

RIGHT: The owner's entire wardrobe of summer shoes is housed in this solid cherry cabinetry.

BELOW: The added furniture elements in this closet freed up space in the bedroom, making it possible for the homeowners to have a sitting area there.



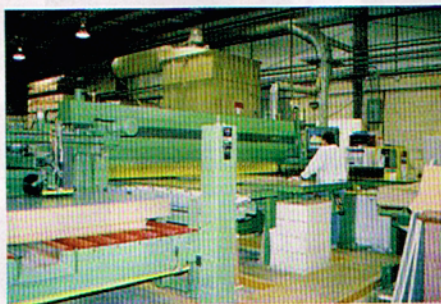


LEFT: As closets expand into full-sized dressing rooms, Creative Closets adds peninsulas and islands to help its customers fold clothes and pack suitcases more easily.

ABOVE: Ellyn Gellar-Elstein says of this room transformation: "The closet was a barren room. Now it is alive with the warmth of natural cherry and a usefulness beyond our client's imagination."



Paula Bomboy, left, president of Bomboy Inc., and Ellyn Gellar-Elstein, president of Creative Closets, are not just business associates. Creative Closets will install new closets in Bomboy's home this year.



Bomboy cuts parts for both its products and Creative Closets' on this Holzma panel saw.



ment is down, you have something else to fall back on," says Paula Bomboy.

After reading about the booming closet industry, Bomboy saw another opportunity for the company. "We did a search for some closet companies throughout the area and found out that Creative Closets was really the premier company in Eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey for closets," she says.

Bomboy approached Creative Closets with the idea to provide some of their product, "especially for their custom work, items they didn't want to buy in bulk, or where we could offer them the specialized items when they need something [right away]," Bomboy says.

The resulting partnership has brought advantages to both companies. Like the line of computer furniture, which is marketed by a third party, the closet parts increase Bomboy's production and sales without adding more work to its front office. And Creative Closets has benefited by finding more ordering options and flexibility along with an array of solutions for custom projects.

"We can offer more variety to customers and more flexibility to our designs in a cost-effective manner that allows us to meet all monetary budgets," Gellar-Elstein says.

Bomboy Inc.'s Glenn Neiman adds that the company has been able to reduce installation times and costs for Creative Closets' installers. Now, he says, they don't have to use knocked-down drawers that only come in certain sizes. "We've found it's more cost-effective for us to make drawers the normal way here at Bomboy, which is doweling and gluing the drawer box and assembling it at the case clamp," he explains. "We're eliminating the assembly time that Creative Closets needs to put the drawer together in the field, and we're also giving them a better drawer.

"We're also making the drawer the size they need it to be," he adds. "With custom sizing, they can maximize storage by designing components to fit the space rather than design the space to fit components."

Creative Closets specializes in design and installation, and most of its parts had been standard colors and sizes, purchased from suppliers. Not all clients need or want the standard, though. "We can increase our ability to offer additional selection to our clients," Gellar-Elstein says. "White and ivory

laminates have been the standard. Now woodgrain laminates and raised panel doors and drawers are just as popular."

"[Bomboy is] able to offer us all kinds of materials, colors and designs," she adds. "In some cases I didn't even know that the possibilities existed."

Neiman says that shipping costs have been eliminated for the parts Bomboy produces. "Rather than buying skids of drawer parts for future use," he says, "the assembled drawers are picked up for each project and delivered directly to the project site."

Bomboy's production facilities contain a Holzma panel saw, edgebanders from Holzma and Holz-Her, a Biesse point-to-point machining center, a Koch doweling machine and a Ligmatech case clamp from Stiles Machinery. It also uses a Hofer cold press to laminate parts. Except for drawers and the odd complete cabinet, the closet parts go from the saw to the boring machine and are ready to ship. The last few work centers in the normal cabinet production line are typically skipped.

"Producing the closet component parts creates uncomplicated fill-in work for specific machine centers that have available time while the more labor-intensive work centers that they feed might be backed up," Neiman explains.

Gellar-Elstein estimates that Bomboy manufactures about half of Creative Closets' custom laminate products. "And the relationship is building," she says.

The relationship between Creative Closets and Bomboy Inc. will also evolve into closet company and customer later this year, when Creative Closets renovates the closets at Paula Bomboy's home.

