



## Adding extra value

*Local custom furniture maker an important part of real estate process*

As told to Dan Rafter

Everyone knows the main players in a real estate transaction: Real estate agents, mortgage loan officers, title insurers, processors, home inspectors, appraisers. But what about those folks that are on the fringe of the real estate transaction? The interior designer who helps stage a home for sale. The tech pro who develops the Web site for a local mortgage loan officer. The landscaper hired by a savvy real estate agent to cut back the bushes in front a particularly tricky listing to move. These professionals all play their own role in facilitating the real estate transaction.

Paul Schulman, owner of Chicago-based Paul Schulman Design, fits in this category, too. He designs his own custom furniture, and often works with home builders to provide added charm and character to their new construction residences. Here in his own words Schulman describes the role he and his furniture-designing skills play in the area's booming residential real estate industry.

### Adding value to a home

A lot of the pieces I create end up as built-ins in new construction. For example, I am working on a project in Northern Michigan. We're building a new house from the ground up. I am designing some 30 or so built-ins for the house. This is only unusual in that there are so many built-ins. I do built-ins all the time, but this is the first time I've ever done so many for one home. Quite literally, these built-ins become part of the house, part of the residence.

### A bookcase fit for a palace

I recently designed a large bookcase with a sliding ladder for a residence in Lakeview, near Roscoe and Halsted. That becomes a part of the house. I would think that such a built-in, such an aesthetically pleasing piece, adds a lot to the house. There are two pivotal things that aesthetics do for a piece of real estate: First, the value of the property goes up. Secondly, it sells faster. With a built-in that looks so good, it adds to the function. When you work with someone like me who is a furniture designer, you actually get a piece that adds something functional and aesthetically pleasing to a space. If someone is looking at two spaces and one is a little bit more money but also features some of these extras, you know they're going to go with the house that costs a little more.



### A home theater in Bucktown

A lot of times I'll work with interior designers, architects or homebuilders. I do a lot of built-ins and furniture for home theaters. For instance, I had some clients who lived in Bucktown who wanted to turn one of their basement bedrooms into a home theater. The room was about 12-by-12. It wasn't very big, but it was big enough. They contacted me and asked me if I had any ideas on how they could go about doing it. They were also working with an audio-visual guy we all really like. So we worked in a collaborative way to get this project done. It's all about working together, getting everyone and their ideas involved. We ended up on this project building a huge wall. The builder built the space, but all the while I knew what was going on. I knew what the space would look like when it was done. By then my cabinets were done. I built them, brought them in and installed them. The AV guy followed me in and did his work. The project went well.

### Working with homebuilders

Often if you get in with a builder they will refer you out a lot. You become part of their stable of people. To them we are like a really good plumber or a good electrician. To the homeowner our value is even greater. The work we do becomes a part of the home's interior design. It bridges both function and aesthetics in a way that not a lot of other individual elements of a house really do.

### The importance of teamwork

When I get integrated with the building team earlier in the process everything ends up being better. Most builders know what they are doing. But they do work from a different perspective than someone like myself does. If I'm involved early enough, I can throw in my little two cents and maybe improve the project or make the project progress just a little more smoothly. Everything in the building process is like an organism: the plumbing, the electrical, the cabinetry all has to work in conjunction. I'm part of that collaboration.

*For more information on Paul Schulman visit the online home of his business, [www.paulschulman.com](http://www.paulschulman.com).*

