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Store fixtures redefined, refined Dennis Reeves Inc.


idea

Innovative Design Excellence Awards
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Diversity, persistence pays off

Store fixture manufacturer uses technology, software to reinvent itself



Jackie Roembke

"Don't set your goals too low," advises Dennis Reeves, president of Dennis Reeves Inc. "If you do, when you achieve that goal, you get soft. Set your goals high and go for it."

After a quarter century of ups and downs in the woodworking industry, Reeves has learned a thing or two about making bold moves in the face of adversity. Luckily, risks such as making major investment in technology, have paid off greatly.

Reeves' career began in Iowa in his uncle's wood shop, Reeves Spinning Wheels. The weather ultimately brought Reeves to California, and while his peers "partied," he bought tools and concentrated on opening his first shop.

"I got started doing store fixtures in the early '80s when I realized there was a lot of room to expand," Reeves recalls. "I decided to seek out companies who wastes more money than I could dream of making, and figure out a way to capture that waste — leading me to go after the bigger chains."

In 1985, Reeves rented a 1,500-sq.-ft. shop and Reeves Enterprises was born. In the beginning, the company grew quickly, building its business around three or four major national chains, one of which was CVS Pharmacies. By 1995, it had grown to a 30-employee operation, working out of the 24,000-sq.-ft. building Reeves had purchased.

"The thing with store fixtures is this: If you

snag an account, it's a lot of money, a lot of work," Reeves explains. "However, if these chains — your clients — get bought out or have a slowdown, and drop you, you will get hit hard."

And that's exactly what happened. Reeves lost all of his national chains and suddenly found himself out of the store fixture business.

"I floundered for a bit," Reeves recalls. "I didn't know where to go from there; we didn't do the custom stuff, just store fixtures."

During this time, Reeves did "anything we could get our hands on." He was forced to cut his workforce down to his three main guys; and had to lease 14,000 sq. ft. of his building in order to get by.

"California is not a good place to be a national manufacturer," Reeves says. "You can't manufacture and ship out of state; it's too expensive; you have companies in Arizona, Nevada and Texas where it's so much cheaper to manufacture — we just could not compete."

In the face of crisis, Reeves reworked his entire business plan. "We retooled, and got into the custom stuff," he says. Reflecting the change, he also renamed the company, Dennis Reeves, Inc.

While creating cut lists and drawings by hand worked while Reeves was in the store fixture business, he quickly realized this method wasn't going to cut it in the custom casework market.

"Everything was different," Reeves says. "With store fixtures, I would design one thing and build it over and over and over again. So everything I did was by hand — drawings, cut lists — you could

DENNIS REEVES INC.

Year established	1983
Location	LaVerne, Calif.
Products	Custom commercial casework
Market area	Southern California
Facility size	15,000 sq. ft.
Employees	18
Owner	Dennis Reeves



Dennis Reeves (right) and his son, Brad, pose by their Biesse Comil Cosmo NK case clamp.



do that when you're doing store fixtures. But now every job is different, and that's when we bought Planit Solutions' Cabinet Visions Solid software in 2003."

Around the same time, Reeves son, Brad, had found his way into the shop, sweeping and such. Brad, who was 15 when Reeves purchased the Planit software, started working on it, learning the program by calling tech support.

When the employee who had been responsible for producing the drawing in Solid quit, Brad stepped in.

"I don't want to say I was thrown into the fire; I just picked it up and told my dad it was no big deal," Brad says.

By the time Brad was 17, he knew the software inside and out, and had started badgering his dad to "go CNC."

"Buying a CNC router was a big step for us because we still didn't really have a customer base," Reeves explains. In 2005, Dennis Reeves Inc. purchased its first CNC router, a Biesse Rover B.

"We chose the Biesse because the link to Planit meshed well with the flat table," Reeves says. "At first I wasn't sure if I should go to nesting or point-to-point. Once we figured out that we wanted to go to nesting, it narrowed my choices down a bit... but really it came down to the [Biesse's] customer service in the end. Usually once you are sold something, the salesperson is gone. With [Biesse], they're always on call. They give you their cell phone numbers — and they answer!"

