

# PROFITS & passions



Lives in: Harrison  
 Works in: Rye Brook  
 Profession: President and CEO of The Private Office  
 Passion: Woodworking

## George Russell Splinter career

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George Russell is the kind of businessman who not only stands behind his work, he sits on it as well.

It should be explained that Russell, who is the president and chief executive officer of The Private Office, which creates unique work spaces for small businesses, also creates or helps shape many of the furnishings for his business. Take for instance the mahogany wall table in a conference room on the sixth floor of the building at 800 Westchester Ave., the former Altria building. About 18 inches wide and 8 feet long, the table comes out of the wall with no visible means of support. Russell didn't want to build something that had legs or the normal support arms that jut out from underneath. He gave it some thought and came up with a cantilevered support system that includes wood and steel. To prove it works, and can hold weight, he has hopped up on it to show visitors its strength.

The ability to design may have been passed down from his grandfather, who was a draftsman for Oldsmobile in the early 1900s. Russell's grandmother was a model who posed with the 1903 curved dash Olds for an advertisement. While his dad wasn't a designer, he did continue the automobile connection by working for General Motors for 42 years on the financial side.

Born in New York City, Russell lived with his family on Long Island while his dad commuted to his offices at 59th Street and Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. Transferred to Michigan, the Russell family lived in Bloomfield Hills outside the Motor City. The young Russell attended Cranbrook School — "the most beautiful secondary school campus in the world."

It was at the private school that Russell's knack for working with wood first took root. One interesting aspect of the school was that students couldn't graduate until they were competent in casting, forging, drafting and running a metal lathe, Russell said.

### FROM A RADIAL SAW TO A FULL SHOP

In 1966, after graduating from Yale and Michigan colleges, he and his wife bought a fixer-upper in what was then known as North Tarrytown. "A radial arm saw was my first tool of significance from Sears," he said.

He did work throughout the house, creating cabinets and shelves. The couple eventually moved to a home in Chappaqua where similar work was performed. It wasn't until about nine years ago that Russell put together "a proper shop" in the basement of his current home in Harrison.

His collection of woodworking tools now includes a planer, joiner and drill press. His most recent acquisition is a Shop Bot, a robotic tool that reduces the tedium of doing the same cut over and over again. He explained that the Shop Bot consists of a flat table of heavy steel over which a router with a cutter head follows a pattern as programmed on a personal computer. Russell said he has used the tool for making cabinets for his offices as well as the wall table. Potential clients have remarked about the table saying, "That's pretty clever the way they did that," to which Russell replies: "We did that."

Doing the woodworking himself gives "me an outlet and allows me to save a little money."

And while he says he's been very busy with his business and unable to spend much time in his shop, it's interesting to note that the acorn doesn't fall far from the tree as his son, Christopher Andrew Russell, has been expanding his own business, CARPENTRY CLASSICS, by using his father's shop.

It's also interesting to note the theme of wood also ran through Russell's career for several years. He worked for International Paper and in 1976 became involved in the company's timber acquisitions unit.

"Every tree is unique — from the soil it sits in and its unique nutrients to the way the sun hits it."

He tries to do the same with his own creations.

SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS PEOPLE HAVE MANY DIMENSIONS, THEY EVEN MANAGE TO HAVE SOME FUN.