

Country View Woodworking - Peaceful Lifestyle Produces Solid Furniture

Published: October 12, 2006

Peaceful Lifestyle Produces Solid Furniture

A traditional Amish shop, Country View Woodworking produces well-crafted furniture without using conventional electricity.

If you think you have it rough competing in today's custom furniture market, try this: unplug your phone and fax, get rid of your computer, then call the power company and tell them to cut off electricity to your woodworking shop.

That's the competitive environment for Roy Miller, co-owner of Country View Woodworking in rural Holmes County, Ohio. Yet the lack of modern conveniences hasn't slowed the business he and his brother Mervin created in 1993. Today they have 28 employees and sell their china cabinets, bookcases, entertainment centers and hutches to more than 200 furniture stores throughout the United States. The company produces 5,000 to 6,000 units per year.

Roy and Mervin are Amish, which means they do without many of today's modern conveniences. Yet, a focus on traditional woodworking techniques and quality of workmanship has helped them grow and prosper in the past nine years. Today, they are the largest non-electric furniture manufacturer in Holmes County, a place famous for producing high-quality Amish furniture.

Country View makes seven styles of china cabinets, two styles and numerous sizes of bookcases and entertainment centers and three styles of corner hutches. That variety allows buyers to meet their needs at one location.

"Some people purchase Amish furniture because they support our lifestyle, but what really makes it sell is the quality. It's just better," says Roy Miller. "We say it will last your lifetime and your children's lifetime. It's built that well."

Miller points out some of the hallmarks of Amish furniture: solid wood construction, drawers held together by interlocking dovetail notches, cabinet-mounted metal drawer slides, and the finest hinges, handles and swivels.



Finish is applied by hand in a separate building. Eleven of the company's 28 employees work in the finishing shop.

“Everything is built as good as we can make it,” Miller says. “It looks like the kind of furniture your grandparents owned.”



A production worker installs a drawer on a china cabinet. Country View manufactures seven different styles of china cabinets.

Even though Miller’s two facilities — one for woodworking, one for finishing — do not use publicly provided electricity, they each have a large diesel engine that produces energy to power hydraulic and air-powered tools. Screw guns and drill presses are air-powered; table saws, bandsaws and sanders are hydraulic-powered.

“Even though we don’t use CNC routers or other computerized machines, there is still some equipment involved. It’s not like we’re still using hand saws,” Miller says.

The woodshop is equipped with four Powermatic table saws, a Delta edge sander, bandsaw and drill press, an Omega miter saw, a Kreg drilling machine and a Powermatic widebelt sander, each purchased without electric motors and fitted for hydraulic power.

The wood Country View uses is primarily oak and cherry, plus a small amount of maple and hickory. The solid wood comes from local mills, but the company also uses Columbia hardwood plywood for partitions, bottoms and some shelves. Plywood, Miller says, is less likely to expand or contract at critical joints and less likely to warp when used for long

shelves.

Lighting in the woodshop is provided by kerosene lanterns, but the finishing shop uses a generator to power lights because of the fire danger. The company uses more than 100 different wood stains, finished with two coats of catalyzed conversion varnish from Sherwin-Williams.

Neither the production shop nor the finishing shop has a phone or fax. If Miller needs to use the phone, he has access to one at a neighbor’s house. No computers are used in the business, and an outside accountant keeps the books and issues paychecks.

“It is a slower pace,” Miller says. “We don’t have all the modern conveniences, but we think it’s the way we should live.”

The Amish place great value on tradition. And that focus on tradition and craftsmanship helps Country View’s products stand out in today’s world of high-volume, fast-paced furniture manufacturing.