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Associations need excellent leadership in order to remain healthy and grow, and the Cabinet Makers Association is fortunate to have stellar leaders from across the U.S. and Canada. The Board of Directors has been established not only to direct the course of the association, but also to meet your needs, act as a point of contact, and answer association-related questions. Please get in touch if we can be of help.

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Cabinet Makers Association



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Training Employees



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A FAREWELL MESSAGE

It's summertime, and I'm looking forward to seeing many of you in July at this year's AWFS in Vegas! As always, there will be many opportunities for networking and learning from each other as well as being able to see the latest in machinery, materials, hardware, and software for our industry. It's not too late to sign up.

Speaking of new things to learn, our 2019 theme of workforce development is continuing in this issue, and our focus this time is training. It's important that we all incorporate training as part of employee onboarding and advancement whether we have two employees or 200.

If you have a small shop, you may think you don't have time for formal onboarding, but think of it this way: If you brought a CNC or other complex piece of machinery into your business, you would never skip the training on your expensive investment. The same goes for an employee you will invest significant time and money in over the years. Your training program can be as simple as having the employee work beside you while you work on the first few jobs and explaining your company's processes and techniques. This could be accompanied by a written outline of the steps involved in accomplishing a given task.

Every company has its own unique approaches and techniques, and a process book makes it much easier to standardize the steps that your employees use to

build cabinets or other products. If you have the skills and resources, you could also make your own training videos to send home with new employees.

Training shouldn't stop after on-boarding. Ideally, you will have employees who excel at their work and have the potential to take on a role with more responsibility at your company. This is a great milestone for you and your employee, but you shouldn't throw anyone into a new position without providing training on how to carry out his/her new duties. Fortunately, you won't necessarily have to provide this kind of training yourself. Depending on the specifics, you could pay for them to attend outside professional development events, such as a project management course or a leadership seminar.

And don't forget about your need to keep learning: Events such as AWFS provide plenty of opportunities, and there are sure to be classes available in your community that will help you expand your knowledge. Looking for a quick way to keep learning? Just visit the CMA member forum and read about the ways your fellow members are tackling problems or using new technology and resources. (If you don't remember your login information, just contact Amanda Conger at director@cabinetmakers.org, and she will get it to you.)

Finally, I have another announcement that happens to tie into our training theme as well. Whenever possible, the CMA likes to have an outgoing president remain on the Board of Directors for one year in order to help the new president learn the ropes. My six-year maximum term as a board member is ending next June,

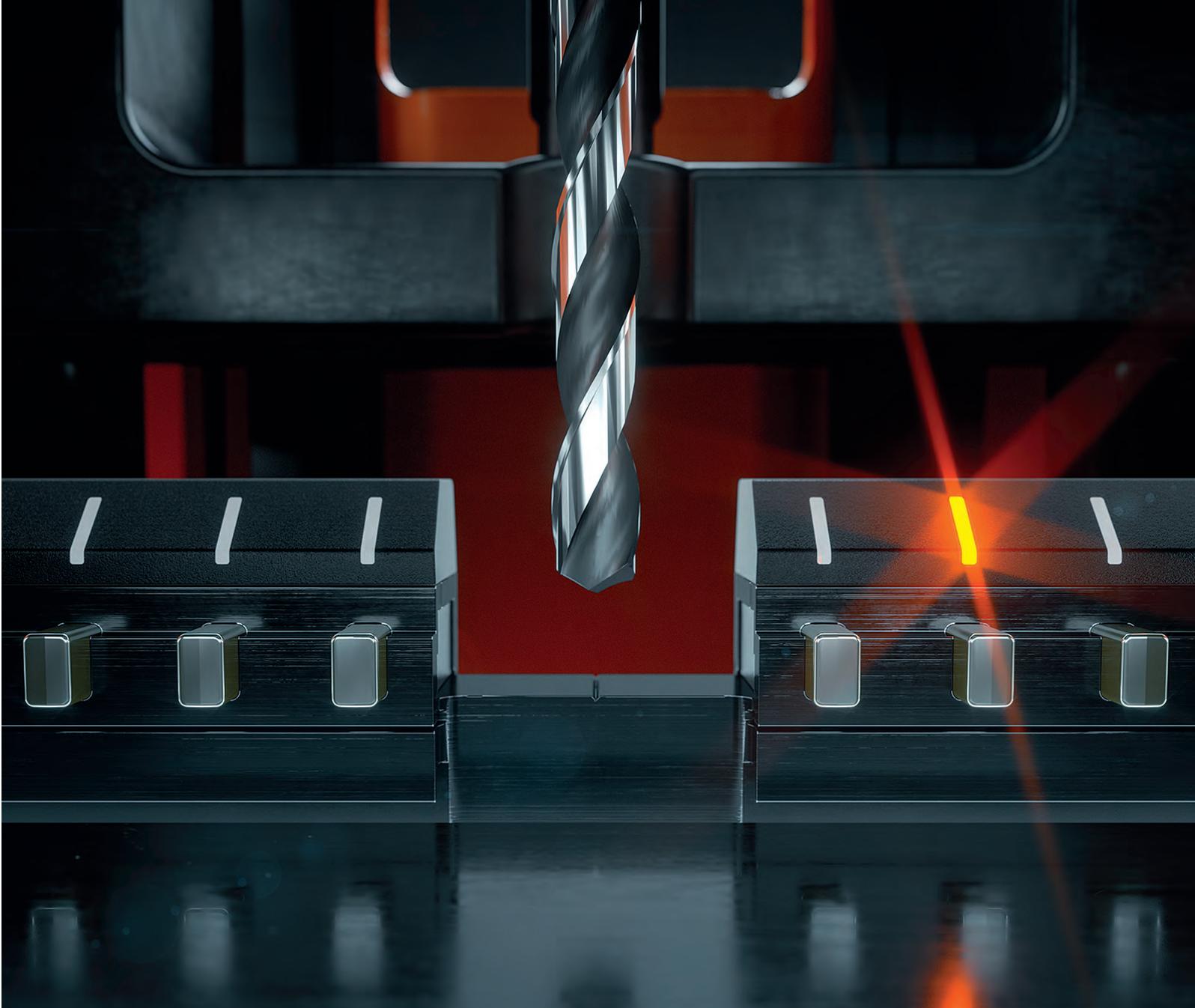
so in keeping with our tradition of one president helping train another, I will spend my final year on the board helping "onboard" Chris Dehmer as our new president. Congratulations to Chris!

