





MASTER CRAFTSMAN

MASTER CRAFTSMAN GARY ANDERSON, TOOL AND DIE MAKER, MACHINIST, FABRICATOR **ANDERSON TOOLING**

In a world of ultra-custom, high-end and antique, it's not surprising the person who can make or reproduce just about anything is indispensable. Yet, paradoxically, tool and die men like Southampton's Gary Anderson are a dying breed. How else does a persnickety homeowner replace a missing finial for their 18th century gate, or find parts for window latches that fell out of fashion three decades earlier? What happens when CAD software and 3D printing won't cut it? Someone always needs to get their hands dirty.

As the Hamptons' last true tool and die maker east of the Shinnecock Canal, Anderson and his team at Anderson Tooling are never short of work. And their hands are rarely clean.

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The 66-year-old Springs resident, who will celebrate 45 years as a machinist on August 8, says he's glad for the steady flow of work, but it also makes him painfully aware of how few people remain in his trade. "I get no breaks, being the only one who does it," Anderson says, describing the vast array of jobs that come into his shop. "I average 60 to 100 hours a week."

A messy stack of job orders grows ever higher on his desk, each new addition threatening to tip it and send papers careening over the side. Still, as overwhelmed as he is, Anderson seems loath to turn anyone away. At one point during an interview at the shop, his phone rings and he quickly denies a request for what turned out to be a customer seeking special screws to mount a license plate bracket. But after some quick, silent calculations, and a bit more information, Anderson relents and acquiesces. The screws were in his customer's hand the next day.

The work is incredibly varied, Anderson says, explaining that projects range from a simple pair of screws to the winding, wood and brushed-metal spiral staircase that appeared in a 1997 issue of *Architectural Digest*.

"You name it, we make it—anything imaginable," Anderson says, noting later, "Metal, plastics, wood... Anything that anybody wants."

Anderson completed his apprenticeship and journeymanhood over nine years at the Bulova watchcase factory in Sag Harbor, where he learned to operate milling machines, lathe turning, precision magnetic grinding and working hand tools. As he built specialized tools for the factory and its workers, Anderson used his off hours to add the art of heat treating, forging, engraving and sculpturing to his growing repertoire of skills.

Bulova allowed him to do private jobs on his own time and he took full advantage of it. The blossoming craftsman had experience well beyond his station by the time Bulova closed in 1981, and after five

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more years working for Shaw Aero Devices in East Hampton, Anderson was ready to start his own company.

Anderson Tooling was one of four local machine shops when he opened the business in 1986. “[Today] I’m the only one that’s in the Yellow Pages,” Anderson says, pointing out that the Hamptons still has its share of fabricators, but he does much more than weld.

“Anybody can be a fabricator,” Anderson says. “You get up and tie your shoes—you just fabricated your laces.”

Anderson’s work requires a much wider breadth of knowledge and a gung-ho spirit for problem solving. “Everything is experimentation,” he says. “It’s like you’re a doctor, always practicing.”

Even with mastery over so many materials and nearly half a century under his belt, Anderson regularly takes on projects that demand innovation or an untested approach. “It’s a very diversified field,” he says.

When a client brings something in, Anderson is often their only remaining hope for a solution. “People call me the ‘last chance,’” he says, adding later, “A lot of people call me ‘the duplicator.’”

Anderson and his guys—including Les, who’s been there 20 years, and the younger Conrad, just a few years out of high school—make perfect replicas. Then

they use various patinas, paints and rubs to match their parts to the originals. “I can make them look brand new or ancient,” Anderson says.

Architects, designers and contractors look to Anderson for the unique solutions they’d never see on a shelf or create themselves, because “A custom thing is very hard to find,” he says.

Along with creating objects or custom tools, Anderson helps create things no one has ever seen before. “I make inventions,” he says, explaining how he works with inventors to build their prototypes. But beyond creating the objects or machines for these customers, “I know nothing about it,” Anderson says, noting that his work for them stays totally confidential.

He even collaborates with East Hampton and Southampton townships to make the small, rectangular clam gauges local clambers use to check if their catch is big enough to keep.

“If I can make it, I will. If I can’t, I’ll find a way of getting it made,” he says. “I’ll make whatever I have to, to make something work.”

Anderson acknowledges it’s an ego boost to realize he can make just about anything put before him. “It’s a very weird business,” he says. “It’s fun. I love what I’m doing.”

— Oliver Peterson