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# The Warmth of Wood

by Kathie Stamps

A photograph of a room featuring extensive light-colored wood cabinetry. On the left, a tall bookshelf is filled with books and decorative items like a vase. The center wall has a large arched cabinet with two doors. To the right, a window is covered with a valance featuring a pineapple and floral pattern. Below the window, a model ship sits on a wooden surface. In the foreground, a chair with a matching pineapple patterned fabric is visible. The floor is made of wood, and a small rug is partially seen.

Specialty details add beauty and value, not to mention eye appeal, to any property.





*The Graves' gorgeous butternut library was just one of the many projects they have completed with Leininger Cabinet and Woodworking.*

**T**he Lexington home of Jim and Nancy Graves sports a butternut library custom-crafted by Leininger Cabinet and Woodworking. There are bookcases and a wet bar in the library, and a unique set of bi-fold doors leading to the kitchen. "This is good work," said Mr. Graves, of the double bi-fold doors, which form a raised panel jamb when they open. The jamb is "a neat detail dating back to Colonial times," said Rex Bartley, who has been in project management with Leininger Cabinet and Woodworking for five years. He had worked with the Graves on two of their previous homes, and was delighted to work with them again as a member of the Leininger team.

Once the Graves' house was framed up, Bartley began measuring and generating drawings for the library, using one of the Graves' favorite woods, butternut. "Butternut is a real light wood," said Bartley. "But it is a hardwood." Hardwood comes from trees with leaves; softwood comes from trees with needles. Known as the black walnut's "country cousin," butternut has a grain similar to walnut, but is lighter in color. Some people call it "white walnut." Butternut is indigenous to the eastern United States; during the Civil War, some Confederate soldiers

wore uniforms colored with a dye made from the butternut tree's bark. Butternut has a satiny finish when it's sanded, so there's no need to stain or paint it. "We did a natural finish with no stain," said Bartley. "We used a catalogued varnish that we spray."

Reeded jambs were used in the doorways, as opposed to fluted ones. Reeding is a detail from a couple of centuries ago, whereby a convex half-circle is formed. Fluted jambs form a concave half circle. Leininger Cabinet and Woodworking also did custom cabinetry work throughout the Graves' home, in the kitchen, living room, office, and the entire master suite, which spans the length of the house. "My wife's dressing room is outstanding," said Mr. Graves. He was impressed with the raised paneling used in the room, and the attention to detail in all of Leininger's custom work. "Rex is the best," he said. "That's why Leininger got him."

Bartley said Jim and Nancy Graves were very pleasant people to work with. "They're not the kind to change their minds a dozen times," he said. "We had to tweak a few of the drawings initially, but then they remained unchanged." The Graves' house was unique. "There aren't a



lot of times you get to work on one like that," said Bartley. "Definitely not cookie-cutter by any stretch."

Distinctive, non-formulaic creations are the hallmark of Leininger Cabinet and Woodworking. Robert Leininger started the company in 1950 in his father's garage. In 1962 the business moved to a building on Forbes Road. Seven or eight additions have been added over the years for 40,000 square feet of administration offices and a woodworking plant. Robert's son, John, has had almost every job possible, including cabinet maker, laminator, painter, and truck driver. He took over as company president around 1979, after returning from a woodworking school in New England. Today there are 22 employees and the business is a streamlined, highly accomplished operation. "If you're going to be in business," said John Leininger, "do it as well as you possibly can, get the best equipment you can get, belong to whatever organizations you can belong to, and take your best shot at it." The people at Leininger are constantly looking to improve themselves and their product. "We're meticulous about job costing," said Leininger. "We keep track of every operation in the shop." Special software has turned price estimations into a "pretty exact science."

Computers and human talent work well together at Leininger Cabinet and Woodworking. When digital drawings are optimized by a computer, sheets of lumber are sent to a panel saw, which configures the best way to cut the designs out of each sheet. As the piece goes down the line, a computer-controlled machine does all the construction boring, hole drilling and grooving of the parts before they're assembled. This concept is fairly new, and the whole process is "as technically advanced as you can get in the industry," said Leininger. High-tech equipment can delineate the difference between a professionally engineered product and something that's homemade. Keeping up with technology is also important to John Leininger because "We owe it to our employees to give them the best tools possible with which to make a living." He wants employees to feel they have a profession, not just a job.

Nothing is ever mass-produced at the company. "From a woodworking standpoint, everything's pretty much custom," said Leininger. Specs are detailed and dimensioned, then built from scratch. Certain items, such as drawers and cabinet doors, are brought in from specialty companies, but the woodworkers at Leininger make wall panels, door parts, and all custom moldings. On many occasions, remodeling and restoration means matching the profile of historic moldings.

Most of Leininger's products wind up in Central Kentucky, but their custom work can be found in Hilton Head, South Carolina, and The Greenbrier in West Virginia. "We've sent work from coast to coast," said Leininger, "but we try and stay close to home." Commercial clients include schools, churches, banks, law offices, and the sales pavilion at Keeneland. These projects involve running trim, casings, molding and crowns, along with creating wall paneling, reception desks and



*Another example of Leininger's work – notice the precision of the arches on the bookcases.*

workstations. For churches, Leininger typically makes choir screens and communion railings. Regular casework, along with molding and trim are common in schools. One commercial project in 1997 was the auditorium at Saint Joseph Hospital, where cherry panels with maple accents were sequenced on either side of the stage. Leininger also put wall caps and solid-surface countertops in Saint Joseph's emergency room. The cabinets feature a high-pressure decorative laminate, which is a standard in healthcare facilities today.

The fine craftsmanship of Leininger Cabinetry and Woodworking provides specialty details that add beauty and value, not to mention eye appeal, to any commercial or residential property.

#### **Where to go to get the look:**

Leininger Cabinet and Woodworking, 116 South Forbes Road, Lexington, KY 40511. Phone: (859)252-0429. Website: [www.lcw-inc.com](http://www.lcw-inc.com)