I want to thank you for trusting me to lead the CMA for the past year. I was able to meet wonderful CMA members, and I truly enjoyed learning about your businesses. The year was filled with great activities such as IWF, regional events, and board meetings. One of the many highlights was being asked to give the State of the Cabinet Manufacturing Industry presentation at this year's WIC Conference. Having face-to-face time with the industry's equipment manufacturers without the distraction of shiny new things in the background was fun and led to many new relationships.

I will close by telling you that without the CMA, my business would not be operating at the level of professional excellence that it currently enjoys. I have learned so many valuable lessons and have been able to share valuable information from my own experiences.

I look forward to being involved with the CMA for many years to come and even when I step away from my business, I will enjoy seeing it carry on without me. I know I wouldn't have a successful business to retire from one of these days if I hadn't had all of the fantastic networking, education and relationships I have enjoyed as a proud CMA member! Thank you.

Leland Thomasset



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I'm pleased to be serving you as the next president of the CMA. I'll start by sharing a little about my background. Woodworking became a passion of mine in childhood, when I would spend hours with my grandfather in his workshop. My great-grandfather was a German woodworker who immigrated to the United States late in the 19th century, and I'm amazed at the artistry he created using the tools of his day. His work is truly inspiring and led me to carry on his tradition of craftsmanship. I hope he would be pleased with the pieces his great-grandson creates by combining Old World techniques with New World ideas.

After many years working day jobs in the tech and construction management industries (and building commissioned pieces on the side), I finally decided it was time to go all-in on my woodworking venture. I opened Dark Horse Woodworks in 2007 in Atlanta's Metropolitan Business and Arts District.

PLUGGING INTO THE CMA

The CMA has certainly played a big role in the success of my company. I joined in 2012 and was pleased when the projects I entered in the annual Wood Diamond Awards competition won and received quite a bit of recognition. In 2016, I was invited to run for an at-large position on the CMA's Board of Directors; two years later, I was elected vice president. My involvement with the CMA is the single best professional development opportunity I've ever encountered, and being on this board has changed me and my business forever.

When you start a business, it's tempting to want to go it alone and look at the others in your line of work as competition – even if they aren't literally vying for the same customers, you may see them as competing against you for awards or respect

or reputation. That's not the way it works with the CMA. The best part of being in this group is the ability to draw on the knowledge of other members.

LEARNING AS I GO

Along those lines, I wanted to add a few words about this issue's focus on training best practices.

In short: I'm not good at training. Like many of you, I struggle with getting thoughts out of my head and into the brains of my employees. If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times: *If only I could clone myself.*

I've toured many successful shops, and I've noticed that they share a best practice: They have put their procedures in writing, spelling out very clearly how something should be done. For example, the CMA toured TruStile Doors in Denver during the 20th Anniversary National Conference. TruStile had photos at each work station showing exactly how things should look, and that really resonated with me. I'm working on adapting these ideas for my shop. It will be time-consuming, but I know that once it's done, I'll have a shop that runs more efficiently and ultimately has a higher value because *I am no longer the company.*

This is just one of the many ideas and innovations that have transformed my business since I joined the CMA. I look forward to learning even more from all of you as I serve in this new role.

Chris Dehmer
President, Cabinet Makers Association



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A CANADIAN “MFG DAY” • INSPIRED BY PROFILES •

While I was reading the Winter edition of *PROfiles*, I came across the feature article titled “Building the Future: Finding Talent,” which included stories about Manufacturing Day events. MFG Day, as it is known, is a celebration of modern manufacturing held every year on the first Friday in October.

MFG Day events are meant to inspire the next generation of manufacturers, but reading about these events inspired *me*. Although MFG Day originated in the US, I immediately knew we had to have a MFG Day at our shop in Canada.

GETTING STARTED

I began by calling high schools to ask if they wanted to collaborate with us. I was disheartened to learn how few of them offered wood shop classes, but it made me more determined to host an event.

After quite a few “We don’t teach that here” responses, I finally found Andy, the woodworking teacher at Westview Secondary School in Maple Ridge, British Columbia. He was thrilled by the idea. Two days later, he was in my shop, and within the week I visited the school’s shop. We officially scheduled our MFG Day event for October, but then our story took an unexpected turn.

Andy called near the end of April and asked if we could put it together in three weeks – before the school year ended. “Why not?” I said, and we scheduled the event for May 16.

MORE INCENTIVE

Andy also invited me to come see his team perform in the woodworking challenge at the Provincial Skills Competition on May 1 in Abbotsford, BC.

The Skills Canada Competition promotes careers in the skilled trade and technology sectors primarily through the annual Skills Canada National Competition, as well as

through provincial and territorial competitions hosted by member organizations. These competitions are free and open to the public, which is invited to try a variety of skilled trade and technology activities at several Try-a-Trade@ and Technology stations. Every two years, top medalists of the Skills Canada National Competition continue their training to secure placement on WorldSkills Team Canada and compete at the WorldSkills Competition.

I was happy for the opportunity to attend the provincial event, but it was disheartening to see so few woodworking students at the competition; to rub salt in the wound, the IT department took up a quarter of the hall. (Woodworkers may be seen as a dying breed by some, but we did outnumber the masonry section, which had only three students.)

After I came back from the competition, I was even more excited about our open house. I just didn’t know where to start. Although the MFG Day website includes pointers and hints, I still wasn’t entirely sure about how to proceed.

Then the Spring issue of *PROfiles* arrived, and I saw the cover story on CK Valenti Designs.

I was excited to read about the competition and open house Chris Valenti has for middle schoolers. I contacted him, and his suggestions gave me the details and inspiration I needed to plan our event.

Our goal was to have kids from grades 9-12 come into a shop and see firsthand that woodworking is not a dying artisan trade and that there can actually be a future (and money) in this field. In short, we wanted to advocate for the industry.

