



RETURN PERFORMANCE

BIRGER JUELL LTD.

Chicago, Ill.

This certainly isn't the first Floor of the Year award for industry legend Birger Juell, but this year's winning floor does represent several Floor of the Year firsts. It's the only time that different floors in the same house have won in back-to-back years. It's also the first time that a project with leather as part of the floor has been a winner.

The classic floor marks the completion of a two-year, half-million dollar project for the company. Last year, a foyer in the

same 22,000-square-foot, Florida home earned Floor of the Year honors in the Master Division. This year, it's the same home's office that got the nod from ASID judges for the same award.

In typical Birger Juell style, every step of manufacturing the floor was a custom process at the company's 31,000-square-foot facility. The large-scale parquet features stained character-grade hickory in a Versailles pattern with faux "alligator" leather centers. After being milled at the factory, each piece of flooring is hand-beveled and hand-scraped by one of the 18 workers who do hand-scraping exclusively. Each one has been trained by Juell himself to scrape the wood following the grain in a fashion Juell likens to water flowing over rocks. Scraping the wood in this style yields production of 60 to 70 square feet of flooring a day per worker.

After scraping, the flooring is acid-stained with Juell's proprietary process and double-oiled. For this floor, there was the additional step of manufacturing the leather inserts. To do this, workers cut hides to size and glue them to $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch high-grade dimensional plywood for a full $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch thickness. The plywood is tongue-and-grooved, as is the rest of the floor, and the leather is waxed with the recommended leather wax. The completed panels then are held together at the corners by hickory pegs. Together with the floor's mortise-and-tendon construction (a deeper tongue and groove), the pegs are all that holds the floor together until it is installed in adhesive on the job site.

Once installed, one of Juell's floors normally receives a final coat of oil and then wax. Because of the unique mixed media on this floor, the final process had to be done by hand, with care taken to not contaminate the leather inserts with the wood flooring wax.

The entire process may sound extraordinary to many contractors, but most things about Birger Juell are. At age 85, Juell's passion for his work is undiminished. He's still working nearly full time, and he was beaming proudly as ever when he climbed up on stage to personally collect his latest award.—*K.M.W.*



◆ Flooring: Birger Juell Ltd. ◆ Finish: **Dura Seal** (oil), Birger Juell Ltd. (wax) ◆ Adhesive: **Bostik** ◆ Nailer: Stanley-Bostitch ◆ Buffer: Clarke
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