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The Leadership Issue

40 Under 40: Millennials make their mark

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Woodworking millennials make their mark

Meet the 2022 Wood Industry 40 Under 40.

Woodworking Network celebrates its seventh annual awarding of the Wood Industry 40 Under 40, recognizing the next generation of professionals who are making an impact.

“We invite the entire industry to join us in celebrating some of the best and brightest contributors to wood products manufacturing in North America. Being selected as a 40 Under 40 honoree carries far more than the distinction of public industry recognition. It is the hallmark of excellence and stands as a living testimonial to the health and well-being of our vibrant industry,” said Tim Fixmer, president and CEO of CCI Media, the parent of Woodworking Network. “It is reassuring to see so many bright, industrious individuals being placed into nomination by their associates.”



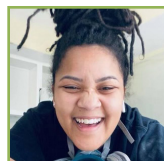
Troy MacBeth Abromaitis, director of Development at Bucci Developments, “is a champion

of sustainable design and construction practices,” says his nominator. At the British Columbia-based Bucci Developments, Abromaitis has overseen 34 multi-family development projects totaling \$1.6 billion — and he’s not done yet. “Troy believes in building a better world for future generations. He is a natural leader, bringing poise, determination and passion to his endeavors.” Troy was the first Indigenous president of the REIBC and sits on the board of at least four home builder associations; he is also involved with All Nations Outreach, an organization dedicated to helping those with addictions.



Thomas Allott, manager of Stiles University, “is dedicated to educating our industry and develop-

ing the next generation of woodworkers,” says his nominator. In his six-plus years as manager of the accredited Michigan-based university, “Thomas has impacted thousands of individuals in their journey toward workforce development. Whether through Stiles University or his efforts to support other educational organizations, Thomas is one of the most dedicated individuals in the industry when it comes to supporting the development of manufacturing professionals.” He’s also on the board for The MiLL and Pittsburgh State University. Stiles University is part of Stiles Machinery, a leading provider of wood manufacturing solutions.



Aimee Barnett is the owner/operator of Barnett Cabinet Painting, where she also holds the

title of lead finisher while husband Jake handles the refacing jobs. Considered a “selfless, industrious leader,” Aimee and the Minnesota-based company are making

The 2022 Class of Wood Industry 40 Under 40 is sponsored by PaintLine. (See sidebar, page 40). Close to 160 submissions were judged by a team of editors. Due to a tie, there are 41 this year.

“I am continually amazed by the list of nominees from which we have to select. The 40 under 40 Class of 2022 represents an extraordinary group of young women and men who have excelled in their careers,” said Harry Urban, FDMC publisher. “Through hard work, creativity and passion they have made a difference at their organizations. In addition to their dedication to their professions, they’ve also contributed to their communities in countless ways. Way to go Class of 2022, we salute you!”

Honorees also received an engraved plaque provided by Epilog Laser. For more on the honorees visit bit.ly/WWN-40U40.

an impact for going above and beyond. Her nominator notes, “Aimee has helped my son, a 24-year-old owner, in developing his business. She has selflessly helped train and teach us how to troubleshoot and freely given of her time to help us and others.” And, he adds, “As a minority and female owner, she is also paving a way for others in the industry” while sowing seeds of interest in woodworking as a career to others in the community.



Phyllis Beyers, product manager at Genesis Products, “brings positive energy and creativity

to all aspects of her work, life and volunteer activities that elevate others. She has built trust with customers and suppliers who rely on her to make major product decisions,” says one nominator. Her achievements at the Indiana-based components manufacturer include the creation of

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the Flatlay video series, which she records monthly. “Phyllis is motivated to truly help her customers incorporate the best design trends into their products. [She] looks for excellent solutions that keep her customers winning in very competitive markets,” notes another nominator. Beyers is also on the board for the Bashor Children’s Home.



David Biggs, Digital Strategy director at Woodworking Network,

is one of the driving forces behind the success of the nation’s largest woodworking media source, CCI Media, headquartered in Iowa. “As Digital Strategy director, he has shepherded the website, social media channels, webinars, event apps, podcasts, audience research, and numerous other digital initiatives over the past decade,” says his nominator. The results of his work are clearly evident in the growth of the company’s online capabilities and statistics. Building on his leadership experience at Woodworking Network, Biggs has stepped up as the WMMA chair of the WMMA/WMIA Joint Technology Committee.



