quick education on veneer. The bulk of the catalog is 8-inch by 10-inch veneer samples

with photographs of Woodesign's projects in each corner. It also contains a primer and glossary of veneering terms. Every six months it adds a page to the book. "Veneering is our specialty. It's the way the industry has to go, with limited resources," says Becker.

In 1993, Langhurst designed a curved bird's-eye maple entertainment center with maple tambour for a customer in Geneva, Switzerland. For the same client, he designed an oval TV cabinet with a 360-degree lift. This, and other international projects, have propelled Woodesign's reputation for exquisite work across the globe.

Woodesign has two specialties — curves and veneering. Curves are used in a variety of projects from cabinets and furniture to circular staircases. A love of curves even extends to the company's fleet of 1950s Chevrolet trucks that are used to make local installations and deliveries. The trucks — with logos — function as moving advertisements.

Craftsmen specialize

Woodesign's cabinets are built with furniture and staircase building techniques, such as dowel joinery, metric measurements, vacuum pressing, and cold lamination. "We make furniture-grade cabinetry," says Becker. His ingenuity, Langhurst's designs, and the talented staff set the company's product apart.

Langhurst creates the conceptual drawings and is responsible for sales and marketing. Each craftsman has his own specialty, says Langhurst, who favors contemporary and deco styles.

Becker, who's in charge of engineering, devises custom details such as lifts, hidden compartments, and disappearing shelves. John Harper specializes in veneer layouts, and Michael Clivner's specialty is large cabinet projects for multimillion dollar homes.

Tim Huber, project coordinator, runs designs through CabnetWare's optimizer detailer package, which the company says has eliminated almost all error. The cut list and

materials then go to Bill Frear, the cutout person. Frear also edgebands parts and drills holes for dowel construction.

Project leaders are in charge of assembly and installation and see work through each stage to make sure it fits with client specifications. According to Langhurst, it takes about a week to prepare a job, then about six to eight weeks for the job to get through the shop. On-time delivery is about 85 percent.

Signed, sealed, delivered

To ensure quality, all work is signed by the craftsmen and guaranteed for five years. Employees are Woodesign's biggest asset, says Langhurst. "Turnover is virtually

nil. Early on we trained our people, but now we tend to attract craftsmen who are already skilled. Our staff is dedicated and it shows in their work." In addition to the satisfaction of a job well done, employees receive vacation time and medical benefits.

The shop includes a mixture of older American equipment such as a Monarch planer, and newer German machinery, such as an Ayen horizontal/vertical boring machine and Holz-Her edgebander. A Holzma sliding table saw, along with a Powermatic table saw and Delta Unisaw and bandsaw, enable the company to do angled cuts and precision work with both veneer and solid wood. Becker uses an AEM widebelt sander with a veneer package.

About a year ago, Woodesign bought the model 1402 Holz-Her edgebander to speed production, says Langhurst. The machine edgebands cabinet boxes and doors and allows the operator to use the same edge and face veneers.

Veneer layouts are done by hand with veneer tape. Becker built a cold vacuum press 12 years ago, which still is used for flat work. A Mercury vacuum press is used for the curved work and veneers are glued with Franklin Titebond glue or Borden PVA glue.

Smoothing production

According to Langhurst, the biggest bottleneck is the 20-foot by 20-foot finishing area. This area is being improved by better scheduling and hiring an assistant for the finisher. "We're open to trying just about anything to improve the bottleneck," admits Langhurst.

In keeping with environmental concerns, Woodesign has been using Binks HVLP guns and Prince pumps, which help cut down overspray. They're also exper-



The craftsmen at Woodesign use dowels and spline biscuits to produce cabinets that are above par. Locking devices on all doors exemplify the company's attention to detail.



Bernie Becker, co-owner, operates the shop's Holzma sliding table saw. Becker often adds lifts, retractable doors, or pull-outs to customize products.

Woodesign

imenting with waterbased finishes. "We've found a good epoxy-based finish, but it's only good for exterior work, which we don't do much of. We're pretty progressive about testing waterbased finishes," says Langhurst.

For the last few years, Woodesign has been involved in mostly high-end residential jobs, but commercial work is increasing. Conference tables, staircases, reception desks, and high-end cabinetry make up the bulk of work. "We do everything from very traditional to high-tech cabinetry. We use wood, melamine, MDF, and lots of veneer," says Becker.

MDF is used as the primary substrate because of its thickness, flatness, and machinability, says Langhurst. Cabinets feature Blum

hinges and Metabox drawers and furniture incorporates Accuride slides and Blum hinges.

So much attention to detail can sometimes slow down production, says Langhurst, but CabinetWare software and better organization have been instituted to save time. "Now, we spend a lot more time scheduling. Projects often take longer than expected, and we have to account for this," says Langhurst.

In addition, Woodesign's scheduling used to be done with Symantec's Timeline computer program, but Langhurst found it took too much time to enter and update all the projects. Because all of Woodesign's projects are custom, the process didn't work efficiently.



Woodesign's owners, Larry Langhurst, right, and Bernie Becker have combined the best in creative design and engineering to achieve residential and commercial success.

"We've begun to prioritize into short- and long-range projects," says Langhurst. "Now with a critical path system, we work backwards from the deadline, and draw on the shop's resources to fill in all the necessary tasks for completion of the goal."

Reprinted from CABINETMAKER May/June 1995 © 1995 by Cahners Publishing Company



Top row, left to right: Bernie Becker, Bill Frear, Larry Langhurst, John Harper, Paul Prescher
Bottom row, left to right: Mark Pera, Tim Huber, Carlos Cortez, Michael Clivner