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Carving out success for 50 years

Merritt continues to dazzle clients with its high-end woodworking

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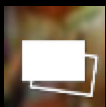


MERRITT

A residence on which Merritt worked in East Hampton, N.Y. Architect: Hart/Howerton

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CARVING OUT SUCCESS FOR 50 YEARS



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The construction industry generally operates with a certain level of tunnel vision, said Michael Merritt, whose self-named company is celebrating 50 years of providing luxury

woodworking services to billionaire clients.

In other words, many construction businesses are only concerned about the item or product they're supplying, without enough thought toward how their contribution fits into a project's overall scope. In contrast, Merritt approaches each job from a holistic point of view. To the company CEO, that means every piece contributes to the final design, meeting demands of customers as well as the world-class architects with whom the firm collaborates.

"We're going into projects with our eyes wide open," Merritt said. "We want to make the whole project perfect, not just the woodwork that goes into it."

Merritt provides its ultra high-end clientele with interior woodworking services such as carpentry, installation and joinery manufacturing. Merritt-built cabinetry, wall panels, window frames, doors and cornice moldings can be found in your typical \$200 million residential estate, opulent town-house or 500-foot superyacht.

"Ninety-eight percent of our clients are true billionaires," Merritt said. "Our focus is interiors while building the structure is handled by others."



MERRITT

Merritt's work spans the country, including this residence in Aspen, Colo.

Merritt's range of services include metal and glasswork, hardware and specialty materials. Headquartered in Mentor with nine locations in the United States and overseas, operations have further expanded into consulting and engineering. According to the firm CEO, Merritt manages tasks from concept to delivery, creating a "service mentality" not often seen in super high-end construction.

"At our core we're a manufacturer, but we have to operate with that mentality," Merritt said. "We've added services based on reading the tea leaves of our clients' needs. We've plugged holes with additional services and wrapped them into our woodworking and manufacturing business. All of this comes out of the mentality of finding the best solutions."

Carving out growth

Company growth has supported this strategy, as Merritt recently acquired a West Coast woodworking firm as well as an architectural wood carving operation out of the United Kingdom. An office in Schweinfurt, Germany, houses a team of project managers and engineers who impart Merritt's customer-centric approach around the globe. Along with expansions and acquisitions, the \$50 million company is commemorating the culmination of a large-scale rebranding campaign.

Merritt was founded in 1967 by the CEO's father, George Merritt, a cabinet maker and master carpenter. Michael Merritt joined the enterprise in 1985, logging 4,000 hours into an apprentice program that began when he was still in high school. His brother, Keith, also entered the program, eventually rising to the title of company executive vice president and treasurer.

"Our dad wanted us to learn all aspects of manufacturing before deciding our roles," Merritt said. "My brother did machining, and I chose the art of making and finishing woodwork."

Livingston Builders, a Florida-based contractor specializing in customized residential construction, has worked with the Merritts on at least 20 projects since 1999. The brothers' dedication to the craft does nothing less than raise the quality of other subcontractors involved with any particular job, noted company president James Remez.

"The Merritt guys are always very observant and provide an intellectual contribution that is extremely rare," Remez said. "This is a large company, yet Mike and Keith have been personally involved in every project I've ever contracted. They're passionate about their brand."

The interior finish and decorative components Merritt supplies reflect the company's precision-driven work ethic, Remez added.

"Their material sourcing, material finishing and project engineering are on an aeronautical level," he said. "It could be a high-gloss lacquer, polished finish, or an authentic 150-year-old design, it's all executed fantastically."

Merritt the CEO takes pleasure in the exactitude that goes into woodworking, from sanding fresh wood to applying the various chemical treatments that bring out particular finishes in a piece.

"The whole process is enjoyable, but I gravitated to finishing when I first started," Merritt said. "I'm still involved in finishing, even if I'm not doing it myself."

These days, Merritt manages 140 highly skilled engineers, 3D modelers, project managers, machinists, carpenters and on-site superintendents. Computer-controlled design has replaced the old-school method of writing down formulas, but advanced automation will never replace raw ability.

"Our greatest asset is our people," Merritt said. "We have an immense volume of talent at every level, and sync our efforts to the needs of our clients."

Finding that talent is difficult in a country where lessons on wood use aren't exactly part of the national curriculum, Merritt said. Companies in the United States are tasked with providing an in-house education that may pair a young worker with an experienced woodworking master. Acquiring other businesses has lent depth to Merritt's talent pool, but unearthing motivated brainpower will ever be an ongoing challenge — a challenge not unique to Merritt, as demand for skilled workers in the entire manufacturing space as a whole far outpaces supply. "The talent search is always tough," Merritt said. "You've got to have that talent base in a market to hire from."

As Merritt remains on the hunt for new employees, the company is staying on course for double-digit growth in 2017. In anticipation of this continued prosperity, Merritt recently completed a rebranding effort that recalibrated its name (dropped "woodworking" from its name), logo, website and social media presence. The changeover further emphasizes the comprehensive, consumer-facing outlook that is the firm's heartbeat, said the CEO.

"This is luxury brand with broad reach, broad resources and 50 years of success," Merritt said. "Bringing us onto your team will ensure success and allow you to create something very special."

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