I also reached out to some suppliers to see if they’d be willing to participate. They were really excited and jumped on board.



A GREAT EVENT

Just before noon on May 16, the school bus full of kids arrived as planned.

We had a short presentation about Sofo, and then we went straight into the shop to show them how we work. The students saw how a job progresses, from the drawing stage through the entire shop. Then they got to see the CNC cutting their “project” (a three-part chair that they would assemble after lunch).

Then we had a lunch break with Subway platters, donuts, and pop. During lunch, the BLUM rep also presented some working models.

After that it was back into the shop for the students to assemble their chairs.

Everyone got to keep their chairs and also took home a bag with goodies from the sponsors.

THE TAKEAWAY FOR YOU

If you’re considering doing something like this, don’t just think about it: Do it!

Reach out to CMA members and ask for help. Reach out to suppliers, who are usually more than happy to pitch in. Formations, our local sheet-good supplier, donated all the plywood, Mckillican paid for Subway, and BLUM provided the snacks and beverages. They all donated things for the goodie bags, too.

There’s still time for you to participate in the American MFG Day in October – make a plan now!

— Monika Soos, Sofo Kitchens (Maple Ridge, British Columbia)

As Monika says: Please participate in the official MFG Day on October 4, 2019! Visit mfgday.com for details on how to host an event.

Inova's Bucey to deliver keynote at 2020 CMA conference

To kick off the CMA's second national conference (March 4-6), Guy Bucey will share his passion for "servant leadership" by explaining why you should "Stay in Your Lane."

Bucey is the COO of Inova, a leading manufacturer and innovator in the furniture industry. Located in upstate New York, Inova focuses on the hospitality, contract, multi-family, student housing, and military markets. Bucey began his career at the

company following his service in the Marines and quickly became a role model at Inova, known for demonstrating the power of teamwork. Bucey shared his thoughts about training best practices with us in this issue; see page 24.

Visit www.cabinetmakers.org/2020 to get more information about the conference.

CROSS-TOWN COLLABORATION

In the spirit of the CMA's goal of promoting cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork, Ken Kumph of Premier Builders and Ed Curtis of Curtis Cabinetry recently planned a company get-together.

The two Georgetown, Massachusetts, shop owners knew of each other, but they really didn't get acquainted until they spent some time together at the IWF trade show in August 2018.

"We realized that we have a lot in common, work three miles from each other, and are not necessarily competitors but are like-minded business owners," says Kumph. They promised to stay in touch and collaborate when opportunity

presented itself.

As CMA members, they know the importance of cooperation over competition. After IWF, Ed helped Ken when Premier's edge-banding machine went down in the middle of a big job.

Another opportunity came along this past April.

"We were trying to get more out of our E-Laser Templating System, and I knew that Ken and his team were using the same equipment," Curtis says. "I gave Ken a call and asked for some assistance."

The two soon chose an afternoon to get together and share information. The Premier Builders team drove the five minutes to Curtis Cabinetry, and the combined crews just started talking shop.

THE RESULT?

"I'm not sure we solved any great mysteries with the templating system, but we did continue our friendship, and there was camaraderie among our teams that will last," Kumph says.

They also made plans to continue collaborating. "I suggested to Ken that we make this a quarterly commitment," Curtis says. The two shop owners highly recommend that CMA members plan similar visits with other nearby shops to share and compare best business practices.

NEW MEMBERS

COMPANY NAME	CITY	STATE	WEBSITE	MEMBERSHIP TYPE
323 Design Team	Chenoa	IL		General Member
Danlee Wood Products	Forreston	IL	www.danleewoodproducts.com	General Member
Essex County Carpentry	Peabody	MA	www.essexcountycarpentry.com	General Member
Golden Forest Products	Rockville	MD		General Member
Hummingbird Woodworking	Donalds	SC	www.hummingbirdwoodworking.com	General Member
Innovative Millworks	Traverse City	MI		General Member
Kessick Wine Storage Systems	Greenville	SC	www.kessick.com	General Member
Lauderdale Millwork Inc.	Berkeley Heights	NJ	www.lauderdalemillwork.com	General Member
Leuco Tool Corporation	Villa Rice	GA	www.leuco.com	Associate Benefactor
Milarc Cabinets	Windsor	CO	www.milarc.com	Century Club Member
Monson Woodworks	Palmer	MA	www.monsonwoodworks.com	General Member
Savin Design	Cambridge	ON	www.savindesign.com	General Member
Stratis Industries	Centuria	WI	www.stratisindustries.com	Century Club Member
Total Image	Lake Park	FL		General Member
Ultimate Cabinets	Collinsville	OK	www.ultcab.com	General Member
Watson Brothers	Middleton	MA	www.watsonbrothers.com	General Member

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***ON FEBRUARY 22, 1957, THE
COMPANY REGISTERED ITS
FIRST INTERNATIONAL PATENT:
A CONCEALED, SELF-CLOSING
FURNITURE HINGE.***

Long ago and far away, Arturo Salice became an entrepreneur, creating a small business in Cantù, Italy. Today, that business is an international success, supplying cabinet makers, furniture companies, closet designers, and more with state-of-the-art functional hardware and accessories.

But back in 1926 when Salice launched his venture, its business model was simple. The company was a retail distributor of hardware produced in Italy and abroad, and its market was local. As Salice's business grew and thrived in the following decades, its reach expanded to the whole of Italy and then beyond.

In the late 1950s, Salice began producing his own line of furniture hardware at a new factory in Cantù. His sons Giorgio and Luciano joined him in managing the new venture, and together, they made a wise decision: Salice would specialize exclusively in the production of furniture hinges.

On February 22, 1957, the company registered its first international patent: a concealed, self-closing furniture hinge. This invention was a technological milestone for the whole industry, and Salice has continued to grow and innovate with every year that passes.

US PRESENCE

Salice America, a leading supplier of components to U.S. kitchen cabinet shops and furniture manufacturers, has been active in the U.S. market for more than 25 years.

Based in Charlotte, NC, it was founded in 1989 as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Arturo Salice S.p.A. The US location allowed the company to better serve and understand its customers here; in 1993, a satellite warehouse opened in the Los Angeles area to provide improved service to its customers in the West. All manufacturing takes place in Italy.



