

PROFILES

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Lois Snyder, Periwinklers

FINDING HER NICHE

by Carla Atkinson



Lois Snyder

In the four years since *PROfiles* featured Lois Snyder's company on its cover, Snyder has found just the right groove for this latest chapter in her long professional life.

Her company, Tarpon Springs, Florida-based Periwinklers, has begun specializing in boutique commercial projects, mostly in nearby St. Petersburg.

"Some people love doing residential cabinetry, but I really can't stand it," says Snyder, who has done plenty of residential work along the way. "My comfort level is not going into somebody's house and selling them a kitchen and hoping it's going to be alright. I can't do it anymore. That's not my personality."

Fortunately, Snyder lives in an area where commercial building is booming — especially high-end restaurants and bars. "St. Pete is on fire right now — upscale and 'happening,'" she says.

It was a personal connection that got the ball rolling for Snyder's pivot into high-end commercial projects. A friend went to work for a St. Petersburg contractor, and she brought Snyder in on the first job she was involved in — a coffee shop.

“Then we did two burger joints and the Grand Central Brewhouse, which we won some awards for,” Snyder says. “We’ve just finished another restaurant with this contractor, and they plan to do another one in 2023. The guy said, ‘I don’t ever want to do another restaurant without you.’ That could change tomorrow, but it’s nice to hear.

“A lot of people believe that if you work for a contractor, you’re going to get taken advantage of,” she adds. “But I believe that if I work for a contractor, I’m going to get *paid*. I often say that the thing I like about contractors is that they write contracts — for me, they’re almost like a lawyer. They deal with it all.”

FINDING YOUR NICHE

Snyder recalls a conversation she was part of recently in which the owner of a restaurant group said something striking. “It used to be that when you went out to dinner, the most important thing was the food, the second-most-important thing was the service, and the third was ambiance,” he said. “But today the most important thing is ambiance, followed by food and service.” *(All photos show the Allelo restaurant, a Periwinklers project in St. Petersburg)*

Another factor in the drive for an eye-catching design? Social media. Snyder says some of the projects she’s worked on have become popular backdrops for social media posts.

She’s enjoyed the ambiance-driven, sometimes “artsy” commercial work so much that she recently found herself wondering why she hadn’t started focusing on these kinds of jobs 20 years ago.

“But I realized that this kind of demand didn’t exist back then, and I probably wasn’t ready to do it, anyway,” she says. “When I was younger, working with big contractors scared me. I wasn’t as comfortable negotiating. But now I’ve built relationships with three contractors, and I can’t possibly keep up with their work.

“This new niche is more complicated, but I like the fact that it pays well and that you come on board as a respected member of the team,” she says. “I like a job site to be run a certain way, and in the residential world, that often doesn’t happen.”

For Snyder, earning a larger chunk of money for a single project is so much better than making that amount from numerous residential projects. She’s realized that positioning



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your business often comes down to personality, preference, and where you live. She laughs at the memory of showing a finished bar project to a visiting CMA member who lives in a very different market in another state.

“I have no idea how you did that,” he told Snyder.

But that’s just because he’d never been called on to do that kind of work, she points out — “we’re all coming from so many different lanes.

“I seem to work better on the big jobs,” Snyder says. “This morning, I was talking to one of my employees about this little job we’re doing for a designer. I gave them a great deal on it, and it turns out it’s a lot more complicated than I had led myself to believe. When I have a huge job with many different parts, it gives me time to digest. I just work better that way.”

GETTING CERTIFIED

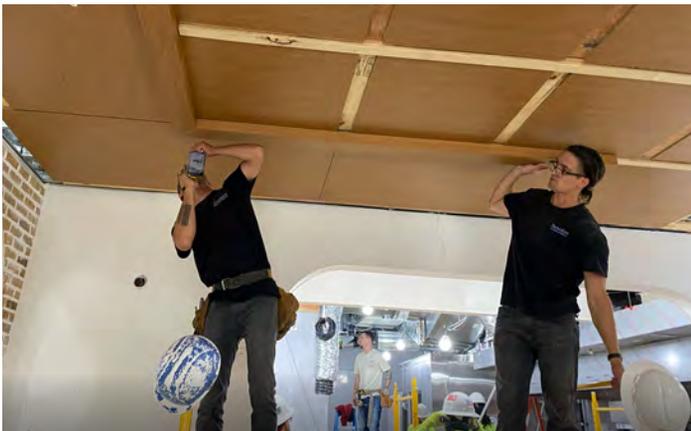
Cabinet makers sometimes run into jobs that require certifications, and they have to decide whether it’s worth it to pay to get those. In this new chapter of her career, Snyder decided it was worth it to go through one of the

most common certification programs for woodworkers — the Quality Certification Program (QCP) developed by the Architectural Woodwork Institute, which Snyder is a member of in addition to the CMA.

“QCP offers 35 different licenses for woodworking firms,” the official website explains. “These licenses cover the fabrication, finishing, and installation of different types of architectural woodwork as they pertain to the Architectural Woodwork Standards as recognized by QCP. Woodworkers have to take two tests (one on the Standards and one on QCP policies), submit trade references, complete sample shop drawings, and undergo one plant visit and two previous project inspections in order to become licensed.”

Snyder says the rigorous process and cost wouldn’t make sense for every shop.

“There are big jobs out there where you have to have QCP certification in order to even bid the job,” she says. “At the end of the day, I look at it and say, ‘If it costs me \$300 a month to have that certification and use it, it’s worth it.’ If I only did smaller jobs, it wouldn’t be.”



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In the same way that Snyder realized that big commercial projects are a better fit for her personality, she also had an epiphany about the standards you have to follow with the QCP.

“Believe it or not, at this point in my life, I still like to learn every which way I can,” she explains. “The standards book tells you how your cabinets have to be built — how your veneers have to be matched and all those kinds of details. I like that. I like to know the expectations so that I can meet them.”

HURRICANE CURVEBALLS

When Hurricane Ian began barreling toward Florida in September, Snyder was doing logistical research and gearing up for her biggest assignment ever — the installation of extensive cabinetry and a tongue-in-groove ceiling at one of the buildings on the late artist Robert Rauschenberg’s property on Captiva Island, Florida.

The 22-acre site is home to the Rauschenberg Residency, which the Rauschenberg Foundation describes as welcoming “artists of all disciplines from around the world to live, work, and create.” (The project is one of the Periwinklers jobs that requires QCP certification.)

When it became clear that her town, Tarpon Springs, was in the forecast path, Snyder and her husband — and partner

in Periwinklers — Matthew Searle, did what they could to safeguard their shop and home, and hoped for the best.

This time, they were lucky; Ian spared their home, business, and boat. Unfortunately, Captiva Island was not so lucky, and Snyder found that the Rauschenberg work was on hold indefinitely.

The project is a good example of the potential down side of doing big jobs, Snyder says. Because this one was going to take a while and require her team to work away from home, she had kept her schedule clear of other projects. When she heard about the damage on Captiva, Snyder found herself stuck

between a rock and a hard place, forced to wait for news before lining up alternative projects.

“There are a lot of unknowns,” she says. “They’re going to have to come up with a plan and give us all time to mobilize again. Right now, there’s nowhere to stay and nowhere to eat on Captiva.”

Living in hurricane country brings plenty of unknowns and risks, and Snyder says Hurricane Ian had an impact even though it caused her no damage.

“It’s made me think about my game plan more,” she reflects. “I’m looking into flood insurance options through the federal government and other options for protecting my equipment.

“I know that next time it could be me.” 

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— Lois Snyder

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