



On the HOME STRETCH

Carter's Cabinetry weathered the recession with ingenuity and came back strong in the Daytona Beach, Fla., area

BY JENNIFER HICKS

Established in 1987, Carter's Cabinetry is a custom shop operating out of 13,000-sq.-ft. in Ormond Beach, Fla., that serves the residential and commercial markets throughout the Sunshine State. It's staffed by 14 employees, a friendly group that includes a professional design staff, production and assembly team, and sales and office personnel.

The company also offers semicustom cabinets from brands such as Kemper and HomeCrest, as well laminate, solid-surface and other types of countertops. Every day presents challenges, but the crew keeps working to produce quality products.

"Business is tough and the industry's getting tougher price-wise," says owner Fred Carter. "Some of the commercial work we bid on is very competitive, but we're a really well-known shop around here. Our reputation is pretty good if you ask anyone."

Young and motivated

From the get-go, Carter had the desire to create a successful cabinet shop. He started wood-working at a New Hampshire high school and continued it as a hobby when he moved to Ormond Beach with his family after graduating.

He worked with his father at a body shop and then refined his woodworking skills as an employee at a cabinet shop until he was ready to open Carter's Cabinetry with a partner. The partnership lasted for 15 years while the business grew to its current size.

"Business just got busier and busier," Carter recalls. "We just built our reputation and kept on getting work. Advertising is one thing we have not done over the years. We never really did a whole lot of marketing. It's all just word of mouth."

For the most part, early projects were in the residential sector with just Carter and his partner.

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PHOTOS: GARY BOGDON / REDUX PLUS (IN THE SHOP, CARTER)



Fred Carter
Owner of:
 Carter's Cabinetry

Location: Ormond Beach, Fla.
2012 gross: \$1.5 million
Employees: 14
Shop size: 13,000 sq. ft.
About: Located several miles north of Daytona Beach, discerning Floridians turn to this turnkey business for all of their residential and commercial cabinetry needs.



Sophisticated machinery and skilled craftsman enable this company to produce high quality custom cabinetry products, such as this kitchen.

The pendulum has swung from residential (above) to commercial work at Carter's Cabinetry.

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Working out of an 800-sq.-ft. bay in Ormond Beach, they added an average of one employee per year until they had to expand into a second bay.

"When I bought out my partner in 2005, I purchased our current shop. It wasn't working out anymore between the two of us, but I kept the existing crew and have added a few others," says Carter.

Commercial focus

Today, Carter's Cabinetry works primarily with commercial clients and always approaches every job with the same care and attention to detail. Its extensive portfolio is posted on the company's website, which not only serves as a marketing tool but helps clients bring their ideas to fruition.

Commercial clients include several auto dealerships, including

custom renovations for the Daytona International Auto Mall, as well as WiseGuys bar, Harley Davidson, Florida Hospital and boutique shops such as the Marriott Surf Shop. These jobs are secured through the shop's large network of contractors.

Carter says he prefers commercial work because there's currently more going on and it's helped him float through the rough economic times with long-term projects.

"We didn't really plan to take on that much commercial work. All of a sudden we got a reputation for doing a little bit of commercial work, then it just became more and more, and that's how we got into the bigger stuff, the hospitals and the car dealerships," says Carter.

Residential clients generally prefer to have their home renovations done in contemporary European styles, he adds.

The shop has about \$500,000 worth of tools and machinery, including

PHOTO: GARY BOGDON / REDUX PLUS

a Weeke CNC machine, which enables it to take on just about any project. Some finishing work is subcontracted out, but most is done in house.

Navigating the recession

Carter's Cabinetry wasn't immune to the recession. Carter had to make some difficult decisions, including pay and benefit cuts. While he hopes to restore those cuts soon, he was able to give his crew a week's paid vacation around the Fourth of July.

"Five years ago everything was great. Then it started dipping in 2008 and we faced some pretty tough times," says Carter. "Things are starting to look better now. We never had to lay anybody off. But we all got together during the slow times and I talked to employees about how I wanted them to help me decide whether I should lay some people off or we could all work fewer hours. Everyone agreed to work fewer

hours so we didn't have to lay anybody off.

"If it wasn't for commercial work to keep us going, we wouldn't have survived. There really hasn't been any new development, so as far as new homes we have not done any of those for four years. Last year was a good year for us and this year is showing a good turnaround."

Down the road, Carter says he plans to maintain the shop's commitment to high-quality custom workmanship while striving to refine the manufacturing process with state-of-the-art computerized machinery.

"I'd like to keep it right where it is right now. I don't want to get any bigger. I don't have a marketing plan. This is it right here. I want things to stay the same so I can retire about five years from now."

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