

Jerry Rumbaugh/Dan O'Neal – Studio 57

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's take a flight on Air Force One. Look at the fine cabinetry and furniture. The craftsman who worked on those furnishings is now putting his skills to work with his partner in creating beautiful customized wood products in rural Kansas. These are master craftsmen working in wood. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Jerry Rumbaugh and Dan O'Neal are partners in this business called Studio 57, which produces customized wood products near Junction City.

Jerry Rumbaugh grew up in Junction City and attended Southern Nazarene University where he met his wife. Jerry was always skilled in working with wood. He did roofing, framing, and finish carpenter work in his parents' construction company. For almost 20 years before retiring, he worked in the wood shop at New Horizons RV, building cabinets for recreational vehicles.

Dan O'Neal got a degree in music education at K-State but there were no teaching jobs open when he graduated. He went to work in L. W. Wilson's cabinet shop near Manhattan and found he really enjoyed it. His career in carpentry and woodworking took him to Wichita where he worked on the furnishings on Air Force One.

Eventually he moved back to the Junction City area and worked at New Horizons RV where he met Jerry. He worked in the wood shop at New Horizons for 11 years before retiring. Dan and his wife live at Wakefield, so he crosses the Milford Lake bridge when he goes to work. "It's a gorgeous drive," Dan said.

The two friends worked on wood projects together at New Horizons. "Jerry was wood shop supervisor," Dan said. "The exceptional quality of his work was instrumental in making the company number one in the nation," he said.

When they retired, they decided to go into business together. They set up shop at Jerry's place, which is in a rural setting along Highway 57 between Junction City and the rural community of Dwight, population 252 people. Now, that's rural.

Because Highway 57 is where the shop is located, they called their business Studio 57. Their specialty is high quality, customized wood products. They have CNC equipment which enables them to do remarkable digitally-controlled designs.

The company makes signs, headboards, lithophanes, engraved photos, ash boxes, custom lettering, CNC carvings, and more. A lithophane, by the way, is a type of back-lit etching. When their former boss at New Horizons passed away, his family asked them to make an ash box as the final resting place for the cremains, which they did.

These two craftsmen created a sign for their business which is especially eye-catching. It's an engraved acrylic sign with built-in lighting on a gorgeous cherry wood base. They can also cut out designs in Corian countertop material that can be inset in a wooden sheet.

Studio 57 produces carved photos which are like works of art. In fact, their picture of a boat was displayed at what is now the Strecker Nelson West Gallery in Manhattan.

Using a software program, the photos are superimposed onto a piece of wood which is grooved in a way that displays the design. Up close, one can feel the grooves. Step back, and it looks like a black and white photo. The grooves or lines can be cut at any width and any angle.

When asked what kind of wood they use, the answer is “Yes.” In other words, they can use any and all types of wood. Maple, cherry and oak would be the most common.

Jerry and Dan use the phrase “Woodwork Re-Imagined” to describe their work. The quality and diversity of products which they can produce is remarkable. The company’s market is growing through word of mouth.

For more information, visit Studio 57 Junction City on Facebook.

It’s time to leave Air Force One, where we’ve admired the handiwork of the craftsman who made these fine wood products. Now that craftsmanship can be found in rural Kansas. We commend Jerry Rumbaugh and Dan O’Neal for making a difference with their skills and creative abilities. If there is a wood product that can be designed, you can be sure that these guys would.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.