

Into the woodwork

Harry Schell still lumbers to work

There is a little sign as you walk into the upstairs wood working shop at Schell Lumber Ltd., Edward Street, Stouffville, that extols the virtues of working with one's hands. It may as well have been written for Harry Schell. The 61-year-old father of four has been custom crafting win-

dows, doors, and one-of-a-kinds in wood since 1956. Along with Dick Ward of Claremont, who has worked along side of Harry for 20 years, he continues to offer the type of specialized service most lumber operations abandoned years ago. "Every small town since Day

One had a saw mill, a planing mill, and a wood working shop," says Harry, whose father, the late Wesley Schell, founded the family business in 1922. "But most of them got out of the shop end of it. Equipment broke down, and they just didn't replace it."

Old equipment used

Harry claims that much of the equipment he is using today has been with the shop for years, and that while it would never do for a shop given towards mass production, it is ideal for his purposes.

"Everything used to be driven by one line shaft, with a single motor operated by a steam engine. We got rid of that 15 years ago. But I've still got the old sash sticker, and some old saws, shapers, and sanders I would never part with."

Harry credits some early influences in his career for contributing towards his mastery of his trade. These include L.C. Murphy in the wood working shop at the old high school which used to be a part of Summitview Public School, and Cedric Watson, the old Summitview principal who also taught wood shop.

Two years spent studying architectural drafting at Danforth Technical Institute prepared him for his work with contractors, designing and building windows and doors for the houses they would build. "I figured I was going into Dad's business, so I thought that if I could draw and read blueprints, that it would prepare me well," Harry recalls.

Learned from a master

His first 10 years at the lumber yard were spent in the yard itself, and driving the company truck. When he did finally move upstairs to the shop, he claims he was fortunate to have been able to learn from one of the great ones.

"One of my greatest teachers was Art Farthing, a man who worked in the mill for around 20 years," Harry remembers. "It was all practical. You learned from your mistakes. I also learned a lot from local tradesmen like Bud Spang and Truman Baxter."

While Harry is the first to admit the custom woodworking operation is not the mainstay of Schell Lumber, he recognizes the value of being able to offer such a service. "The yard is the main part of our business, but by being able to make up special windows and



Harry Schell of Schell Lumber Ltd. has been custom crafting windows and doors in wood since 1956. He continues to offer that one-of-a-kind, specialized service many businesses abandoned years ago. His father, the late Wesley Schell, founded the business in 1922.

doors for a contractor, we often end up getting the contract for the lumber for the whole house."

He feels the older equipment he uses is ideally suited for many special orders involving the reproduction of doors and windows used by Stouffville area people in old or reproduction houses. "People today want to go back 100 years," he says. "The modern shop can't make up these sort of things. They are just not equipped."

Hard to say no

Harry prefers to stick to windows and doors, but admits he finds it hard to say no to a customer who comes along with an unusual request. "If I've got the time, then I'll do it."

His work has found itself taken as far away as the Caribbean. "A man came to me and said he wanted some old fashioned window sash made for some stores he was doing in the Caribbean. We delivered them to Richmond Hill where they were loaded into a container, then shipped by boat to their destination."

A recent feature in the Toronto Star included a picture of a gothic style window Harry had made for a Toronto restaurant. Harry's windows and doors are in buildings in Toronto, Kingston, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Edmonton, he says.

May slow down

As for how much longer he in-

tends to ride his bike to a job that involves a certain amount of physical exertion, Harry is non-committal. "I should be training someone to pick it up eventually, but that person hasn't come along yet. But I certainly don't want to retire early. I suppose I'll stay at it as long as my health holds up. I might just slow down a little."

But for now, he gives the impression he could go on making his precision wood products forever. Many an evening finds him heading over to the shop to put in a little extra time on a project.

As for his enjoyment of his work, he feels it's simply a matter of finding what you want to do, and sticking with it. "You have to do what you want to do," he concludes.

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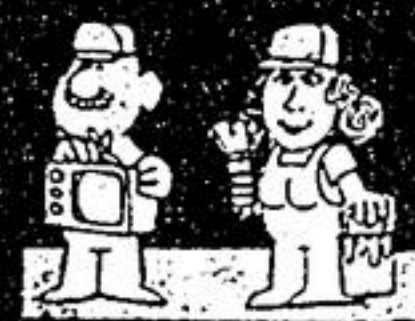
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