



Muscanell Millworks Inc.: Succeeding by Doing Things Differently

Lumber proceeds to the moulder infeed at Muscanell Millworks, which buys White Oak, Hickory, Walnut, Cherry and other North American Hardwoods.

By Deborah Wilbrink

Cortez, CO—Muscanell Millworks Inc., based here, has established success by doing things differently, using unique processes and standards to produce high quality Hardwood flooring from over 3 million board feet of lumber purchased yearly. The company manufactures solid, Hardwood flooring in long lengths with precision squared ends, and with a below-standard moisture content for less variance when installed. Both qualities are rare in the industry, according to Muscanell.

All that lumber is purchased from sawmills by mill Superintendent Bobby Comisky in the following North American Hardwood species: White Oak (mill run), Walnut (log run), Q/R White Oak (Nos. 1 and 2 Common), Red Oak (Nos. 1 and 2 Common), Cherry (Nos. 1 and 2 Common) and Hickory (mill run).

Muscanell President and Founder Doug Muscanell tells how Muscanell Millworks innovated the use of stain-free Hickory in flooring. “When we started running Hickory it was thought of as junk wood; there was a lot of stain and it looked ugly. We thought it could be a beautiful Hardwood if it were taken care of properly. We approached our supplying sawmills, and asked them to provide us with Hickory that was free of stain. It became 60-70 percent of our production. Today the majority of Hickory sold in the U.S. is stain-free.”

A second kiln drying after ripping is another way that Muscanell does production differently. Muscanell dries most of its lumber a second time with a cycle of about 12 hours. The reason, Doug said, is that, “We live in the desert and many of our customers have dry climates just like ours. We bring

Please turn to page 44



Muscanell Millworks, Cortez, CO, purchases over 3 million board feet of lumber annually to produce high quality Hardwood flooring. Pictured is a Muscanell team member overseeing the lumber infeed to the rip saw.

"We call it the Muscanell Way: training people, caring for people and the result is that they'll do a good job for you."

**–Doug Muscanell,
President and Founder,
Muscanell Millworks Inc.**



Muscanell Millworks President and Founder Doug Muscanell and Mill Superintendent Bobby Comisky stand with Walnut logs procured for custom sawing at Kendrick Forest Products in Iowa.



Mill Foreman Phillip Garcia does a quality check on White Oak flooring.

the average moisture content of delivered lumber from 8-9 percent down to 5-7 percent so that our floors don't shrink. We've built a niche for many years by drying floors much drier than standard flooring. There's a need for it."

Muscanell ships to over 150 customers, including major distributors. A few high-end homes and climate-controlled museums on the East Coast use Muscanell flooring, too, acclimatizing it to their own environments.

The company's history has deeply affected its product line. Doug Muscanell and his wife, Secretary-Treasurer Karen Harbaugh, moved to Colorado in 1986. They began building decorative wooden boxes for the American craft industry. As sales grew, they hired Bobby Comisky, and the three used a bandsaw and steamer to craft burl wood. "I had just built a breezeway connecting our house and shop when a fire burned them both to the ground," recalled Doug. "There was no way we could make enough boxes to pay off that debt. We had no choice but to do something that would

Muscanell's textured flooring is another popular product. Random patterning is available in all widths and species and in four styles: Blue Mountain, Cimarron, Bryce Canyon and Buckboard. Although the company has textured some lumber for many years, the process has recently changed. "We don't shatter the edges when we texture so there's no need to bevel the edges. We do it differently," Doug commented.

Muscanell Millworks also manufactures stair parts, crafting treads, risers, and nosing to match their unfinished flooring. Most stair parts are custom made to order.

Twenty-seven people work in the 45,000-square-foot of buildings, located on 10 acres. Doing things differently extends to human resources. Each person is cross-trained and the workers rotate through floor positions every hour and a half, keeping output consistent. "We call it the Muscanell Way: training people, caring for people," said Doug, "and the result is that they'll do a good job for you."



