

## Made in Montana

# Wood turns into wonder in the hands of Mark King & Friends

BY DAVID HIPSCHMAN

In an old concrete building across from the Whitefish Volunteer Fire Department, creative things happen to pieces of wood and interesting philosophies are woven into the fabric of a small business.

In the building at 128 Baker, a business called Mark King & Friends creates handmade doors and entryways, custom cabinetry, and kitchens and interiors that are of furniture quality.

One recent kitchen commission, for instance, included cabinetry of Honduran mahogany. Mark King, 42, started the business in what used to be Skull's body shop three years ago. He said he can remember that the anniversary is next week, "only because it nearly coincided with my first wedding anniversary." He is married to Amy Conner, a local real estate agent.

King explained that the "& Friends" portion of the business's name referred to its "greatest asset, the human resources."

"I just surround myself with people who can do their job as good or better than I can," King said. "It's a loose association of people that gives our customers access to varied talents like an architectural designer, a wood turner, a blacksmith, finish painters, some of the best woodworkers in the area, even a guitar builder."

King learned the woodworkers' trade from "old school European cabinet makers." He moved to Whitefish after 20 years in Vail, Colo., where he "was involved with some amazingly fine craftsmen and real nice, detailed architectural projects."

He explained that a background in the restaurant business led to his current career. "After I designed and opened five restaurants I realized I liked building and designing them better than running them," he said.

"The basic lesson I learned, from



MARK KING

a man I once worked for, is that your power in management is your ability to surround yourself with valuable people," he said. Referring to the "Friends," he said: "Without them I wouldn't be anywhere."

Where he, and they, are is easily seen around the area, from the doors that grace Whitefish's Holy Nativity Episcopal Church to the doors, arched windows, lunch counter, bar and booths in the Remington Casino Saloon and Cafe.

Another place to see their eclectic work is at O'Keef & Company Unlimited in Whitefish, where they built the building's facade, windows, display cases and cabinetry.

That location boasts lots of poplar and hand-forged brass and steel door hardware and handles.

King said he and the "Friends" will build anything from antique reproductions to "modern, sort of eccentric furniture," in addition to the entryways and interiors that have become their hallmark.

"We end up making the stuff of dreams. We make the things that people dream of — or dream up — that they can't find anywhere else," he explained.