Nick Bohlke is president of Manufacturing at M. Bohlke Veneer Corp.

His recognition of new trends and developments, and the efforts and initiatives Bohlke has put in place to improve safety, technology, marketing and HR, have brought the Ohio-based MBVC to the forefront of its field. His nominator adds, “Nick sees our workforce as a team. To continue a successful 50-plus years old business is no small feat; to do so requires evolution and adaption, and Nick under-

stands this deeply. He wants his employees to be successful, independent, content/happy, and to work together as a cohesive team for ourselves, for our customers, and for the company and wood industry as a whole.”



Andrew Busie is “a person who changes the lives of those who get to know him.” A seventh

grade math and middle school carpentry teacher at Philadelphia Elementary School in Tennessee, he plays an important role in developing a future workforce for the woodworking industry. And not only is he teaching them important life skills, but many have started their own woodworking business. Adds one nominator, “This [goes beyond] the walls of the school and covers our entire county. The impact Andrew has on those that he teaches and works with is special.” In addition to teaching, Busie is the owner/operator of With the Grain, a custom woodworking shop.



Blair Chandler has an important role in helping woodworking companies finance their

future. The manager of Equipment Leasing & Finance at SCM Group, Chandler works with small and large manufacturers to acquire new technology to improve their productivity and profitability. “Motivated, driven and professional,” her nominator says, “she is super quick on customer response and our lease customers appreciate her professional approach.” Always willing to share her knowledge, she recently discussed the pros and cons of various leasing programs on a podcast with Woodworking Network. A leading provider of woodwork-

ing technology, SCM’s U.S. headquarters are in Georgia.



Nick Cox, president of Webster Door & Millwork, took over the family business while

in his 20s, and under his leadership the Louisiana-based custom cabinetry and millwork firm has grown significantly. “In 2016, Nick implemented modern technology to bring this small wood shop into the 21st century,” says his nominator, adding “Nick is a hard worker and is completely genuine. He’s always jumping in to help our employees. And he’s always researching and finding new methods or tools to streamline our work.” Cox, who also serves in local politics, can add TV star to his resume: Webster Door & Millwork was among those featured on HGTV’s Home Town Kickstart: Making over Minden.



Stephen Fancy, owner of British Columbia-based Northern Superior Woodworks, is described

as motivated, competitive and passionate about woodworking. A Red Seal cabinet-maker, Fancy “is motivated by wanting to deliver the best product with an outstanding reputation,” says his nominator. “He doesn’t settle for just okay; he wants every job to be one that he would want in his own home.” Under Fancy’s leadership, NSW has expanded its product scope of cabinetry for all rooms as well as countertops, and also its sales territory. “Stephen never loses focus of progressing the business. He has a keen eye for design and the calmness to understand customers’ needs,” adds the nominator.

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Matthew Garrett,

vice president – Hardwoods at Utah-based Lewis Cabinet Specialties Group, has seen it all in

his 19 years in the industry. Garrett's nominator notes, "Because he started as an entry-level shop employee, he knows every position within the shop and willingly steps in to help when they are short-handed. He leads over 140 employees from a place of understanding because he has personally held nearly all of their positions." Also, "[Matthew] will regularly take time after hours, or on the weekends, to help employees with their own carpentry projects. He teaches them new techniques, sharing his passion and knowledge for cabinetry and furniture building while growing the same for those he leads."



Laura Gavin is the

owner/designer at Mars Design Studio LLC, a Pennsylvania-based

custom woodwork firm. Born deaf, Gavin "overcame the inherent obstacles to become a woman-small business owner," says her nominator, and now serves as a role model. "Driven by the need to create," what started as thank-you and holiday gifts for customers of their landscape design and build firm has evolved into a thriving business manufacturing artistic cutting boards, custom bowls, live edge tables, furniture and more. "Laura is dedicated to her art, but is right at home at the table saw or operating the excavator." She is also active in the woman-owned business community.