High quality Hickory flooring by Muscanell Millworks is pictured.



Muscanell Millworks produced this custom quartersawn White Oak flooring for the Barnes Museum in Philadelphia.

make more money. We took the chance on making flooring differently and it paid off."

In 1995, Muscanell Millworks created their own grades of lumber for long-length flooring. "We wanted to buck the system. An average flooring length at the time was 2 ¾ or 3-foot. Our average length was five-foot and longer. In order to do that we had to procure a different type of lumber than the average. That's why we put names on our grades over 20 years ago." Distributors loved the wood, orders multiplied, and so did Muscanell Millworks' capacity. Today, Muscanell grades are the Hacienda, Casa, Madera, and Mesa, a tribute to the Southwestern locale.

Equipment used in the plant, such as moulders, rip systems, grinders, end matchers, the boiler and sander carry various manufacturers' names. These include Mellott Manufacturing, Leadermac, Hasko, Marinus, Progressive, Eagle, Froedge, Cresswood, Decton and Cantek, as well as forklifts by Nissan and Hyster.

Hardwood sawdust is a by-product of the milling. The sawdust is used in manufacturing the company's Woodchucks Fire Logs, using the Danish C. F. Nielsen briquetting press. They burn without spark and pop and leave less than 1 percent ash. The plant sells the logs locally, and an area distributor buys lots. The company is looking for more fire

log distribution, noted Doug. "We might team up with other industries, and would consider making the fire logs for other companies."

Sawdust fuels the pre-dryer, the Kiln-Direct kiln and the Burnham boiler system that heats the plant. In winter, hot water heats concrete slabs and melts the snow around the plant.

The company recently found a major cost-savings strategy in its co-op electricity, which penalized for unavoidable power surges from high-efficiency motors which, nonetheless, sometimes were idle. Muscanell solved the problem by consulting a local engineer who directed incoming energy through a custom bank of capacitors. Doug stated, "The power factor went from 62 percent to 96 percent, saving us about \$5,000 a month in our power bill. Our electrical room is much cooler, too."

Recycling sawdust and saving power are not only cost-efficient, they are part of a company-wide commitment to sustainability. Comisky and Doug Muscanell visit possible suppliers, making it "a point to partner in business with people who have the same beliefs we do about forestry," Doug explained. "The Hardwood industry overall is a wonderful industry, with a lot of family-owned companies and people who care about their forests. Forestry is a science. If you let foresters manage forests, they'll do a good job of it."

The company is also very conscience of the dangers of fire. The plant is surrounded by lowland scrub, which gets lightning-strike fires in the summer. Doug was a volunteer firefighter for 23 years, and four other employees are firefighters with the nearby Lewis-Arriola Volunteer Fire Department. The forest service deals with neighboring forest fires at higher elevations.

Additionally, Muscanell Millworks takes full advantage of its membership in the National Wood Flooring Association, exhibiting every year at the trade show. "I wish more people would join," said Doug, "because the association's information bank is enormous and wonderful!"

The innovative president of Muscanell is retiring to a consulting role next year. Mill Superintendent Bobby Comisky has been with the company since its box-building days. Thus, Doug explained, "I'm gradually turning over responsibilities to Bobby. For example, he is doing all the purchasing of the wood right now."

The business was sold about two years ago to Eugen Lägler GmbH, a German manufacturer of floor sanders. "We wanted to sell the business," said Doug, "but keep it going



Key personnel at Muscanell Millworks includes: Karen Harbaugh, Secretary-Treasurer; Doug Muscanell, President and Founder; and Bobby Comisky, Mill Superintendent.



This view is from atop the silo at the Muscanell's facility near Cortez, CO.

to sustain jobs in the community. Lägler has the talent, skills and resources to keep our Muscanell Millworks going for many years. They promote from within, and they are already working on a 20-year plan! We will continue to do things differently, standing out for our quality products." ■

Learn more at
www.muscanell.com