Salice employs 900 people worldwide and 80 in the US and Canada. The company has some unusual bragging rights: In an industry dominated by men, Salice's corporate team is dominated by women, and there are also plenty of women working in the company's manufacturing operations in Italy – from machine operators to quality technicians, to production managers and supervisors at all levels.

ENGINEERING SOPHISTICATION

Today, through mergers, acquisitions and expectations of new technology, Salice offers a wide range of products for cabinet applications, including concealed hinges and mounting plates; lift systems; sliding door systems; runner and drawer systems; kitchen space organizers; and most recently, a collection of high-end, Italian leather-wrapped closet accessories.

The new closet line includes organizers, drawers, trays, and hangers for belts, ties, handbags, etc., as well as the underlying high-end mechanics that Salice is known for– such as touch-to-open, soft-close drawers and pullout systems for shoes and for clothes stored at a higher level.



AS ARTURO SALICE'S BUSINESS GREW AND THRIVED, ITS REACH EXPANDED TO THE WHOLE OF ITALY AND THEN BEYOND.





The company says high-end touches have been ignored on the closet front, noting that competitors have begun adding similar products since the line debuted. Salice will be offering similar high-end product lines for the kitchen and bathroom very soon.

FUTURE FOCUS

Salice's 100th birthday is within sight, and the company has no intention of slowing down. It is always laser-focused on being the innovation leader in technology and bringing cutting-edge concepts to the industry.

Knowing what the industry needs is key to the company's

evolution, and Salice America sees the CMA as a valuable partner. "CMA members make up our primary customer base," the company says. "They keep us up to speed in an ever-changing marketplace. We love to connect with them at shows and other events."

While Salice is a successful international company that sells products across the globe, its leadership is determined to avoid becoming too large and inflexible. "Companies can outgrow themselves and forget their roots," the company says. "Staying in touch with our customers helps us remain grounded and responsive." 

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FEATURED SHOP

PREMIUM WOODWORKING



BUILDING

A Satisfying Life

BY CARLA ATKINSON

Neil Persaud has a thriving cabinetry business headquartered in a 10,000-square-foot shop on Long Island. Anyone would look at Premium Woodworking and call it a success story.

But when you ask him about how he built his business, Persaud laughs out loud, remembering the bravado of his younger self.

“I was working nine to five, making good money – decent money – and I thought, ‘I’m working too hard for my boss,’” Persaud says. “I’m making him money ... why not do it for myself?” I was sure the grass was greener on the other side. I thought, ‘I’m going to make all this money and have all the flexibility in the world.... I could work three days a week!’ Then I learned that it was the complete opposite – I work more, and I make less!”

Many people would bail on a big goal if they knew at the beginning how much hardship and stress would be involved. Powerful, naive daydreams like Persaud’s have fueled many a successful venture that may never have taken off otherwise.

Persaud would be the first to tell you that the hard work never stops and the process isn’t easy when you launch a business, but doing work that you care about can make those rough times worthwhile.

LEARNING TO PIVOT

Born in 1978 in the former British colony of Guyana, the only English-speaking country in South America, Persaud moved to the United States in 1996 at age 18. He came on his own, living with his aunt in New York City and going to school; his parents and brother moved to the States seven years later.

He got an associate’s degree in mechanical engineering and later went back to school to study architecture. With four or five classes left, Persaud realized he didn’t want to be an architect, so he didn’t finish the degree. Instead, he began doing shop drawings for interior designers and others, and eventually took a draftsman position with a general contractor firm that was doing its own cabinetry.

“I learned there, and then after four or five years, I moved on to other companies,” he says. “I gained more and more experience and knowledge of the cabinetry world.”

Then Persaud pivoted again, working as an assistant project manager and later as a chief estimator.

When he decided to launch his business, Persaud stuck with his unorthodox approach.

He rented an office space in Brooklyn – a cubicle to be exact – and hired a bookkeeper, subbing out the cabinet-making work to local two-man shops. He sourced out the shop drawings, ordered material and had it sent to the shops doing the work. “I never went on a job site,” Persaud says.

After about a year and a half, the set-up became impossible to maintain.

“I was depending on other shops, and quality became an issue,” he recalls. “General contractors would call and want to visit my shop, and there was no shop. I knew I had to make a change. I could either start my own shop or quit and go back to working for someone else. I decided I couldn’t go back.”

For Phase 2, Persaud rented a 3,000-square-foot space in Brooklyn, pulling together resources to outfit the space with four machines – a cabinet saw, a sliding table saw, a joiner, and a planer.

He knocked on doors, sent out promotional letters to general contractors, and got a couple of calls back. He invited GCs to stop by and got a positive response to his small but nice, clean shop.

“That’s when it took off,” he says.

But within a few years, Premium reached a point where the company would have to expand to keep up with the competition.

“We couldn’t take bigger jobs because we didn’t have enough space,” Persaud explains. “We had all manual machines, while other shops were getting CNCs. It was becoming harder and harder to compete on pricing.”

A little research made it clear that staying in Brooklyn didn’t make sense financially.

“I was paying \$5,000 a month in rent, and I was getting no equity,” Persaud says. “To get a 10,000-square-foot shop in Brooklyn would have cost \$12,000 a month in rent.”

He went looking for industrial properties and eventually found the perfect spot – a 20,000-square-foot property with a 10,000-square-foot building in West Babylon, New York, on Long Island.

“AT THE END OF THE DAY,
WHAT I LOVE IS SEEING
WHAT WE’VE MADE AND
KNOWING WE MADE IT WELL.”

— NEIL PERSAUD

“I fell in love with it right away,” Persaud recalls. “It’s a wide-open layout — no columns interrupt the shop floor.”

He bought it in 2016 and then invested a million dollars in high-end machinery. He now pays approximately \$6,000 a month on mortgage, insurance, and property taxes, which is a bargain compared to Brooklyn costs.

FINDING A NICHE

Over time, Premium settled into a groove. About 80 percent of its work is commercial, and the remaining 20 percent is residential work involving veneer and lacquered cabinetry.

