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APRIL 2025

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CRAFTSPEOPLE

Michael Merritt | building arts

By Calvin Hennick

AT MERRITT, ROBOTS AID IN SANDING AND DESIGNERS USE

3D building information modeling (BIM) tools to accelerate work and minimize errors. What hasn't changed in nearly six decades, though, is a commitment to craftsmanship and quality.

"We leverage automation where we can," says Michael Merritt, chairman and visionary of the company. "Clients want things faster, the expectations of quality level keeps rising, and there's a large volume of work that needs to be done. If we could bring in 100 new cabinet makers and finishers tomorrow, we would do it. But those additional employees don't exist. So, we have to find a blend of technology and craft to execute what our clients want us to bring to the table." Merritt also has built a training

center to help keep the craft alive. This gives their employees an opportunity to further their careers and allows them to provide apprenticeships for those who have an interest in learning the trade and joining the Merritt team.

"The architects and designers that we work with are design-

"Once you're a craftsman, you never want to lower the quality, it's not something you can turn on and off."

Keith Merritt

ing art," says Keith Merritt, vice chairman and master craftsman. "So, you must have that craftsmanship and artisan skill, to bring their designs to life and make them functional. We do a great job of that, and we've been doing it for years—everything we deliver is custom and unique to the homeowners' visions."



Merritt has spent nearly 60 years producing exquisite historically inspired woodwork.

George A. Merritt, who learned his craft under a master Italian cabinet maker, founded the company in 1967, and today, it is owned by his two sons. In addition to high-end woodwork, Merritt also manufactures architectural metalwork, glass work, and in 2017, the company expanded into classical decoration with the acquisition of Agrell Architectural Carving. In addition, Merritt often includes a complete turnkey interior to include stone, plaster, wood flooring, and decorative finishes.

For decades, Merritt performed work for both the commercial and residential sectors, but since the late 1990s, the company has focused exclusively on luxury residential and super yachts. These customers, Michael Merritt explains, are less price-sensitive than those in the commercial sector, because they are not willing to settle for "good enough." His customers are buying the Merritt detail, craft, and quality.

Holding the line on quality has grown more challenging, the brothers say, as the demand for oak and walnut has grown, while the consistency of top-grade lumber has declined. Instead of buying first- and second-grade lumber, the company now buys veneer-grade logs even for cabinet



interiors. This approach ends up using less wood, the brothers note, since workers no longer have to discard as many excessively knotty and sappy boards.

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