

Art imitating life



HOUSTON – The work of Jim Farris, owner of Jim Farris Cabinets, inspires people to go deep with their feelings.

L-R: Jim Farris (owner), John Fife and Jose Dozal, of Jim Farris Cabinets

"I had a client one time tell me – and it was the ultimate, ultimate compliment – 'I can see Jesus in every thing that you do,'" Farris recalls. "Another time, one of my professors in college made the comment, 'Your art and my art are very much alike; we both do large-format, abstract art. My art is about death and dying, but I look at your art and your painting and they say to me that you're painting about life and living.'" To me that was very profound, especially as someone who has a Christian worldview. Even in what we do, like a drawing or painting, that shines through."

Farris' creativity bloomed early.

"I could paint and draw and had very good spatial visualization," Farris remembers. "I studied painting, sculpture, and composition, and 3-Dimensional conception came very easy to me. I drew abstract landscapes."

Farris parlayed that creativity into construction gigs while studying art at the University of Houston.

"One of my best friends from church offered me a job; he was trimming new homes with another man," Farris says. "I was introduced to cabinets and trim working with wood to construction in homes, on the finish carpenter end, not framing. I worked for him for six months and was hired by somebody else."

It was then that Farris realized he was using his own truck and tools to work for others.

"I said, 'I can do this on my own! No fear!'" he says with a laugh.

He quit college after three years and founded Jim Farris Cabinets in 1976. He says his naiveté then still amazes him.

"It was a long time before I was making as much money as I was making working for the other guy," Farris says ruefully. "But I set my own agenda and early on I did anything we could get. My wife Chris worked with me in the shop and kept the books. About my third year into it, I was busy enough to hire a helper; for years, I ran with just a helper. I started off in 700sf, moved to 1,250sf, then 2,000, then 4,000 and now 8,000sf."

Today, Farris staffs two full-time employees, John and Jose (Chris still helps with the books). He has also become more discerning about the level of work he produces. He now opts to deliver higher-end cabinetry, trim and finish work in domestic and exotic woods, veneers and laminates.

"It became a conscious decision to pursue craftsmanship and quality in both construction and design how something looks as well as how it functions," Farris says.

"A lot of my clients have become close friends and we have a very good relationship with our

clients," he says. "In any business, the repeat and referral business is your best advertising. That's how we have made it all of these years; we get the best referrals."

Farris stepped up his creative game nearly three years ago when he purchased a CNC router.

"Despite all of the stuff I had seen made with routers, I didn't know how we were going to incorporate it into our day-to-day work," Farris admits. "It was pretty incredible how quick we were making things on the router and using it on every single project on some level. It doesn't replace every other machine we have in the shop, but it augments and compliments the machinery that we had and are skilled at using. This has become a new avenue for us."

It just goes to show that, 43 years after Farris started his business, his work is still about life and moving forward.

"Some guys, when they get older, they're just stuck," Farris says. "I'm always looking for something new and interesting and I thrive on a challenge on a project. That's part of what makes it so satisfying. To design something, build it, see it in its end use and also to get feedback from clients is very rewarding."

Jim Farris Cabinets is a custom cabinet shop in Pasadena, TX. -mjm