

THE BUILDER'S JOURNALTM

Inside Story



St. Croix Valley Hardwoods
As Luck Would Have It





Photo by Dave Fick

Select Hickory Paneling.

St. Croix Valley Hardwoods As Luck Would Have It

By Cynthia Lueck Sowden

Gordy Fick, owner of St. Croix Valley Hardwoods, is passionate about service and as genuine as the lumber he sells. For more than 25 years, St. Croix Valley Hardwoods (SCVH) has provided top quality hardwood lumber to the millwork and cabinetry trade. Based in Luck, WI, the company began offering their products to builders and contractors in commercial and residential construction several years ago. In 2007, Luckwood®, a line of premium hardwood flooring, tongue-and-groove paneling, millwork and moldings, made its debut. Demand is keen and growing.

That's very gratifying to owner Gordy Fick, who started swinging a hammer when he was 12 years old. "I still have a real passion for what's going on. I get excited about these doggone things," he said. Now in his very vigorous seventies, the "semi-retired" entrepreneur is still very much at the helm of the company he and two friends started in August 1981, in a factory that used to make Duncan Yo-Yos.

Luckwood® is solid hardwood paneling and flooring, not a laminate or veneer. Specifications are exacting, which is what you'd expect from a

company selling hardwood to cabinet-makers. "We don't want to rush a lot of stuff through our manufacturing plants," said Gordy. "Our lumber is in good shape." There is an art to kiln drying wood without having it crack, and St. Croix Valley Hardwoods has developed its expertise. Gordy continued, "When we get it into our yards, it has 75-100 percent moisture content. In order for it to work for furniture, cabinets, paneling or flooring, it's got to be down to 6-8 percent. We have people who watch it very closely. We take pride in what we do."



Select Maple Flooring.



Luckwood® from Luck, WI.

SCVH provides a simple and unqualified guarantee, “The quality of every Luckwood board or panel is guaranteed to meet your satisfaction.” They can make the guarantee because they control all aspects of the lumber process, from the tree to when it’s packed in the box.

SCVH not only dries the wood, they will also plane, rip, mould it. Contrary to other hardwood manufacturers, however, SCVH values the character variations in wood. “I’ve always loved the different colors in the knots and the streaks,” Gordy said.

It didn’t take much for this love of natural variation to become SCVH’s new product line. Sound character defects such as knots, sap streaks, mineral stains, heartwood and wild grains all show up in Luckwood® flooring and paneling, which is offered in select (clear) and rustic grades.

The sales manager at SCVH’s Forest Products division in White Bear Lake, notes, “When people go to a retail lumberyard to buy flooring, every single piece looks identical. When rustic material gets made, the boards are actually selected for

the character that they bring, the knots, the sap, all of it. It’s a ‘lower’ grade of wood that’s used, but it’s handled and sorted better than high-end wood. A lot of attention goes into manufacturing. The same with our paneling”

The establishment of the Luckwood® line came at a time when builders and contractors began putting more “character” grades into custom-built homes. “The lake country is what got us going,

because people wanted a rustic look,” Gordy said. “It’s really become a trend over the last three to five years. It’s not down in the basement any more. It used to be such a uniform thing. Everybody wanted the same thing. Now nobody wants what their neighbors have. It seems like the individuality has come out in people.”

Luckwood® flooring and paneling has been installed in several high-end



Select Cherry Paneling.

homes. And interest is growing. The quality and unique character traits of the wood can help builders wow their customers and distinguish their work. Luckwood® hardwood products come in several species, including ash, birch, cherry, hickory, maple, oak and walnut. Much of it comes from the Midwest. “The nicest oak grown is from Wisconsin, simply because of the cold weather,” said Gordy. “The trees don’t grow as fast and they have a much smaller growth every year. It’s fine-textured.” In all, the company offers more than 30 species, including 17 “exotics” ranging from African mahogany to Yellowheart (Pau Amerillo).

SCVH places a high value on providing sustainable and renewable wood products. They are committed to using eco-friendly manufacturing processes that make efficient use of natural resources. Towards this end, the company is in the process of being FSC-certified and is on-track to become a lean manufacturing operation.

St. Croix Valley Hardwoods supports its products with service that Gordy said “takes a backseat to nobody.” The company’s “hands on” approach to



St. Croix Valley Hardwoods takes care of their builder customers through their Forest Products division in White Bear Lake.

customer service means they will do whatever it takes to meet a customer’s needs. Each customer is valued and treated with respect. Gordy continues, “Most of the time, you get a two- or three-week notice and that fits right into the schedule. But if a builder needs a molding or flooring in three days, we can do it. We believe in the teamwork philosophy, and all our workers in Luck understand that our jobs are on the line

if we don’t take care of the customer.”

SCVH takes care of builders through its Forest Products division in White Bear Lake. The offices are a showcase for Luckwood® and customers are welcome to come in to see the quality and richness of the product first-hand.

Luckwood® flooring comes from a dedicated manufacturing line and can be made in wide or narrow widths, whatever a contractor or designer may specify. “Most everything is made to order,” said Patty Miles, Inside Sales Manager. “Some contractors are doing some real artistry. We want to help them with that. We prefer for them to tell us what they want, and we’ll make it, versus ‘Here’s what we make, what do you want?’”

Patty added thoughtfully, “It’s a conversation. It’s not going through a catalog. It’s very custom.”

For more information or quotes, contact St. Croix Valley Hardwoods at 4250 Otter Lake Road, White Bear Lake, MN 55110. Call 651-407-2828, or 800-236-7098, or visit www.scvh.com. Gordy Fick encourages builders, designers and contractors to tour the plant in Luck, Wis. Please call ahead to make arrangements.



Gordy Fick, owner of St. Croix Valley Hardwoods, is passionate about service and as genuine as the lumber he sells. His appreciation for the character of different hardwoods led to the development of Luckwood®, a line of premium hardwood products. His great love of the outdoors is supported in the company’s sustainable and renewable forest practices. His high regard for the customer is echoed in the company’s philosophy of doing whatever it takes to meet a customer’s needs.