

BY HOWARD BRICKMAN



Inspired by a 17th century brass map (inset), this compass rose is the focal point of an eight-sided room. The author inlaid the compass points in contrasting woods and veneer. The center is a spiral of end-grain maple with a walnut burl center.

## Dead Reckoning Craftsmanship

**This project started as** a consulting assignment. The architect, Donald Grose, called me in to evaluate the wood flooring that was being supplied for a client's new home.

While walking through the house, we entered a well-lit octagonal room located at the far end of the house. Donald explained that the room would remain essentially unfurnished and be used for meditation. He also mentioned that the clients were going to buy a factory-made medallion as a focal point for the center of the room. As a former Air Force navigator, I have a special affinity for compass roses, and I thought that this would be a perfect spot for one.

At Donald's urging, I mentioned my idea to the client, and after much discussion and research by the client, we were given a picture of a compass rose on a brass map from the 1600s. Working off the photo, Donald created a scaled drawing of the compass rose. The client asked me to make the compass rose look as close to the drawing as possible. Donald also generated a 6-foot-diameter paper template that we set on the subfloor in the proper orientation so that the flooring installers could make sure there were no nails where we needed to cut out flooring for the compass.

The flooring in the room was to be rift- and quarter-sawn white oak. I selected several boards of rift-sawn red oak and darker quarter-sawn white oak for fabricating the points of the compass and purchased some veneer sheets dyed black for the lines. I made the center circle with end-grain maple that spiraled inward to a dark center. That piece I cut out of a burly spot in a board that I had noticed near my work area in the client's basement. The client told me that the board was milled from the crotch of an old walnut tree on the property that had been struck by lightning. For the directional letters, I got help from Jim Garth, of Decorative Flooring. He laser-cut the letters, inlaid them in polygons, and provided a template for me to rout out and drop in the letters at the four points.

The compass rose took a couple of months to complete, and it was the finishing touch in the home. The drawing and the actual compass rose turned out to be a close match. It was a real pleasure to work with a client and architect who came up with such a well-defined design and who had the patience to let me work through the details.

*Howard Brickman is a flooring contractor and consultant based in Norwell, Mass.*

Photos by Howard Brickman