Cassey Gibson is a "dynamo" and "superhero." Her nomination by 16 people is a testament

to the "remarkable on-the-job excellence in quality of work, customer service, teamwork, leadership, and innovation" by the Engagement Specialist at Innergy, a software provider based in Minnesota. As one nominator notes, "Woodworking is historically homogenous and a man's purview. Cassey has committed to, and invested in, this industry for over 15 years and has moved the gender needle with both her work at Innergy and AWI." Another adds, "Her passion to educate has had lasting effects on several trade organizations' standards and has challenged everyone to do better as a community."



Chris Gioia is the

president of Montbleau & Associates, an architectural woodwork firm

based in California. His "drive, dedication and industry knowledge" have quickly propelled him through the ranks, starting as project manager, then project executive and vice president, before becoming president in 2021. And under Gioia's leadership, Montbleau & Associates has grown, including the expansion of territory and capacity booked for 2022 and a large portion of 2023. "Chris has always emphasized the value of listening to his team to find ways to improve the company's performance. In turn, he has earned the trust, respect and dedication of his colleagues and employees," notes his nominator.

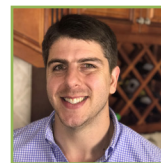


Sean Glessing started

his custom woodworking business, Sean's Cabinetry LLC, when he

was just 16 and has been going strong ever since. The owner of the Minnesota-based custom cabinetry and countertops manu-

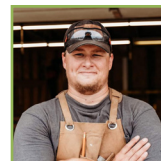
facturer, Glessing "is the most determined person I have ever met, and his work ethic is unmatched," says a nominator. Another notes, "Sean's workmanship has always been incredible down to the littlest detail. His product development and leadership skills have been an inspiration to watch." Hardworking, humble, honest and creative, "Sean's passion for woodworking truly embodies the saying: 'If you love what you do, you will never work a day in your life.'"



Randy Goldstein joined

Kitchen Cabinet Distributors (KCD) as CEO in 2016, and has since

grown the North Carolina-based company from a small, regional distributor of RTA cabinetry to one of the largest RTA cabinet companies in the United States. "Much of Randy's effort has focused on applying innovative technologies to this largely low-tech segment of the cabinet industry. Advanced ERP and manufacturing systems, a best-in-class planning and procurement platform, and an intuitive, home-grown online customer portal are just some of the ways that KCD has been able to grow so rapidly while ensuring its commitment to service and quality," says his nominator.



Zach Gosnell, owner/

operator of Torch Lake Concepts, is "driven to succeed." Gosnell has

been making waves and drawing raves in Michigan and beyond for his custom furniture, islands and other wood products made from old-growth lumber, many of which pay homage to the company's namesake. "He has a love of the environment and a love for what [he does]," says

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his nominator. In addition, Gosnell is on the board of directors for the local conservation district, and is actively involved in the planting of new trees in the northern Michigan region. In fact, a portion of every sale pays for more trees to be planted, and with support from its suppliers, the company plants about 20,000 trees a year.



Carolyn Guffey leads by example. The vice president of Operations and Marketing at Guffey

Systems LLC, a Tennessee-based finishing equipment manufacturer, Guffey “is determined, passionate and focused. She works tirelessly to motivate and inspire both internal and external partners to always give their best. She actively seeks input and advice through inclusion and respect of a broad range of skills and business acumen of all partners,” says her nominator. Within the workplace, Guffey supports brand development and sales growth through strategic marketing planning and initiatives, while outside of work she is involved in the local schools and community.



Neil Harder is the area manager for Felder Group USA, a leading technology provider

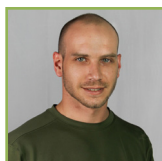
based in Delaware. He also is a longtime woodworker. “Neil became immersed in woodworking and its environmental impacts, ultimately co-founding a company committed to repurposing the millions of acres of dead beetle-kill pine into high-quality furniture,” says his nominator. As one of the spearheads of the trend, “Neil repurposed over 1 million board feet of dead standing trees that threaten the

local Colorado Ecosystem.” Using his vast industry knowledge, Harder now focuses on “safety, efficiency, and environmentally creative ways to evolve the woodworking industry,” including saw safety systems.



