

Building Custom Cabinets

Designing, Building and Installing Custom Cabinets for the Home, by G. William Scherer. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1986. 346 pages, \$24.95 hardcover.



by Paul Hanke

My first impression of this textbook for high-school, vocational-education, and other beginning cabinetmakers was not too favorable. For starters, the review copy was bound upside down, and a quick thumb-through revealed lackluster graphics and book design. However, a closer reading showed that *Custom Cabinets*, by G. William Scherer, is a pretty good reference book for novice cabinetmakers.

Organized in sequence from design through installation, the book opens with a chapter on work triangles,

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basic kitchen layouts, linear-foot recommendations for base and wall cabinets, standard dimensions, and instructions on how to take field measurements and prepare construction drawings. The drawings are good but limited to elevations, and shop drawings are not addressed, which would have been useful—especially in relation to estimating.

Chapter Two covers estimating, and introduces hardwoods, softwoods, types of plywood, and other common materials of the cabinetmaker's trade. Two more chapters briefly discuss hand and power tools, including both portables and larger machin-

ery such as shapers and drill presses. The focus is on basic techniques and operation.

The bulk of the remaining text is given to a thorough discussion of how to fabricate and install base cabinets, drawers, and wall cabinets. Here, materials takeoff (which was absent from the earlier chapter on estimating) is described in detail. The pros and cons of box-and-frame versus casework construction are described, followed by clear, sequential instructions on construction.

The photos are sharp, generous, and instructive, but the drawings are printed in gray ink (instead of black), which makes for low contrast and contributes to the lackluster appearance already noted.

Supplemental chapters cover doors (styles, routing, shaping, glass inserts, and hinging), the fine points of installation, corners for base and wall units, peninsulas, returns, lazy susans, vertical dividers, eating bars, bathroom vanities, and other specialized subjects.

Two other chapters—one on plastic laminates (hampered by a lack of sources for specialty tools), and the other on hardware (hinges, pulls, handles, supports, slides)—are particularly interesting.

This is a good, basic cabinetmaking textbook, and includes fine illustrations and instructions. It stops short, however, of taking the reader into the realm of cabinetwork as an art form, as in the books of James Krenov or in *Fine Woodworking* magazine. Then again, Scherer is writing for beginners, and Krenov is on another plane entirely. The techniques and the basics are present in Scherer's book, but inspiration isn't. ■

are courses." He notes that he once took a voc/tech evening class (as I also did) that should have been titled "Access to Machines" rather than "Cabinetmaking," since most people signed up just to use expensive machinery they didn't own.

But whatever training you get, the best way to learn is simply to get started on a project. The advice for this first project is: 1) make something you need; 2) keep it simple; 3) start with a design by others, which will allow you to concentrate on technique.

The focus of the book, however, is on design, even in the Woods and Tools section that concludes Part One. Here, readers learn how to understand and appreciate wood (and plywood), the consequences of alternating growth rings or orienting them in the same direction in glued-up stock, tips by Tage Frid on how to sharpen a chisel, and why a circular saw is preferable to a table saw for cutting large plywood sheets.

Also included is a discussion of joint types, wood hinges, and finishing (including traditional French polishing, and innovative methods such as the resin-coated felt that was applied to drawer and door fronts to add color to Arthur Carpenter's "Mondrian" cabinet).

Part One is liberally illustrated, and this continues in Part Two—a gallery of the individual works. Here you will find finely crafted traditional

pieces such as Paul Gehret's reproduction dresser and Stan Griskivich's pantry doors. Facing these are the modern, cubist-style shelves by architect Paul Pugliese. Equally simple, but less stark, is Nelson Denny's recycling of old wood into a plain—but rich—new kitchen for a 1748 Cape Cod house.

Other favorites included Larry Golden's simple V-joint detail at the meeting of a door stile and rail, Alex MacLean's use of quarter-round molding to edge plywood doors, and Ed Colin's half-circle drawer/door pulls. At the opposite extreme is John Vugrin's fascinating free-form kitchen, which took an entire year to build. But my own favorite has to be the exquisite, cantilevered bed by amateurs Mike and Dianne Radcliffe that appears to float 12 inches off the floor.

As you may have noted from the names mentioned, there are few women represented in this book. However, you will find Roberta Katz's pleasant and gracious stained- and leaded-glass cabinet doors and Rhonda Dixon's scrap-glass cabinet, which incorporates old bottles in the door.

If you want to learn precisely *how* to make cabinets, get Scherer's book. If you want to learn about taking the work into the realm of creating objects that are both beautiful and useful, get *Handcrafted*. Better yet, get both. ■

Free or Cheap

Alternative Housing Arrangements: A 40-page booklet developed by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development examines alternative living arrangements (home sharing, accessory apartments, and the "elder cottage housing" option), and provides abstracts of books, reports, and other materials on housing options. The booklet also contains a list of organizations to contact for more information.

The booklet, *Alternative Housing Arrangements—A Selected Information Guide*, is \$5 from HUD User, Dept. A, P.O. Box 280, Germantown, Md. 20874.

Fire-Resistant Wood: A four-page color brochure, *The Design of Fire-Resistive Exposed Wood Members*, is available free of charge from the National Forest Products Association, 1619 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Fire-Rated Metal Doors: The National Association of Architectural Metal Manufacturers (NAAMM) has published the second edition of *Fire-Rated Hollow Metal Doors & Frames*, a manual addressing design limitations, local regulations, architect responsibilities, and the requirements of the National Fire Protection Association. A description of the types and sizes of fire-rated doors and frames now on the market is included.

The manual is available for \$15 plus \$2.50 for postage and handling from NAAMM, 600 S. Federal St., Suite 400, Chicago, Ill. 60605.

Fire-Rated Backer Board: A free data sheet with detailed drawings of fire-rated wall systems using "Durock" tile backer board is available from USG Corp., Durabond Division, Dept. 122-ZZ, 101 S. Wacker, Chicago, Ill. 60606. ■

—NEB staff

Handcrafted Shelves & Cabinets

Handcrafted Shelves & Cabinets, by Amy Zaffarano Rowland and William H. Hylton. Emmaus, Pa.: Rodale Press, 1984. 207 pages, \$12.95 paperback, \$21.95 hardcover.

Handcrafted Shelves & Cabinets is a delightful complement to *Custom Cabinets*, reviewed above. Amy Zaffarano Rowland and William H. Hylton interviewed amateur and professional cabinetmakers, and selected a fascinating group of 18 as the focus for this inspiring introduction to the field. Their work (well presented in 150 color photos) and viewpoints, plus the authors' analysis and commentary, provide what Scherer's nuts-and-bolts textbook ignores: a glimpse of the beauty and fine craftsmanship that are possible with the human hand.

Part One concentrates on the art of cabinetmaking, beginning with an

introduction to the woodworkers featured in the book—their styles, philosophies, and approaches to work.

The text covers getting started—apprenticeship versus YMCA (or other) classes versus formal training (such as the School of American Craftsmen in Rochester, N.Y.) or training in related fields, such as sculpture and the fine arts. This last area is apparent in Larry Golden's whimsical "Shelf as Sculpture" piece, and in the work of several architects featured in the book.

Other cabinetmakers took various woodworking classes but, cautions Hylton, "There are courses and there