

2009

MODERN  
WOODWORKING

SMALL  
SHOP

Of The Year

## Finalist

BKI Woodworks, Boulder, Colo.  
Bruce Kranzberg, owner

# Sustainable strides



### BKI Woodworks grows with a green niche

By Jeff Crissey

Celebrating its 30th year in business, BKI Woodworks has made a name for itself in Boulder, Colo., by maintaining an uncompromised level of quality and adapting to meet the changing needs of its clientele. After starting out in 1979 concentrating on high-end custom furniture pieces, the company had its first taste of commercial work in the mid-80s building plastic laminate displays for an ongoing renovation of the nearby IBM manufacturing facility.

"I finished up our work and was sitting in the contractor's office and asked for more work," recalls Bruce Kranzberg, owner. "I felt I could compete with larger shops because we had a good blend of skilled labor and technology and I didn't have a lot of overhead. I never subscribed to the starving artist theory of furniture making, and doing that on a small scale wasn't a good growth pattern for the long term. When we made a switch to concentrate on commercial work, we quickly grew and we became more profitable."

The decision to change its focus soon led to new opportunities in the residential market. Today, BKI

Woodworks' product mix is an even split between residential woodworking and commercial, office and retail environments, and its geographic reach extends to Denver to the east and ski resorts such as Vail, Crested Butte and Steamboat Springs to the west. Its retail fixture business has grown to include a national outdoor equipment retailer.

Living in and serving customers in Boulder – a community with an acute environmental conscience – Kranzberg has seen green project become a larger part of the company's business in recent years. The city council's recently adopted Green Points Ordinance provides a rating system, guidelines and mandatory green building requirements for residential construction. As a result, BKI Woodworks has become active in promoting and using green materials in the construction of its cabinetry and woodworking projects.

This winter, BKI Woodworks completed the kitchen and household cabinetry for the Next West House, a Boulder residence built by the Zero Carbon Initiative and touted as the "Greenest house in America" and the first LEED Platinum, Net Zero Carbon residence.



Check out Modern Woodworking's digital edition to view a video of BKI Woodworks' Altendorf F-45 ELMO 4 sliding table saw with CNC controller and motorized rip and crosscut fences at [www.modernwoodworking-digital.com](http://www.modernwoodworking-digital.com)

*BKI Woodworks completed the kitchen and household cabinetry for the Next West house, billed as the "Greenest house in America." The bathroom cabinetry is made from Bamboo, and the kitchen cabinetry is made from European figured Ash. All the cabinetry is built with no-added formaldehyde substrates.*

## A setup for success

Kranzberg attributes BKI Woodworks' growth to three main areas: production machinery investments, skilled employees and sound business practices and systems. "We stay focused on the market segments that compliment our employees' skills rather than going after all types of projects," he says. "We run a lean, clean organized operation which we constantly make improvements to. I believe our clients choose us and return to us because of our depth of knowledge in our industry and our practice of listening to and responding to their needs."

The company operates with five employees in a modern 8,500-sq.-ft. production facility. Rather than having employees dedicated to specific areas of production, they are assigned specific projects and see the job through from beginning to end and handle most if not all aspects of cutting, machining and assembly. Kranzberg freely admits that although this setup is different than most shops, it works for his business.

"I run my shop a little different than other places," he says. "The idea behind it is that the employees take a sense of ownership in their work. It keeps their interest level high and it bridges the gap between being a production facility and being a craftsman shop. It does bring a different employee here that is harder to find.

Kranzberg's production model has paid dividends. Most of his employees have been with the company for seven years or more and the ownership in their work helps

employees maintain a high level of quality that customers have come to expect from the company.

"I believe that my employees make me a successful company owner," says Kranzberg. "I may direct the overall tone and attitude of the company, but they put it all in motion. It doesn't matter how good my business strategy is if my employees don't produce an excellent product that exceeds a client's expectations and keeps them coming back."

## Proactive marketing pays off

As BKI Woodworks has grown into new areas of business, its success in each market hasn't been by accident. The company implements a marketing program that integrates a variety of methods, including involvement in area business groups, direct mail for lead generation and existing client contact, scanning for new building permits and following up on leads. "I'll be on a job and hear the plumber or electrician talking about another project they're working on and I'll follow up with a cold call," says Kranzberg. "I feel like you should be marketing when you are really busy, but that can be hard to do as a small business."

Marketing is not done just on the front end, but also the back end of a job. BKI Woodworks uses customer appreciation efforts to show that it values the client's business, such as purchasing trees that are planted through a national conservation organization that then sends a certificate to the client. **MW**