Premium’s commercial projects are highly specialized and wide-ranging.

The company has done a lot of work for hospitals, for instance, including building out two floors at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City. Hospital work can include outfitting exam rooms, nurses’ stations, patient rooms, handicapped-accessible bathrooms, lounge areas, and more.

The company has done quite a bit of courthouse work, too, building judges’ benches, lawyers’ tables, wall paneling, and just about anything else you can imagine.

New York City is known for its elegant retail spaces, and Premium has created many displays for Ralph Lauren, Armani, and other famous designer lines. Many of its displays land in NYC department stores such as Macy’s, Bloomingdale’s, and Nordstrom’s. The company also outfitted three showrooms for French retailer L’Occitane and three floors of NYC office space for Amazon (conference rooms, pantries, closets, offices, etc.). Premium has also worked on school projects and high-end lobbies.

Much of the company’s commercial work involves plastic laminate (Formica, etc.). “Finishing is very hard, so I’ve found that when we work with prefinished materials, we really flow,” Persaud says.



Neil Persaud takes CMA members on a tour of his shop.



UPHILL BATTLES

Persaud was happy to weigh in with his workforce development experience as *PROfiles* continues to spotlight these issues in 2019.

He began to deal with workforce challenges in earnest after moving his business to Long Island. Persaud soon realized the major down side of leaving Brooklyn behind: It had a big pool of potential workers and great mass transit to get them to work.

On Long Island, he tried posting to Craigslist and even put a sign in front of the shop. He got responses, but not the kind he hoped for. After several years grappling with this lack of supply to go with his demand, Persaud is well-versed in common hiring and retention challenges:

- **New hires who lack training.**

Most young employees don't have skills and have to be trained, and Persaud has had mixed experiences with this situation.

His shop foreman came to him one day, frustrated that a young employee kept

making the same mistake. "I explained it to him five times," the foreman said.

When Persaud approached the employee to talk about why he was struggling with the task, the employee's immediate response was, "Okay – I can quit."

Persaud was incredulous.

"I told him I didn't want him to quit," he recalls. "What I wanted was for him to get better at the job – and to want to get better. 'The more I show you and the more I explain what I expect of you, the better you can be,' I told him."

The employee didn't see it that way, and he left.

The flip side of this experience came when a young man who had been working in landscaping applied for a job. He had no cabinet-making experience but told Persaud that if he was willing to teach him, he knew he could learn the business. His eagerness was a breath of fresh air.

"He's open, he's energetic, and he has that drive to learn," Persaud says. "I told him he would learn and improve and as he did, he would earn more."

- **New hires who bring previous experience... but also drawbacks.**

Persaud quickly learned that even experienced new employees can require training.

"Guys who come from bigger shops can't function as well in smaller operations like my seven-man shop," he says. In many cases, these employees did just one task or worked in just one area in their previous jobs, while Premium employees need to know how to do all of the steps in the process.

Then there are the candidates who come in touting their decades of cabinetry experience and do okay on shop tests, but don't perform well on the job.

"They come in and want to make \$30 an hour, telling me they have 25 years of experience," he says. "Then you put them to work, and they make four cabinet boxes a day when you expect 15, and they're chipping the laminates. I say, 'Either you've been taught wrong for 25 years or no one took the time to check your work.'"

NEIL PERSAUD VALUES THE CMA FOR SEVERAL REASONS:

“You know there are members you can turn to — genuine, serious people,” he says. “I can usually count on the fact that if I have a problem, there are 30 or more people who have run into the same issue before I did and the answer is on the forum if I search for it.”

Persaud was happy to have CMA members visit his shop during a regional event, and he enjoys the roundtable talks and other events.

He’s a big supporter of cabinetmakers coming together to help and advance the industry.

“If we are stingy with our ideas, we will not succeed,” he says.

“I WANT PEOPLE TO COME HERE NOT JUST FOR THE PAYCHECK BUT BECAUSE THEY LOOK AT THEIR WORK AND THINK ‘I MADE ALL THESE THINGS’ AND FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES.”

— NEIL PERSAUD



Unfortunately, those situations rarely end well. It’s not practical to keep paying a high rate to employees who oversold their skills, Persaud says, and yet lowering salaries doesn’t make for a harmonious work relationship. It’s better to part ways, he says.

He’s also dealt with experienced candidates who feel threatened by the high-tech machinery in his shop.

“Instead of embracing it, they talk about how they did things differently in earlier jobs and how it worked fine,” he says. “I try to get them to look at the CNC as a good thing. It’s not your enemy – it’s here to make your work easier.”

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Persaud uses whatever innovations and interventions he can come up with to help employees adapt and learn.

For starters, the set-up of the Premium shop helps with the learning curve.

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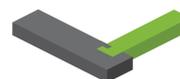


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“MAKE SURE YOU HAVE DEEP POCKETS —
CASH FLOW IS THE NAME OF THE GAME,
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RUNNING BEHIND AND PLAYING CATCH-UP.”

— NEIL PERSAUD

“Our machines are laid out to mirror the sequence we use to process our jobs — from raw material to finished goods,” he explains.

Though machines handle the technical details, employees still need skills to be able to use them. For example, Persaud’s shop foreman knew nothing about drawing when he came to work for Premium. For three months, Persaud met with him in the afternoons and taught him what he needed to know.

“Now he gets it and he runs the shop,” Persaud says. “He was open-minded and willing to learn. Eight years later, I can give him any drawing, and he’ll figure it out.

“It takes about three months to train people to do things the Premium way,” he adds. “Some people don’t understand the seriousness of the business. We pride ourselves on quality, and you’ve got to take your time.

“I want people to come here not just for the paycheck but because they look at their work and think ‘I made all these things’ and feel good about themselves. I want them to have the same vision I do, and I’m looking for that compatibility to be there for the long-term.”

Premium has also begun having Friday coffee breaks where employees are invited to share ideas for improvements or raise issues. When new people join the company, Persaud always asks them to speak up if they know of better ways to do things.

As time goes by, you can get set in your ways and see only the way you do things, he says; being open to new ideas and perspectives is important.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY, AND THE SATISFYING

Persaud’s advice to others who want to follow an entrepreneurial path is pragmatic.