Dustin Harris, operations manager at Masonite Corp., joined the Florida-based door firm in Sep-

tember 2020, and the impact was immediate. “At the time we were struggling with production, external quality and morale issues. Within four months, through Dustin’s leadership all three areas dramatically improved.” His nominator adds, “At the time Dustin started, the company was unable to meet its production schedule, and we had more than 8,000 late orders. Four months later that was reduced to almost zero,” with output and quality significantly improved. “Dustin’s commitment to quality was a key component of our facility receiving Masonite’s External Cost of Quality Award in 2021.”



Ben Heinrich is production manager at Closet America, a Maryland-based manufacturer

of custom home organization systems. “Ben’s contribution has been key to Closet America’s ability to grow since inception including managing the factory and its output through 43 percent year over year growth from 2020 to 2021,” says his nominator. “Without Ben managing output, improving efficiencies, managing staff and maintaining machines, that growth would have been impossible.” He adds, “What makes this all the more impressive is that Ben joined the organization with no woodworking or management experience – as the ‘low man on the totem pole,’ and now

runs production.”



Elijah Jensen, senior technician, “is key to CNC Factory’s design and implementation of

new technology,” says a nominator.” Notes another, “He listens to the customer’s needs and finds the ideal mechanical customizations to benefit them the most – always keeping simplicity and productivity in mind.” Jensen’s dedication also inspires the team. “He holds an extremely high standard of quality that sets the bar for every CNC machine CNC Factory builds. In addition, his enthusiasm for finding the right solution, or even creating a new feature to solve a customer’s production challenge, brings high energy and joy to our work,” says a third. Based in California, CNC Factory is a leading technology provider.



Amy Jones, purchasing manager for Bakes & Kropp Fine Cabinetry, continues to inspire

women in woodworking, and is an advocate for others to join the field. She has more than 9 years and a wide range of industry experience, starting as a finisher, then shop floor manager, before taking the role of purchasing manager at the Michigan-based cabinetry manufacturer. Jones has also been involved in several company initiatives including lean manufacturing, new hire training, safety, and production planning. As she puts it, “Keep improving” is not just one of the values at Bakes and Kropp, it’s something that really motivates me. Finding new processes or innovative products has turned into a passion.”

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Nirvan Khaitan is senior vice president of Operations at Georgia-based Cosmo Cabinets. “This industry needs young leaders like Nirvan,” says of one four nominators. “Nirvan’s great leadership skills have positively impacted the team and the company in general. There’s an evident high morale of the team and in turn that has increased the production output and reduced the nonconformities during production. There are lesser downtimes, orders are delivered on time, and sales are skyrocketing thanks to his contribution.” Khaitan is involved in the KCMA, “where his early contributions have been and will continue to play an important role in the organization,” another notes.



Derek Koester, director of Sales, Casework and Millwork Division at Stevens Industries Inc., “has been monumental in changing the way that Stevens – and the industry – approaches architecturally specified commercial casework,” says his nominator. “By modernizing the RFI and substitution approval process, Derek has been successful in tripling sales of our direct sales efforts. Derek has also changed our marketing approach with our dealer entities, creating a massive catalog of project profiles and production examples that our partners can use in their sales efforts.” Most of the Illinois-based panel processor and fixture manufacturer’s customers now utilize Koester as a resource for their upcoming projects.



Logan Leinbach, Woodwork Manufacturing Specialist at Michigan-based Burke Architectural

Millwork LLC, made history recently as the country’s first woodwork manufacturing specialist in the newly approved Department of Labor registered apprenticeship/occupation. He also helped write and gain passage of the apprenticeship, while also participating in several panels on workforce development and the new program. On top of this, he has met with students and shared his passion for woodworking and the program. As one nominator notes, “Logan has had and continues to be a peer inspiration and mentor, not only to the other young workers within our organization but within the general public.”



David Mulkeran, cabinetmaker at Elliott Woodworking, “came into the business an eager-to-learn 19-year-old, and in the last six years has only grown in enthusiasm, knowledge and skill as he has taken on more and more responsibility for the success of the business,” says his nominator. Based in Michigan, the company specializes in cabinetry components. “At 25 he has already been given an ownership stake in the business to not only retain him, but compensate him for what he brings to it and give him a vision for the future.” Mulkeran also mentors and trains new employees. “His enthusiasm for the work has been contagious, and they have embraced it for themselves.”



