



## “We Like to do Difficult Things”

by Steve Carlson

A stairway, according to Lynn Smith, is a “free-standing sculpture on a grand scale.”

Smith’s firm, Woodsmiths Design and Manufacturing, builds stairways for elegant homes throughout the U.S. Each is custom designed for a specific setting. Most include curves or spirals; many include intricate wood carvings.

The stairways are built at the Woodsmiths plant in Gunter, Texas. Each is then knocked down in sections and trucked to the home, where the pieces are reassembled “like a very large puzzle.” Smith and his 15 employees handle all stages of construction, transportation, and installation. Depending on the complexity, a stairway takes between six weeks and four months to complete. Prices range from \$3,800 to more than \$100,000.

Unlike most other sculptures, stairways have to meet code requirements. “The dynamic movements have to be achieved in ways that make the stairway safe and walkable,” Smith says. “Run-to-rise ratios are very important. A hand rail has to twist, not just bend. A lot of design work is required.”

In the five years since he started his company, demand has increased steadily, Smith says. He attributes this to a growing appreciation of craftsmanship and of the beauty of natural wood. The demand is not just a local one: Smith has recently signed contracts for stairways in New York, Georgia, Florida, California, Nevada, and Illinois.

While some of his creations have modern designs, most of the demand is for designs with a traditional look, he says. “People are interested in the look and feel of generations past; they’re interested in ‘Gone With The Wind.’”

Smith says there’s only one major general criterion he sets regarding the projects he will accept. “It has to be difficult. We like to do difficult things, and interesting things.”

A few of those difficult things, in varying stages of completion, are shown on this page. ■



Workers at the Woodsmiths plant assemble a three-story-high stairway as a single unit. Taller structures are built in separate sections.



Stairways with complex curves are often plastered underneath although Smith says that wooden soffits can be built for any stair if the customer prefers.



The railing—complete with volute—is carefully fitted to the stairs before balusters are installed. Despite its elegant details, this is one of Smith’s least expensive stairways.



The wood carvings featured on many Woodsmiths stairways are roughed out with power tool and then finished by hand.