



FLOOR OF THE YEAR

BEST USE OF WOOD TECHNOLOGY

Birger Juell Ltd.
CHICAGO, ILL.

Juell's Seaside Jewel

For a beachfront home on Jupiter Island, Florida, Birger Juell Ltd. provided the perfect floor for the 13-by-7-foot entry: a seashell. Laid in a field of clear hickory that looks like ripples of water, the free-form shell floats in the center. Composed of 4,500 paper-thin, laminated pieces, it matches the color of the sand outside.

The creation earned Birger Juell, a longtime and nationally respected flooring craftsman in Chicago, the "Best Use of Wood Technology" honor in the NWFA's 1995 Floor of the Year competition. Juell attended the convention-ending dinner at which the awards were announced, yet he slipped out before his name was called. "I thought I had a better chance at winning in poker than I did in the contest," he said. "There were so many other fantastic entries."



With 46 years in the business, Juell is known for his high-end installations across the country. He has worked on hardwood flooring projects in Pebble Beach, Calif., Steamboat Springs, Colo., and on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue in the last few months alone.

The shell became part of his portfolio after a Wisconsin designer, Cindy Wilson of Lake Geneva, invited him to be part of a beachfront project. "I suggested a shell, and then bought a book of shells," Juell said of the floor's beginnings.

"I have an installer, Ray Thurman, who is very clever and actually designed the shell. We talked about how we would do it, what woods we would need to create the grain of the shell. I collect shells; I like to dive. There is a grain pattern in all marine life. Yet there's not any particular place where it stops and starts; it all just flows. That's what we needed to do."

The selected shell is the shape of Thatchet's Wonder Shell (*Thatcheria Mirabilis*). It is a mixture of extremely thin laminations of walnut, hard maple, beech, sycamore and cherry. All of it is quartersawn. The laminations range from to .0625-inch wide, all 3/8-inch deep. They are affixed to 1/2-inch plywood underlayment.

The background is made from 2-by-8-inch clear hickory, hand-scraped with hand-beveled edges to simulate running water. The shell, also hand-scraped — Juell's specialty — appears to be floating in a pool, which is, in reality, a 1 1/4-inch wenge plank, surrounded by a 2-inch wenge oval band.

The project began in April 1994, and was finished in time for the family to enjoy their first Christmas in Florida.

"I was very pleased, because it turned out beyond what I had imagined," Juell said. "The owner said it was like a Tiffany." ●

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