

Growing Together: Aurora Custom Mouldings



By Brock Weir

The Auroran continues its series on Aurora's longest-serving businesses this week with Aurora Custom Mouldings.

A simple "You're Fired!" spat out by real estate impresario Donald Trump is enough to send a shiver down the spines of the best of us.

But Aurora Custom Mouldings, a business founded by the Attridge Family in Aurora over 90 years ago, is made of sterner stuff. Since they shifted gears in the 1980s from more of a general hardware store to a company focused specifically on custom mouldings, they have stayed true to their hometown roots while chasing those high-end prestigious projects. A recent pinnacle for them is providing all mouldings for Toronto's Trump Tower.

"It is a lot of work to infiltrate any of those organizations to get the work," says Jamie Attridge, 31, the fifth generation operator of Aurora Custom Mouldings. "It's a lot of leg work, and it's a lot of phone calls, a lot of trips and a lot of travelling. It is just an awesome feeling to get a job like that and you can't explain how happy you are when you get them."

It's not likely you would be able to tell from a change of expression on his face, but it seems "The Donald" was pleased as well as Mr. Attridge says "not one stick of material" was returned to them with a complaint during the project.

"We strive for quality," he says. "When we say we can do those jobs and ship them and do everything on time; that is our thing. We strive to make sure those jobs are perfect, 100 per cent. When you can complete a project like that, it is just an awesome feeling."

This "awesome feeling" extends as well to the completion of Toronto's Ritz Carlton, as well as closer to home. Their work can be seen extensively, for instance, within the Magna Headquarters just off Wellington Street East, as well as the Rockport Condominium developments currently underway on John West Way, historical buildings such as Victoria Hall and the Aurora Cultural Centre, and private homes the length and breadth of Aurora.

Since the business was founded in 1921, its evolution has been non-stop and has grown along with the community itself.

"There are big shoes to fill," says Mr. Attridge of being the fifth generation. "It is definitely hard to make sure everything is going in the right direction and keep the shop going. That is the big struggle throughout all these generations. It's a lot of weight on your shoulders."

His shoulders started to carry a bit of the burden at a very young age, however. Mr. Attridge recalls working in the shop over the

summer from the time he was eight years old, getting a kick out of feeding the wood chipper at first before duties were piled on over the years.

Since that time, he has witnessed the business significantly streamlined towards focusing specifically on architectural wood mouldings away from a full-service hardware store in the showroom with rows of nails and tools not unlike Home Hardware or Aurora Downtown Hardware.

?I think there was just too much competition on the market,? he says. We chase strictly custom work like historical replication of mouldings and the restoration of old stuff, buildings, and new sky-rises. We have focused on the bigger projects rather than wearing out our equipment making stuff, for instance, for Home Depot. We have chased more prestigious projects in that regard and we have been successful at it.?

Their business model is not the only thing that has evolved. While Attridge prides himself that they still often use the tools of his grandfather and great-grandfather because they remain top of the line in getting the job done, they are becoming increasingly automated for precision projects.

Case in point: one computerized machine is busy working away on carving out highly detailed fish on a piece of pine. The fish is not destined for a sconce or a piece of moulding, but really showing off just what the machine can do.

?[Through modern-izing] and the optimizing of our material, our waste is so minimal now. We send absolutely nothing to landfill. We're certified by the Ecology Centre of Canada. We're 100 per cent green and we're also FSC certified for all of our materials and I think we're one of two mill workshops that are to that standard. With the technology we have been able to maximize every piece of the wood fibre that we bring in to make sure we have a 100 per cent clean product.

?I think we have changed directions to follow the times and that is really what it is. When markets change and things change, you really have to think on your feet and change directions to follow the right market, or you will be left holding the bag.?