

A CUT ABOVE:



RIMI WOODCRAFT NAILS DOWN NEARLY 60 YEARS OF SUCCESS IN THE BRONX

by Noah Fowle

Since it was founded nearly six decades ago in the Bronx, Rimi Woodcraft Corporation has grown from literally a mom and pop business into one of the premiere woodworking companies in the metropolitan area, counting major corporations and renowned celebrities such as Jerry Seinfeld among its clientele.

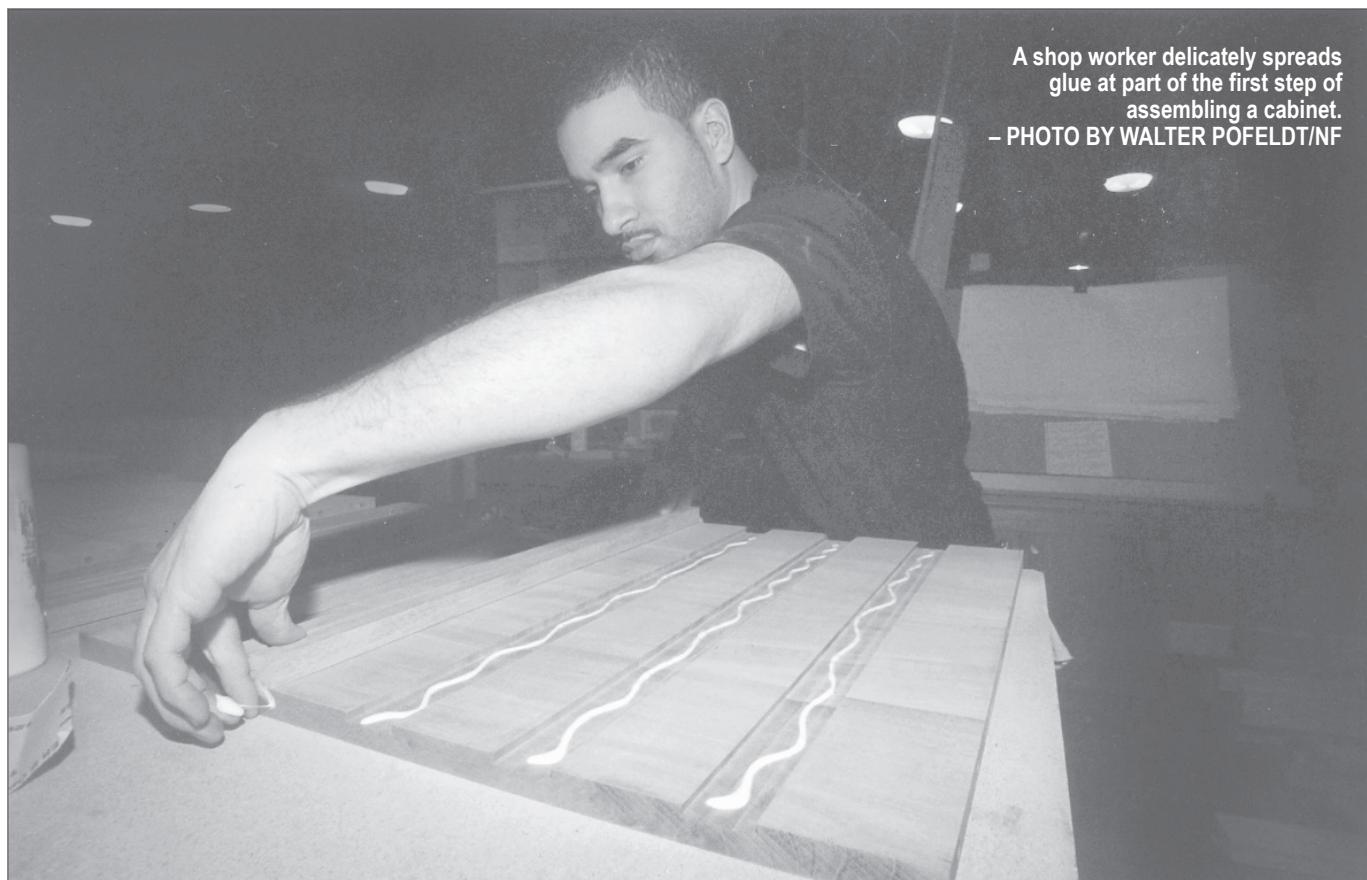
Backed by a commitment to quality craftsmanship, Rimi's owners, the Rizzo family, continues to run its woodworking operations on the same principles the company was founded on by Dominick Rizzo, an Italian immigrant who started the business in 1943 with his wife.