“Make sure you have deep pockets – cash flow is the name of the game,” he says. “It’s tough to always be in a hole, running behind and playing catch-up.”

Cash flow and overhead costs are his biggest challenges.

“Payment is becoming the biggest issue,” he says. “Vendors won’t give you net 30 days any more. We’re not at the price point where we would like to be right now, but work is flowing in.”

Work-life balance is also a challenge for small business owners, and Persaud is no different. He has two kids (ages 4 and 9), but usually ends up working six days a week – a far cry from that three-day work week he imagined way back when.

“I like being involved in every part of the business,” he says. “I’m a control freak like that. I’m not saying that’s a good thing, but I just don’t want to lose control of my company. I like the personal feeling that comes with dealing with clients myself, and I don’t want to get too big.”

But he does have a plan. “I’m 40 now, and my goal is to be able to back off at 45,” he says. Backing off means reaching a point where systems are in place to the point where day-to-day operations don’t rely on him so much.

Persaud’s career currency is not money – it’s satisfaction.

“I make a decent living,” he says. “But at the end of the day, what I love is seeing what we’ve made and knowing we made it well.” 



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Building the Future: TRAINING EMPLOYEES



“Don’t ask, ‘What if we train them and they leave?’ Ask ‘What if we don’t train them and they stay?’”

— Levi Lusko

Investing in your employees empowers them to do the jobs they were hired to do. Professional development is essential for every individual, but many of us don’t make it a priority.

It is important to have a growth plan for all of your team members, including yourself. Consider implementing a training fund of \$1,000/year per employee (or whatever rate makes the most sense for your area, the available programs, type of training required, and your budget). The employees will then be able to afford job-relevant training (pre-approved, of course), and you will reap the benefits. This opportunity gives your employees the tools they need to take control of their career.

There are other simple-to-implement options, too, such as providing devices for your employees to listen to job-relevant audiobooks while they work; you could offer some type of incentive plan or competition based on the number completed.

An often-overlooked area is cross-training your team for internal mobility. Not only does this give you a backup plan when an employee doesn’t come to work, but it also gives employees variety in their days/weeks.

This quarter, we dive deeper into this topic of training with Inova COO Guy Bucey, who talked to us recently about how vital training is to the health of your business. (Bucey will be the keynote speaker at our CMA conference in 2020; see the News Roundup for more details.)



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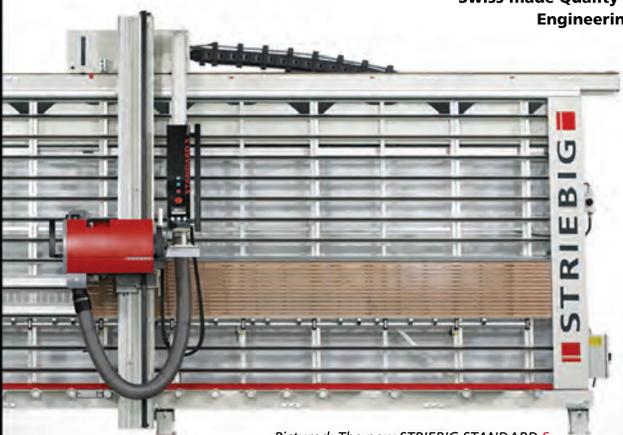
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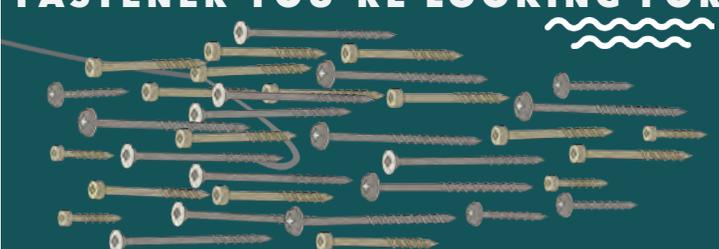
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**BUILDING THE FUTURE:
TRAINING EMPLOYEES**



OWNING THE
future
**GUY BUCEY HAS SOME TOUGH TALK
FOR THE INDUSTRY**

BY CARLA ATKINSON

When you delve into Guy Bucey's back story, his passion about the need for great training immediately makes sense. The Inova COO launched his career life in the Marines Corps, which is legendary for its tough training. Bucey began as an infantry machine gunner and left as a sergeant eight years later.

"Every Marine is trained to be a leader," he says, "and as a sergeant you are a leader of Marines. I had been out of the Marine Corps for three days when I started at Inova,

and I took my Marine Corps experience and molded it into a really good philosophy that works for the civilian environment."

 **STEPPING UP**

Maybe it's that Marine mindset that has made Guy Bucey impatient with the industry's lament about struggling to find good workers.

"We're constantly hearing about how difficult it is to find

BUILDING THE FUTURE: TRAINING EMPLOYEES

skilled labor and grow our companies because of the lack of education or training,” he says. “I see a common trend — whether it’s manufacturers with a thousand employees or cabinet shops with five employees – where people look at the problem as an external factor that keeps them down. In reality, we have to take some ownership of that, and we have to understand that a big portion of the problem is our fault.”

Why?

“We’re very focused on the dollars and cents and the sales aspect of our work,” he says. “We’re focused on making sure that our machines are running 100 percent and that we’re constantly staying busy. Meanwhile, we put training – and ultimately our people – off to the side and never look at them as being a priority.”



CREATING A GREAT WORKSPACE

So what does Bucey think cabinet shop owners and company leaders need to do to solve the problem?

For starters, he recommends getting your house in order – literally.

“Historically, manufacturing facilities and cabinet shops have been these dark, dingy, grimy places that are loud and busy,” Bucey says. “Some companies still don’t do a good job of making their facilities appealing to people – and it’s hard to make careers in the industry appealing if potential employees don’t see our workspaces as places they would want to spend their days.”

An appealing environment is clean, brightly lit, organized and set up for safety, he says. He also recommends keeping up with the latest technology so your shop is as “current” as possible.

“At Inova, we want potential employees to look at our facilities and think, ‘Wow, this is a pretty incredible place, and I’d love to invest my time and energy into getting the skills to work here.’”



