

OLD CRAFT, NEW TECH

FOR SOME HOMEOWNERS, an entertainment center takes up an entire room or area of the house. But what options do you have if you want to incorporate a wide-screen TV or stereo system into a convenient location, without setting up a full-blown theater? And without buying some tacky cabinet that doesn't suit your system or your space and style?

One option is to hire a skilled craftsman such as Francois Langin, owner and designer of Francois Langin Designs.

Langin integrates technology with architecture, expressed through his passion for building furniture. "I try to create a focal point for the house," Langin said in his Santa Ana studio. His works are sought out by entertainment celebrities, professional sports stars and those who appreciate skilled design.

Langin began designing home-entertainment units in 1992 to hide multi-speaker stereo systems. These days he builds built-in wall units and freestanding centers to house today's expansive



DESIGNED AS all-purpose armoire, this cabinet serves as a wine rack and cigar humididor.

Francois Langin Designs



Francois Langin Designs

home theaters.

While the technology is cutting edge, the techniques for crafting the pieces date back more than 500 years. How he builds is a blend of family tradition and the teachings of the European guild system, in which craftsmen or “compagnons” pass along their design philosophy, skills and knowledge to aspiring artisans. As a child growing up in Annecy in the French Alps, Langin was surrounded by family artisans.

“At a young age I was fascinated with materials, their scent, look and feel,” he said. “I wanted to see what that area of France had to offer and I traveled around learning all I could.”

Despite studying under the guild system, he didn’t complete its apprenticeship and instead earned a degree in furniture design from the University Compagnonique of Lyon, France.

Hints of Old World craftsmanship, like dovetail drawers and mortise and tenon jointing techniques, are incorporated throughout Langin’s creations. Much has changed in woodworking over the centuries, but the basics of building durable, lasting pieces remain the same. You will also find dark, exotic



Chas Mettler / Orange County Home

THE UNIT AT TOP was designed to be the focus on the room, rather than the 80-inch screen. Francois Langin, above, is surrounded by photos of his craftsmanship.

woods such as makore, narra and macassar ebony. Langin fell in love with these dark woods while traveling through the Philippines, seeking out local artisans and learning their techniques and how to work with the wood.

“I’ve always loved the visual aspect, the colors, the intricate nuances, the incredible beauty,” he said. “But also the texture of this

amazing medium.”

Langin chooses which wood to use based on the final color and feel he wants the piece to exude. Besides the exotic woods, he also works with maple because of its color and close grains suit Mediterranean decor, a popular look in Orange County.

Where does he find inspiration for his designs? “It could be a gallery opening, contemporary art, the mate-

rial itself or even someone I meet,” he explained.

Many times the inspiration comes from the client and their home.

“I see in 3-D,” he said. “I can walk into a room and see what will work with the existing space, absorbing the space and learning what the client wants. But it is also a lot of listening to the client, taking ideas and knowledge from older projects.”

Blending technology and craftsmanship into what a client wants can result in some interesting final projects.

While the techniques may be centuries old, the technology is today.

Langin has designed an automated wall unit that houses two 32-inch TVs, a 50-inch TV and a 120-inch drop-down movie screen. Plus the sound system. He has also designed an automated art deco cabinet in which the display, the stereo and DVD player rise from inside the cabinet.

Custom-designed furniture is not a quick or inexpensive choice. It can take Langin six to eight weeks to execute a project, and some cost as much as \$100,000 for ones with large, multiple pieces. Traditionally Langin’s work starts around \$5,000.

His client list is impressive. Langin has been contracted to design furniture for members of the Onassis family and NFL football star Todd Lyght. He redid the interior design of Johnny Depp’s Viper Room nightclub in Hollywood. At age 20, he spent two years as a lead interior designer for the King of Morocco’s summer palace.

“It requires vision, knowledge and skills, finesse and psychology to translate a person’s desires and tastes into emotion, harmony and pleasure,” he said. “Yet to obtain a functional and practical product that fits today’s modern trends.”

To contact the writer call (714) 796-6079 or e-mail nbrennan@ocregister.com.



Francois Langin Designs

THE HIGHLIGHT of a Pasadena art deco home theater. The doors are made of Tamo Ash, Padauk and Macassar Ebony veneers.

RESOURCES

Francois Langin Designs

1218 S. Lyon St.
Santa Ana, 92705
(714) 796-9215

www.fldesigns.com