



gan to branch off on his own.

But he's far from alone.

Specializing now in restoration, refinishing, repairs and marquetry through his own Holland-based business, Into the Woods, Cala finds most pride in collaborating with colleagues.

"You won't find better-skilled artisans anywhere," he says of Michigan. "There is great talent in this state."

### Reveling In Partnership

Nearby in Grand Rapids, commercial real estate developer Jim Cash loves leveraging strengths to address new market opportunities.

He also loves wine.

When Cash couldn't find the products he needed to create the home cellar he wanted, he decided to design and build his own wine furniture, justifying the costly process as due diligence.

It could — just possibly — spark a new business.

Fast forward a few years: Wine Specta-

tor magazine features Revel Custom Wine Cellars' first project — a 1,700-bottle cellar in Long Island, NY. The article (followed by acclaim in Robb Report and other media) launches a niche clientele of Fortune 500 CEOs, Hollywood stars, celebrity athletes and other discerning wine collectors around the world.

"I didn't know if it would evolve," Cash reflects. "But here we are in West Michigan, stock full of talented artisans and high quality furniture makers, where jobs are created by small business and new business innovation."

After securing patents for Revel's visionary designs, Cash contracted Benchmark Wood Studio in Holland to craft his wine furniture from premium Honduran mahogany. Multiple times since, this partnership's ingenuity has earned Revel prestigious international design recognition.

"The quality of their work is spectacular," Cash says of Benchmark's artisans. "But they're also creative. We have more new product designs in the pipeline than we can

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY ANDY ARCHITECTS (TOP); BENCHMARK (LEFT)



Opposite page, top: Decorative wood brackets crafted by Benchmark artisans were designed by A.M.D.G. Architects Inc. Below: The Holland-based firm specializes in custom cabinetry. This page: A prolific team of woodcrafters at Benchmark creates dynamic products for Revel Custom Wine Cellars (top left) and A.M.D.G. Architects Inc. (top right).

effectively bring to market in the near-term future.”

Based in a state-of-the-art facility on the north end of Holland, Benchmark Wood Studio’s skilled craftsmen are renowned for incomparable custom millwork, cabinetry and furniture; they also create unique trusses, suspended wood ceilings, carriage doors and decorative brackets.

But the firm’s Design Studio houses interior designers and draftsmen as well, making the firm a collaborative chameleon.

“Working directly with builders, architects, remodelers and homeowners, we fit ourselves into different roles,” says Jeff Swieringa, Benchmark’s design team manager. “Repeatedly partnering with veteran builders like Mike Schaap also lends us valuable insights, which makes us more than just a cabinet shop.”

The result, shares Grand Rapids-based A.M.D.G. Architects, Inc., another partner, is Benchmark’s unparalleled execution of their clients’ visions.

“We’re very comfortable collaborating,” says senior architect Brent Dykstra. “It works best for everyone when people play to their strengths.”

Andrew Brown reclaims fallen wood and other “green” materials to craft unique rustic and “urban primitive” furniture in Lakeside.

### Reclaiming The Past

Sometimes, collaboration becomes the root of self-discovery.

Before founding Hearthwoods Rustic Furnishings in Lakeside — which specializes in crafting custom floors from reclaimed antique barn wood and “urban primitive” furniture from discarded trees, historic machinery parts and other “green” materials — Andrew Brown spent most of history class staring out at the woods.

Fortunately, Brown’s history teacher — T.J. Woods — was also his Biology/Nature Study instructor. Here, Brown excelled. Toward that school year’s end, the 14-year-old told Woods he was thinking of making his parents a table for their 25th anniversary. His teacher offered to help.

“We got a big old saw from the wood shop, the kind that’s eight feet long, with a

handle on each end,” Brown says. “He taught me how to sharpen it, and off we went. He knew of a tree that had fallen.”

Together, they cut off a couple thick slices of this Eastern White Pine. Woods showed Brown how to attach log legs, how to plane, and how to sand the wood flat.

“I loved every minute,” Brown says. “I was so proud I could build furniture! Being from a thrifty family, the idea of using fallen wood was even better.

“My folks *loved* that table.”

Working as an ad rep in Chicago after college, Brown returned weekends to his family’s Lakeside home. He “decompressed” from the Windy City by hiking and cutting firewood. “For balance,” he says, “I needed to reconnect with nature.”

Finding Brown could also connect with numbers, his employer promoted him to na-