Beginning his work as a cabinetmaker in his youth in Italy, Dominick Rizzo emigrated to New York City with his brother and a close friend to find similar opportunities as the thousands of other Europeans crossing the Atlantic Ocean in the 1920s. Anthony Rizzo, who now co-owns the family-run business with his sister Marie, recalled his father's triumphant story with both admiration and zeal. "The three of them--my father, my uncle and their friend--moved into a one bedroom apartment together," Rizzo explained. "They scraped by, working hard and taking turns sleeping in the one bed in the apartment. Each person got it for only eight hours a day."

Over the years, the Rizzo family gained a foothold in their adopted city, and when Anthony was only three years old, his father and mother, Rose, decided to go into business for themselves. In 1947, they opened a shop on 156th Street and Melrose Avenue in the Bronx. From that location, Anthony said there were both good and bad times. "On one Christmas Eve, they were ready to close down completely when a merchant knocked on their door and asked to sell his Christmas trees out front. My parents agreed and he gave them \$25 for using the space," Rizzo said. "That money kept the store open, provided a beautiful Christmas and propelled the business forward."

Although Anthony said there were times that his parents struggled, the business continued to flourish, and eventually his parents moved their operation to 151st Street and Wales Avenue in 1957. It was during that time that Anthony began hanging around the drafting rooms of the shop and started to pick up on various aspects of the family business, which specializes in architectural woodwork, including ornate shelving, elaborate doorjams and quality cabinets. From there, he also studied the manufacturing end of the plant and even joined a union as a cabinetmaker. "I wasn't great, but the idea was to give me a little taste of everything and to allow me to learn how to swing a hammer so that I understood all aspects of the business," he said.

In 1970, with a steady stream of large projects coming in, the family decided to take advantage of a developing industrial area around Zerega Avenue and opened a 60,000 square foot warehouse on Commerce Avenue. Anthony said that the smooth move happened literally over the



A shop worker delicately spreads glue at part of the first step of assembling a cabinet.
- PHOTO BY WALTER POFELDT/NF



Dominick and Rose Rizzo founded Rimi Woodcraft almost six decades ago.

weekend, and production at Rimi continued without skipping a beat. "We received a lot of support from the city and specifically Mayor John Lindsay, who was encouraging industrial development in the Bronx at that time," Anthony explained. "My father was good at keeping his different projects organized and running unimpeded."

Since opening the Zerega plant, Rimi Woodcraft has continued to grow, and has completed jobs for high profile clients spanning from the business world to celebrity circles. Anthony facilitated the designs and installation for the Xerox headquarters in Rochester, New York, a job that holds a special place in his heart. "I met my future wife on that project," he said.

Rimi Woodcraft also did extensive woodwork on the Citibank and AOL Time Warner headquarters, both located in Manhattan, major law firms and financial institutions such as Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and American Express, and other notable clients including RJR Nabisco and Tiffany & Company.

In addition to large corporate projects, the family business also does work of all scope and size in private residences, and in some cases, the homes of well-known figures. "We worked on the home of Alan Klein, who managed the Beatles," he said. "And we completed a job for Jerry Seinfeld."

During the years, with the normal ebbs and flows of business, Rimi Woodcraft has balanced both its high profile clients with its smaller, more personal installations, offering the same level of integrity, commitment to excellence and attention to



Marie and Anthony Rizzo are the co-owners of Rimi Woodcraft, which was founded by their father, whose portrait hangs in their Commerce Avenue office. – PHOTO BY WALTER POFELDT/NF

detail that the business was built on nearly six decades ago, Rizzo said.

Keeping his eyes on the future, Anthony said he is hoping that when his son graduates from Manhattan College, he will attend a technical school before joining the family business, eventually becoming the third generation at the helm of Rimi

Woodcraft. Now that Rimi has affiliated companies on Canal Street in Manhattan, another in upstate Middletown, New York and a third in Germany, the Rizzo family is looking forward to at least another 60 years of offering quality craftsmanship in the Bronx and beyond.



Behind the trusted name of Rimi Woodcraft is a dedicated staff of wood working experts, including (l-r) Ian Malings, Julia Cupertino, John Mignella, Jim Clapper, John Dinca, Claudio Corbellini, Vic Fusillo, George Desis, James La Sante, Edward Horn and Peter Bieler. – PHOTO BY WALTER POFELDT/NF



A cabinetmaker makes some precise measurements while working in the Rimi shop. – PHOTO BY WALTER POFELDT/NF