

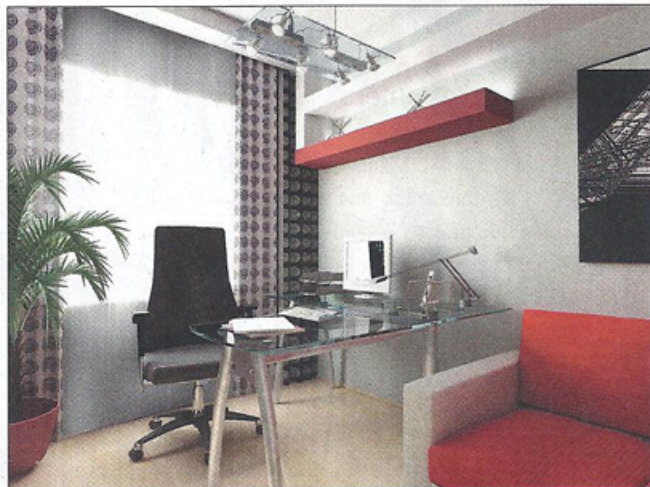
Your Projects

Commercial Connections

Remodeler turns to commercial work to provide a balance with his company's residential side

When Stephen Jaron started Renovate & Restore 10 years ago, he spent the first few years concentrating on residential remodeling. But as he began subcontracting for restaurants and stores, he decided to pursue more commercial jobs to help maintain a steady flow of work in all economic conditions in his Naples, Fla., market. "I wanted a balance," Jaron says. "In the long term, [commercial work] would smooth out the peaks and valleys. It also gives us a larger client base to pull from."

Though his primary work is still residential, Jaron bids on tenant improvements for businesses such as restaurants, salons, and stores. "But commercial jobs are more competitive than residential bids," he points out. In addition, the south Florida market where he works has a glut of commercial properties. "A lot of



Steven Jaron's remodeling company, Renovate & Restore, built these modern office suites for two commercial property tenants.

it is vacant," Jaron says. "I see strip malls without tenants."

SOURCING THE WORK

Renovate and Restore's commercial work comes from a variety of sources, including referrals from other general contractors, as well as from property man-

ers and real estate agents. Jaron also finds jobs in Dodge Project News, a print and online subscription database of building projects throughout North America, and CDC News, an online subscription service that provides regional public and private commercial construction leads



(see "Commercial Lead Reports" this page).

Jaron says that developing the commercial side of his business is a long-term effort. "I definitely have to develop relationships with architects, engineers, and commercial property managers," he says.

COMMERCIAL BASICS

Jaron usually bids on tenant improvement projects for retail businesses and restaurants that are leasing space in shopping plazas or in doctors' or dentists' offices. Much of the existing space is basic and raw, with just concrete floors.

He says that commercial work is more straightforward than residential. The tenant usually has a set of plans that they bid out. "If we are in the ballpark, we get to

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Commercial Lead Reports

Remodeler Stephen Jaron had been using Dodge Project News, published online and in print by McGraw-Hill Construction, but found that the Construction Data Company's CDC News provided better leads for private commercial work. Though the Dodge report lists a lot of public work, Jaron says that much of that information is also available through online government sources.

For both Dodge and CDC News, report cost is based on the geographic area. Jaron's Dodge subscription included six counties in southwest Florida. CDC News costs him less because he can define a tighter area (three counties) and can subscribe by type of work (tenant improvements and commercial build-outs and alterations). He can search the online database by type of job (restaurant/retail/medical), type of building, or project cost. The listings include the owner's name and the architect or engineer's contact information. Jaron usually e-mails the architect or engineer, then follows up with a phone call. "If possible, I want to get an appointment or a copy of the blueprints so I can work on a bid," he says. —N.P.

Commercial Connections *continued*

negotiate with the owner. We don't have a lot of design input," he says.

To do commercial projects, a company must be bonded for commercial work. "Bonding can

be restrictive," Jaron points out. "You get rated to a certain dollar amount. If you're bonded for \$1 million, you can't do a \$2 million project," he explains.

Jaron spends a lot of time mak-

ing sure his commercial bids are thorough and accurate. He and his crew keep up with commercial codes. His in-house crew handles the carpentry, drywall, and trim work for commercial jobs, but he subcontracts electrical, plumbing, roofing, HVAC, and concrete.

The actual bidding process for commercial projects can take a long time, and there may be a specific time line based on leases or bank loans. However, there is more flexibility in working hours, with longer days and weekend work. —*Nina Patel*

Neat and Trim

Trim design basics

There are some great replacement windows available today, but to complement the design of older houses they usually need exterior trimming. Plain or fancy, there are a few basic considerations in the design of appropriate trim.

Unless manufactured with a wood exterior, most new windows are made with a thin siding-stop type frame and a hidden attachment fin. This works fine for installation, but to replicate the style of traditional homes, there should be exterior trim on the top and sides as well as a visible sloped sill at the bottom. The old wooden windows were secured in place by the trim, and if the house is to look authentic or well-designed, the trim should look substantial.

The width of the window trim should be proportionate with other trim on the house. If the corner boards and eave trim are wide, then most likely the window jambs would also be wide. If other areas of the house are elaborately developed, then the window trim should also show more panache. It's probably not wise to make the window trim too fancy if the rest of the house architecture will not visually support it.

When you get close to a historic house or reconstruction, you can see that the trim is quite substantial compared with today's homes. This creates heightened shadow lines and tex-

ture on the façade, imparting a greater sense of character and permanence. Generally, the older the historic style of the house, the thicker the trim pieces will be. Availability of wood and the cost of milling surely played a role, but it is unlikely that the Pilgrims would have used a ¾-inch trimboard on their homes. Eighteenth century homes in Newport, R.I., have window jambs more than 2 inches thick. (The clapboards were thick, too.) In Williamsburg, Va., they are about 1½ inches thick, but in postwar homes they run only about 7/8 inches thick.

More classically inspired houses often used backbands and cornices to enhance the windows, but a historic home would never have a cornice above the window unless there were also jamb trimboards and a sill. Backbands and crown moldings can add shadow, texture, and substance to the ensemble but should be used carefully. If there are shutters, these should lay atop the side trim as if they could close over the sash opening.

The proper use of window trim can elevate a mundane façade to an elegant composition. In the hands of a master, it can create an unforgettable image of harmonious proportion and diligent craftsmanship. —*Dick Kawalek, a registered architect for more than 30 years, is founder of Kawalek Architects, in Cleveland; rck@rktekt.com.*