"Again, this was a huge step for us, and was all [Brad]," Reeves says.

"It was all so easy, and our business just took off," he adds.

Dennis Reeves, Inc., doubled its workload in



Harley-Davidson Clothing Outlet,
Anaheim, Calif.

Contractor: WF Construction • Installation: Dennis Reeves, Inc. • Architect: Harout Dedeyan

Award-winning store fixtures

Dennis Reeves Inc. won first place in the Store Fixture category of *Wood Digest's* Innovative Design Excellence Awards (IDEA) competition for its work in the Harley Davidson Clothing Outlet.

The client wanted to create large replicas of motorcycle parts as the displays — making for a very curvilinear design. The most challenging piece was the Shock Absorber Hat Display. The challenge: figuring out how to build this odd shaped coil, route electrical for the recessed rope light to each shelf without being noticeable while meeting all the electrical codes. The top shelf of the fixture was only 72 in. tall, but since the center post extends to the ceiling, it had to meet Seismic Zone 4 building codes as well.

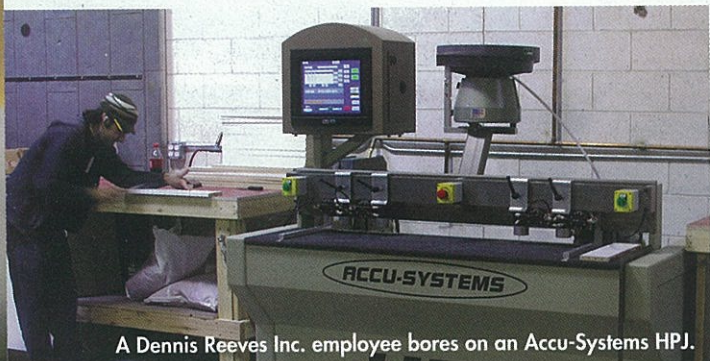
The coils are built from 3-in. tubular steel, coiled in two different diameters to make circles. The circles

were then cut in half to make circles. The smaller diameter was used to create the flat shelf portion and the larger diameter was used for the rise. The ends were tapered so the welds could be grounded smooth for a seamless look. The center poles are individual sections of 6-in. tubular steel with flanges welded on all ends, bolted together through each shelf. The shelves are made of 2 1/2-in. thick MDF with recessed rope lighting. The metal parts were powder-coated silver with a clear coat. The base is made from plywood and bender board laminated using Wilsonart Brushed Pewter on the vertical surfaces and black on the shelves.

For more information about the IDEA competition or to check out all of the 2008 IDEA winners, visit www.wooddigest.com/IDEA.



PROFILE



A Dennis Reeves Inc. employee bores on an Accu-Systems HPJ.



Dennis Reeves Inc. also dabbles in custom cabinetry.

Making more out of wood

Technology for resource efficiency



After purchasing its Biesse Rover B 4.40FT, Dennis Reeves Inc. doubled its workload.

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the first year, 2006; and doubled its 2006 numbers in 2007.

"We're producing four times what we were before the introduction of the CNC, without adding shop employees," Reeves says. "We've added more people in the office, but that's because there's so much more volume — that being said, we're only running at 50 percent capacity of what that machine can do within our current footprint.

"Every cabinet shop eventually will need a CNC router, or they'll go under; they can't compete," Reeves says. "Here we are, a small shop with seven guys on the shop floor, and we're doing the locker rooms at the Rose Bowl. When could a little shop without CNC do that? You couldn't do it. We're doing lots of radius work. That's so time-consuming to do by hand, and we do a lot of these jobs — it is so easy with the software and the router.

"You just have to be up with technology — you just have to," Reeves says. "It's a huge investment, but you have to do it to stay in business."

The growth resulting from the increased capacity allowed Reeves to take back a portion of the building he had been leasing. The automa-

tion offered by the CNC has kept his labor needs low; the company currently employs a staff of 18.

Naturally, the company has witnessed improvements in lead times as well.

"Sometimes we'll get a call on a Monday and by Friday we're shipping product," Reeves says. "At least on small projects."

Once shop drawings are approved, Reeves' typical turn around for large jobs is about two weeks. Last year Reeves turned out over 100 projects. On average four jobs are on the shop floor at any given time.