NOT MARKETING THE “WHY”

While Bucey wants you to make sure your shop is a class act, he is even more passionate about the need for the industry to do a better job of marketing.

“We want people to be able to come into our facility with preexisting training, but we’re also not projecting and promoting why people should be seeking out this training,” he says. “And that’s always kind of blown my mind. We never ever take responsibility for perpetuating this situation.”

There is a lot of complaining about shop class going away in high school, a shortage of vocational schools and a lack of classes at community colleges, Bucey says, but those complaints are missing an important point.

“They’re not just going to put programs in place because we as manufacturers think that they should,” he says. “They’re going to do it because they have an audience that actually wants that kind of education. They need to be able to fill the seats. So we have to blow up our marketing efforts so they get more people in those seats.”



SOLVING THE PROBLEM IN-HOUSE

Until training is widely available to anyone who wants it, it’s the responsibility of cabinet shop owners and manufacturers to bring training in-house.

“We have to create the programs to train people who have the desire to learn and the ability to learn,” he says. “If we bring training into our facilities and create employee success stories, we will create a bigger pool of people who are actually seeking out these opportunities. External training providers such as community colleges and vocational programs will begin to see that people want to learn these skills.”

At Inova, no one wastes time talking about the shortage of skilled workers.

**BUILDING THE FUTURE:
TRAINING EMPLOYEES**



“We just acknowledge it’s a reality and move on,” Bucey says. “Without the skillset, we look for people who are highly motivated, have a positive outlook on life and the intelligence to be able to learn and adapt. There are plenty of those people out there looking for jobs.”

New employees without experience begin in “low-risk areas,” such as the pallet-building section. “It’s highly organized, highly standardized and takes the pressure off of the new employee, who doesn’t have to worry about making a mistake that could damage valuable products or equipment,” says Bucey. “It also eliminates the

BUILDING THE FUTURE: TRAINING EMPLOYEES



stress for the person doing the teaching; if a new employee makes a mistake in the pallet area, it's no big deal, and the supervisor can focus his/her attention on helping the trainee learn how to do things the right way instead of worrying about damage."

The company also works on standardizing all of its operations, which helps ensure that all new employees are getting consistent training.

"We create a culture of learning and training," Bucey says. "We designate an hour for training every single day in our facility. Employees can use this time to fix things within their work area or learn specific skills, such as how to operate a machine, how to apply molding to a panel, etc."



THE BIG PICTURE

Inova believes in the "full-circle" approach.

"We want everybody in our facility to understand how our product is made, from A to Z," he explains. "We work backward from the finished product all the way to the

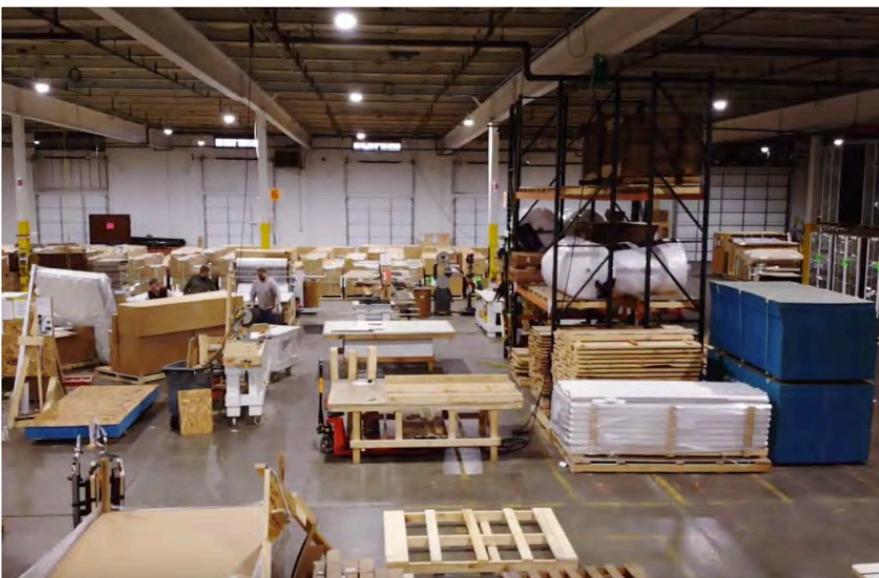
beginning to the saw area where the product begins. That gives everybody an understanding of the entire process, so you don't just have a saw operator who's cutting squares all day long, but has absolutely no idea where those squares are going to go or what they're going to be part of down the line."

Inova likes to have frequent informal check-ins with employees as a matter of course, but new employees' first formal review comes at the six-month mark.

"At the six-month mark, people have really got their feet underneath them," Bucey explains. "They're really starting to understand our culture and how we do things, they're starting to get a good baseline skill set and they're starting to think about where they're going to land within the company.

"We're not talking about raises at this point – we're checking in to see what their ambitions and their motivations are, so we can begin to steer them down those paths. It's really important that you put your people in the areas they enjoy – that's where they will be most productive and successful."

**BUILDING THE FUTURE:
TRAINING EMPLOYEES**



 **NEVER STOP**

So when does the Inova training period end?

It doesn't.

“We're constantly looking to teach,” Bucey says. “We never want people to reach a point where they think they have nothing left to learn. We're constantly seeking out potential external training and other opportunities for employees to continue their education.

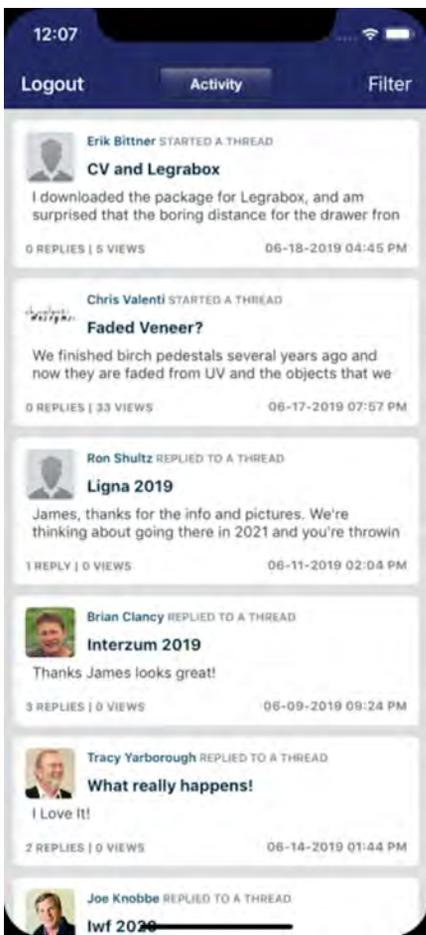
“We put a lot of focus on our leadership — we want to be mentors and teachers and not just people who are telling other people what to do. The exact term we use is ‘servant’ leadership. We're always working to cultivate, train, and teach other employees.”