Ivan Nuno, lead designer at Twig Custom Builders LLC, “demonstrates the rare combination of collaborative/creative,” says his nominator. For example, Nuno combined his knowledge of CNC operation, assembly and the

client’s workflow in a new joinery/installation system that reduced Twig’s internal costs and dramatically reduced the client’s costs for ongoing work. “Twig would not be the growing company it continues to be without Ivan. The confidence and trust fostered in our clients are what have allowed us to double revenue each of the last three years. We also retain a 100% closing rate for clients who visit for a design appointment with Ivan.” Based in Colorado, Twig is a digital fabrication shop.



Andrew Ramirez, founding partner at Cherrywood Partners, demonstrates “a rare combination of passion and expertise for sustainable forest products,” and over the past 15 years, he has built a career championing sustainability and responsible supply chains in the forest products industry. The Minnesota-based Cherrywood Partners assists companies in acquiring and/or maintaining FSC, SFI or PEFC forestry chain-of-custody certification for wood products sourced from sustainable forests and other responsible sources. In his free time, Ramirez works with Rotary International to plan and implement environmental justice tree planting projects in historically under-resourced neighborhoods.



Luke Remmert is president & CEO of Remmert & Co., an Alabama-based architectural woodwork firm. In the three years since he and a partner took over, “Luke has invested in new woodworking software and has successfully integrated it into all facets of the business. He has also invested in the latest

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robotic equipment which has dramatically improved the capacity of our factory,” says his nominator. “The impact is very broad. First, our company is breaking new records in both bookings and capacity, [and] we have won the ABC Excellence in Construction award for interiors four years straight.” Remmert also volunteers in the community and is involved in organizations including ABC and AWI.



Wesley Robinson,

Hardwood Lumber manager - North America at Robinson Lumber Co., is a rising leader at the Louisiana-based firm and recently spearheaded the new North American Hardwoods sourcing division from the ground up. “The added volume over and above our production facilities has been instrumental in growing our customer base in North America and worldwide as well,” says his nominator. And with his “can-do attitude,” in less than two years Robinson has grown the business unit into a profitable PnL with annualized revenues exceeding \$10 million and more than \$5 million in new personal sales. Outside of work, he crafts fine woodworking which is often donated.



Jesse Schmitt is president of Premier Custom Millwork & Surfaces, Inc.

Under his leadership the New York-based architectural door and millwork firm has grown in size and scope. Notes one nominator, “The more difficult the challenge, the more motivated he becomes to find a resolution.” Customer service and satisfaction are key to the company’s success, and Schmitt and

his team deliver. His nominator adds, “No matter what he’s doing and how much he has going on... you just know he’s giving it everything he’s got. He’s totally committed to every project, problem and situation that he’s working on. There’s no such thing as ‘second best’ in his vocabulary. It’s always all or nothing.”



A.J. Sousa, owner/president of Ontario-based The Grain Studio, “is super talented and hard-

working. He creates incredibly beautiful pieces of furniture art – all handcrafted and taken to an extremely high level,” says his nominator. Sousa began working with wood at the age of 13, and his strong work ethic and determination to succeed have continued despite a recent cancer diagnosis. “He is determined to push through. He’s not cleared yet, but [is still] working as much as possible. Despite all these challenges, The Grain Studio continues to be set up for success and is on track to do great things.” With Sousa’s motto of “always forward,” plus a “no excuse attitude,” there’s no doubt.



Kelsey Spitz-Dietrich

“is an all-encompassing powerful woman.” The vice president of Innovation & Inclusion at Ontario-based UCS Forest Group of Companies, Spitz-Dietrich’s “extraordinary work advancing innovation, inclusion and sustainability across the company is unparalleled,” her nominator adds. “Her stewardship of many technological projects is helping to transform the business and drive it forward into the digital space. The work she spearheaded has enabled innovative and efficient ways

of operating, as well as provided significant opportunities for development.” Spitz-Dietrich is also co-author of the book, “Social Innovation Generation: Fostering a Canadian Ecosystem for Systems Change.”



Josh Stepp is product specialist – Cutting at Michael Weing Inc./Holz-

Her U.S. Inc., a leading technology provider based in North Carolina. His nominator says, “[Josh] has an amazing ability to understand wood utilization optimization,” and he excels at developing and modifying processes in order to increase yield and help companies succeed. In addition to the monetary aspect, “The idea that I find most interesting is Josh’s view on how optimized processes and automation help the environment. By optimizing the sawing of lumber, shops are able to increase their yield and therefore waste less wood fiber. This has an impact on the amount of lumber needed and over time will affect the entire supply chain.”



