

My Biggest Project Ever

By Nelson Niederer

As an outgrowth of my love for woodworking and building stuff for myself, a few years ago I started a small woodworking business out of my garage, which is actually a shop that hasn't felt the rubber of tires for over a decade. With the exception of my Yamaha V-Star Classic 1100, which lounges in heated comfort all winter.

A fella's got to have priorities, right?

An old friend, Tim, has become a good customer of mine. Over the years I've built display shelves for his wife's sports memorabilia, pool cue rack, installed her father's classic fly fishing equipment in a bathroom and other little projects. I prefer working with people who give me a basic idea or design and then step back and let me create the finished piece. An open checkbook is nice too.

We'd talked about building a custom bar for Tim's rec room for years. Originally, it was going to have his custom chopper displayed in an integrated glass case. (I mentioned open checkbook, right?) Different ideas flowed from that over time. Finally, I got the word it was time to "bust a move" and start building. We used masking tape on the floor to get layout dimensions and put together a

working design plan. Then his wife came home.

Uh-oh. About three weeks later we had a new plan to work from. To be honest, Beth was right making the changes she wanted because the room is 1,500 square feet and an 8'-long bar would just get swallowed up in the room.

I began with a base built using particle board covered with a wood-grained Formica™ on the inside for easy cleaning. I used pine for the face frames and finished the outside with tongue-and-groove knotty pine coated with Minwax™ Polycrylic satin finish. The corner posts are Sitka spruce with mahogany accents coated with Minwax Helmsman Spar Urethane gloss finish. This was the easy part because all the materials were available locally.

The bar top proved to be a bit more complicated so, armed with a blank check, I drove to L.L. Johnson Lumber Co. in Charlotte, Michigan. This place is like a candy store for wood workers! The top was also to be made with Sitka spruce and mahogany accents, so I was pretty picky selecting the boards. I told the guys at L.L. Johnson what I was doing and they suggested using System Three Mirror Coat™ for the top finish. I told them

Two views of the finished bar in Tim's rec room. It really ties the room together.



“I’m a WEST SYSTEM® man-I accept no substitutes!” Additionally, I know that in four or five years if I have to re-coat or repair anything on the bar I’ll be able to get WEST SYSTEM 105 Epoxy Resin® and 207 Special Clear Hardener™ without any problems. Did I mention that my brother Bruce is a Gougeon Technical Advisor?

The top has four coats of 105/207 wet sanded between the third and fourth coat. It is built with a ¾" particle board core, then a ¾" Sitka top and bottom. I had to make the top in two sections—14' and 11'—and the angle where they meet was 27°. I assembled it in my shop to make sure the two sections fit together, then took it apart and moved to the job site. It took four guys to accomplish this.

Once there, I assembled the parts and coated the mating surfaces of the angle with 105/207, then clamped it together with joint ties that I had pre-installed. The whole top got a final sanding with 600-grit paper followed by four coats of High Gloss Spar Varnish for a tough finish. I always learn a few things on every project since they are one-of-a-kind custom pieces. On this project I learned:

1. It doesn’t matter what you like—make sure the wife likes it first.
2. Don’t try to build a 30' part in a 25' shop.
3. It really helps to have a son-in-law who’s a cabinet maker. (Thanks, Brian!) When all was said and done the bar turned out awesome. It’s the biggest wood working project I’ve tackled to date. Most importantly, Beth liked it! ■



The corner detail showing the Sitka spruce field with mahogany accent strips. The top has four coats of 105/207 wet sanded between the third and fourth coat.



The happy owner, Tim, bellying up to the bar, reflected in four coats of High Gloss Spar Varnish.

Below left—The behind-the-bar trash drawer/cabinet door.

Below—When you build a 30'-long bar in a 25' garage the weather becomes a factor.