Guy Bucey will continue this conversation in the final issue of 2019, discussing how to retain great employees. 

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

I recently visited CMA member Hans Parker at his shop, Board Foot Co., in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I always enjoy seeing members' shops, equipment, and employees, but my favorite part is connecting further with them about their businesses, the impact of the economy, and the industry as a whole.

Hans and I spoke at length about the need to educate others about our industry. He is very involved with the local high school and its shop program, the nearby technical school, and his chapter of the American Institute for Architects (AIA). Hans knows it's essential to make students (and maybe more importantly, their parents) aware that woodworking is a viable career choice, as well as educate architects and designers about what's possible and profitable.

We also talked about the variety of jobs the industry offers and the fact that while college may not be for everyone, it does make sense for some who may want to get into project management, sales, or other career paths that require higher education. Hans even said he would be willing to help employees pay for school if it makes sense for their desires and his business plan.



We need to think creatively about training. Training may be what we offer our employees for their professional development as highlighted in this issue's special section. However, it's not necessarily just about our current employees, and it's not always something that happens in the shop. With Hans, it's connecting with schools and architects. Perhaps for you, it's reaching out to general contractors or designers to do the same. All of our efforts ultimately impact the relationships we have with our customers. At the end of the day, isn't that the most important thing?

The CMA exists to help you learn more. We offer one-on-one conversations through our ProCoach mentoring program, feedback from the collective group in the online discussion forums, and opportunities to meet other members face-to-face at the variety of events we offer throughout the year.

Never stop learning, and then use that knowledge to educate others. It benefits you, your team, and the future of the industry.

Amanda Berger

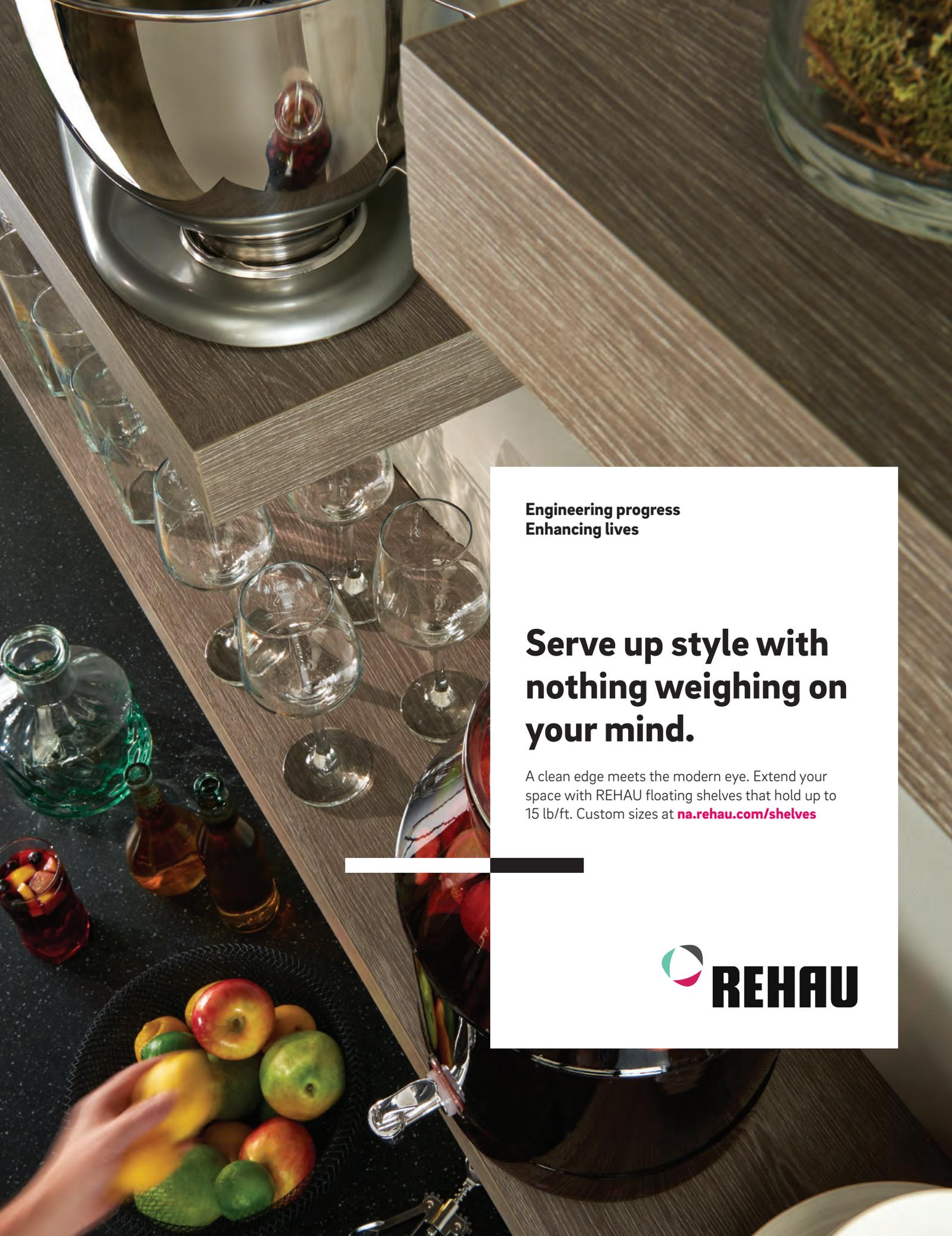
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