Bomboy says that, as a customer, she's been impressed with the way Gellar-Elstein took inventory of every item of clothing she had. "She builds the closet so that it works with what you have," she says.

Closets for all occasions

Although Creative Closets works on all types of designs, there are several types of clients that are near to Gellar-Elstein's heart. "I really enjoy working with the physically challenged," she says, "With my nursing background, it's an area I can really relate to."

"They need special considerations in how the areas are set up, especially if they're using a wheelchair or a walker," Andy Elstein adds.

Creative Closets also does work for children with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia or ADD. "These children need to be taught from an early age specific ways to organize. This provides them with better skills in future learning environments," Gellar-Elstein says.

Creative Closets has come up with many different organizational techniques, so much so that Gellar-Elstein writes a weekly question/answer column in the local *Morning Call* newspaper. Called "The Closet Lady," the column gives tips for organizing everything, from pantries to a Thanksgiving dinner.

When Creative Closets works on a clients' room, everything is given its own place. Laundry rooms get a laundry sorter where everyone in the house can pre-sort dirty clothes into appropriate labeled bins. Dressing rooms are designed to include islands or peninsulas for folding clothes when packing for business trips or vacations. The mudroom, which Gellar-Elstein calls the most important closet in the house, has a drawer for each person in the home instead of a drawer for each item.

"[Imagine if children] have to get to Little League, and they can't find two shoes that match or a glove," she says, explaining that all their equipment would be in one drawer, rather than scattered through several places. "They have a specific space, and the hassle is so much less."

Gellar-Elstein and Creative Closets will showcase all these organizing accessories when the company moves into its new location this summer. The new building will contain offices, a fabrication area and a new showroom. It will also have a showcase for every room in a house, from the garage and mudroom to a dressing room and linen closet.

The new showroom, which Gellar-Elstein says will be the only one of its kind within two hours of Allentown, is bound to bring more work to both Creative Closets and Bomboy. And the two companies are interested in seeing what develops.

"I see it as an evolution," Neiman says. "Not only are we trying to work more together, but we're also still playing at what we can do for each other." ■

RIGHT: Creative Closets' showroom displays organizational ideas for many rooms of the house, including the garage.

BELOW: Bomboy Inc.'s product lines include custom commercial casework and a line of institutional computer desks.



A match made in Allentown

Two Pennsylvania companies fill a need by forming a mutually beneficial relationship.

BY SAM GAZDZIAK

Bombooy Inc. of Allentown, PA, was a commercial casework manufacturer that wanted to enter the closets market, but it didn't want to burden its marketing department with a new industry. Creative Closets Ltd. was a closet and organization company in the same city with plenty of clients, looking for alternative suppliers for their custom products.

About a year ago, the two companies began collaborating on the production of closet parts, and the results have made two already-successful companies even stronger. And both sides agree that the relationship is still growing.

Creative Closets has been involved in home and office organization since 1983, when Ellyn Gellar-Elstein decided to leave the nursing profession and start the company in the basement of her house. It now has 17 employees, has grown into a 4,200-square-foot building and is soon moving into a 16,000-square-foot showroom, office and fabrication facility.

Bombooy began under similar circumstances. Craig Bombooy started the company from his basement in 1973. The company employs 19 people in its 22,000-square-foot facility and manufactures custom commercial casework under the Casara brand and a line of institutional computer furniture under the Casara and Ashcroft names. Craig Bombooy died in 1999, and his wife, Paula, succeeded him as president and CEO.

The relationship grows

Gellar-Elstein, who serves as president of Creative Closets, says that closets are just one of the many products the company offers. Home offices, Murphy beds, garages, laundry rooms, bedroom furniture, entertainment centers and commercial spaces are also possibilities. "Garage organization has become more popular," she adds, "and mud rooms are now a focus of attention."

"Many people are interested in organized craft rooms centered around their hobbies," adds her son Andy, who is chief of operations. With such a variety of products, there was a growing need for custom solutions.

Fifteen minutes away, Bombooy had been looking to enter a new market. The company established its line of computer furniture in 1991 as a way to level out the peaks and valleys that are found in commercial casework. "We're always looking at new products or another segment of the business to get into, so that when one seg-

