



## Crafting cupboards for a unique look

### Made-to-order millwork tailored to a homeowner's needs

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EDMONTON - Building a new home allows you many options and the choices can seem overwhelming. But more and more homes are being tailored to suit the special needs of their owners.

Take the millwork, for instance. Cabinets and cupboards in a new house can be completely made-to-order, based on the desires and dreams of the excited owners. In some cases, cupboards can be designed and built to suit a client's existing furniture.

Where to go if you want custom millwork? Edmonton's yellow pages phonebook lists more than 50 millwork companies that will craft woodwork according to your specifications. Zebra Custom Furniture is so small, however, it's only a line in the white pages.

Established in 1986 by husband and wife team Rejean and Denise Levesque, Zebra Custom Furniture is a home-based operation. The couple works out of their oversized garage at the back of their home. Rejean has made custom furniture and millwork-building his full time occupation after working in the construction industry.

The fact that Zebra doesn't advertise for commissions is a testament to the quality of their work.

"People tell their friends when they're happy with your work," says Rejean. He also states that he always has direct contact with clients, since Zebra Custom Furniture is a company of two.

Rejean and Denise complete one project at a time, and typically need three months to a year to book a project. Their work varies from modern to historical reproductions.

For a private client, the Leveques created a Murphy bed that allowed the spare room in the house to function as a home office and then as a guest room, when required.

Why build more space than you really need, when a piece of furniture can adapt to suit your lifestyle? The Murphy bed is designed to camouflage into the wall when not in use.

For Jane and Ernie Hodges, Rejean and Denise created a home theatre that spanned an entire wall. Home theatre or



Jane and Elizabeth Hodges play chess in the family rec room. The family had the entertainment unit along the back wall custom built.

CREDIT: Jason Scott, The Journal



Side tables built to match a custom entertainment unit.

entertainment units are popular for Zebra because you can't buy CREDIT: Jason Scott, The Journal units at a furniture store.

The home theatre unit included cupboards underneath a niche where a projection screen would come down. Granite slab shelves were also built into the unit to provide contrast to the decorative wood.

According to Jane Hodges, the English sycamore wood was finished but not stained in order to highlight the wood grain and to bring out its natural features. Black handles were used to set the whole piece off.

"They'll even do the inside of the drawers just how you want them," says Jane. "Rejean put in CD and DVD holders with the size and space specific to our use."

Zebra Custom Furniture also built nesting tables for Jane and Ernie that matched the home theatre.

For architect Myron Nebozuk and his wife Agnes Pataki, Rejean and Denise built a very clever closet. Composed of various sizes of cupboards and drawers, the piece is the epitome of custom design.

This design originated when Agnes saw a photograph of a piece of millwork designed by Steven Holl, a renowned New York architect. She transposed the design for a bedroom in her own house, with the help of her architect husband.

"Rejean diligently interpreted the four complex drawings I made for the doors," says Myron.

When closed, the wall length unit is a sophisticated series of lines with voids for door pulls. When various doors are open, the entire wall becomes a dynamic sculpture.

Made of English sycamore, "the veneer has an effect of three-dimensionality when the book-matched veneers alternate between light and dark," Myron says.

The trends, according to Rejean and Denise, for millwork today include a move toward cherrywood, and exotic woods like bubinga, English sycamore and curly maples.

Rejean states that these are "woods with a lot of figure," and unless you have millwork custom made, you won't find some of these woods anywhere.

Zebra tends to stay away from scarce wood species though. "They are all from sustainable sources -- who knows in 20 years if you will even be able to get certain hardwoods?"

Millwork can be built with the homeowner's interests and habits in mind to create something more personal and more versatile. Millwork can not only help you organize, but help make your space more livable.

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#### WHAT IS MILLWORK?

Millwork includes everything from cabinetry, doors, shelving, countertops and vanities.

Millwork is usually fabricated in a woodworking shop and brought to a site for finishing and installation.

On the Web: Zebra Custom Furniture

[www.zebrafurniture.com](http://www.zebrafurniture.com)

Ran with fact box "What Is Millwork?", which has been appended to this story.

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