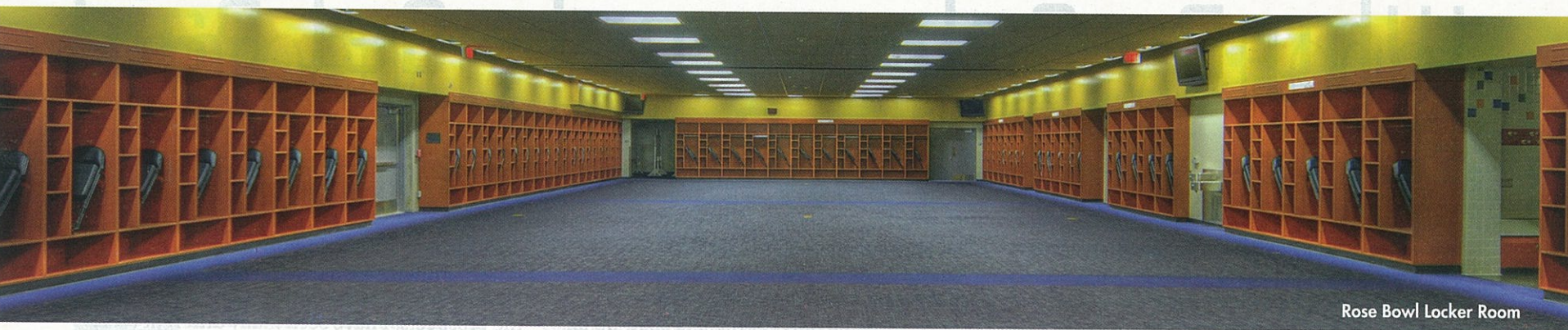
"Everything we do is custom," Reeves says. "We only do a couple of kitchens a year because that market is too competitive."

Dennis Reeves, Inc., focuses primarily on bidding jobs like banks, school, offices, laboratories, healthcare facilities and universities.

"We produce a little bit of everything," Reeves says.

Reeves doesn't have a base clientele; it bids all of its jobs.

"I don't consider us a mid-sized shop, more of a small shop, because when somebody calls here, and they want something built, they talk to me — and that's why I think some of the general contractors come back," Reeves says. "They deal



Rose Bowl Locker Room

directly with me and get decisions right away.”

Dennis Reeves, Inc., installs the majority of its work through its union-affiliated installation company.

Reeves: The next generation

Brad is currently a full-time student at San Diego State University. In spring 2010, he is set to graduate with his bachelor's degree in information systems.

“Whenever I'm in town, I'm usually at the shop working and helping out with things,” Brad says. “When school is in session, I serve as technical

support,” Brad says. “I occasionally come home to fix program, computer, network or machine issues if they can't be explained over the phone.”

When he graduates, Brad plans to work with his dad at Dennis Reeves, Inc. — and maybe take over the company someday.

“If it wasn't for Brad pushing me to go CNC, I doubt I would be in this business today,” Reeves says. “Last year, he talked me into purchasing a Biesse Akron 435 edgebander as well. I think he wants as much machinery as possible in place for when he takes over.” **WD**

Sources

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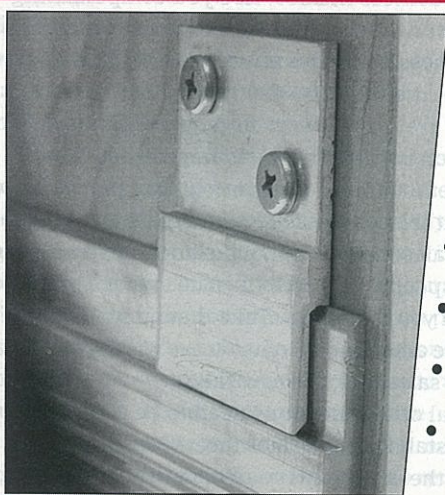
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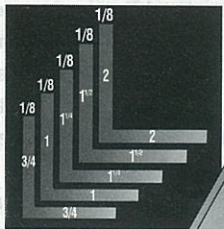


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