Bhavjit Thandi is CFO at British Columbia-based Richmond Plywood Corp. Ltd. “In his first

six months at Richply [Bhavjit] was able to deliver over an estimated \$1 million in savings to the company,” says his nominator. “We have been able to use the funds he has saved through changes he implemented and apply them to other projects, not to mention help our bottom line. Not only has Bhavjit made a positive impact on our financial statements but he has also made a positive impact on [the entire company] as he continues to strive toward the success of Richmond Plywood, whether through cost

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savings, new initiatives, negotiations with vendors or simply upgrading current procedures.”



Paul Timmins, co-owner of OE Custom, “is the single biggest pioneer for urban wood utilization in the country,” says his nominator. Timmins shifted the Maryland furniture firm’s reliance on industry wood, and it instead utilizes 100,000 board feet of waste wood each year. Last year OE joined Cambium Carbon, a collaborative dedicated to fighting the climate crisis. “He witnessed firsthand what his commitment could bring to the greater Baltimore area and wanted to scale it. There was no ego, it was all about impact, carbon sequestration, and tree planting. Changing current supply chains will take a herculean effort – and Paul is taking that step.” Timmins also co-owns Maryland Wood Countertops, an OE Custom operated company.



Francois-Xavier Tremblay, Software Implementation IT at Web-Cab Inc., combines his technical knowledge and experience as a cabinetmaker to help woodworkers advance. His nominator notes, “The impact of Xavier’s work on the industry may seem somewhat intangible to some, but to all those who have called upon him he has saved the day or the profitability of a project more than once. Furthermore, Xavier is instrumental in the development of new software features that solve real issues encountered on the factory floor. His constant contact with customers and knowledge of the industry enables him to relay crucial information to our development team.” The software specialist is based in Quebec.



Brett Warriner, outside sales for Powell Valley Millwork, “is an invaluable member of our team who wears a variety of hats within the organization. With nearly 10 years of experience in the millwork industry, Brett’s primary focus is outside sales and customer management though he is keenly involved with production scheduling, new product development, and logistics,” says his nominator. “We have been fortunate to achieve significant growth in market share across all product categories and Brett’s involvement is a key component to that success.” The Kentucky-based PVM specializes in the manufacture of mouldings, S4S boards and components made from yellow poplar.



Marcus Waterworth is owner of Waterworths Woodshop Inc., and under his leadership, the Minnesota-based custom cabinetry, casework, countertops and millwork firm continues to expand in size and scope. Waterworth has taken “his already rapidly growing business and has started doing luxury apartments, which has led to an even higher rate of growth,” says his nominator. “They have been expanding for years and have left several builders [as well as other customers] extremely happy with the way that they have structured their company.” The shop also has won recognition for many of its residential and commercial projects, including Wood Diamond Awards by the CMA.



Kyle Westbrook, Business Development Manager for Oregon-based DR Johnson Lumber

Co., “took it upon himself to [restart] an old

family sawmill that had been shut down for over 10 years. Over the last 18 months, Kyle continues to break production records and honor his grandfather’s legacy.” He now runs a crew of 40 employees while navigating the logistical-, personnel- and natural resource-based challenges the industry faces every day. Westbrook also is credited with developing a market for the chip and saw logs. “Kyle,” his nominator adds, “has breathed life back into what was a shutdown plant site, creating new jobs in a county where other forest products businesses are downsizing.” +



2022 sponsor salutes the 40 Under 40

PaintLine is the official sponsor of the seventh annual Wood Industry 40 Under 40.

“The 40 Under 40 class of 2022 represents the best and the brightest in the woodworking industry” said Kyle Robinson, CEO of PaintLine. “The innovation, leadership and success that this group represents is truly exciting. We at PaintLine are proud to sponsor 40 Under 40 and congratulate the 2022 honorees on being selected for this distinguished award.”

PaintLine provides innovative, practical and economical drying rack, spray stand and other process-oriented product solutions for cabinetmakers, millwork shops, residential remodelers, renovators, commercial painters, and DIYers.

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