

Models built on creative skills

BY DAVID PARKER, CALGARY HERALD SEPTEMBER 3, 2009 3:02 AM

Building models sounds like a lot of fun and a great way to earn a living. It is great fun, although the three partners at Replicate Designs also have the usual small business concerns of administration, sales, marketing and production to worry about. But the reward of designing to suit a client's needs and the pride in delivering the end product means Felix Rooke, Shelli Woodall and Paul Hern do get great satisfaction out of their daily work.

And they have been very successful, considering they launched the company from scratch just five years ago.

Rooke worked for his father's ceramics company in Ipswich, England, before moving to Calgary seven years ago. He was a professional ceramics artist specializing in the design, sculpting, mould-making and manufacturing of dynamic pieces at the well-known family firm of Bernard Rooke Pottery.

Woodall is an industrial model maker schooled in London. After four years of extensive training, she worked in the U. K. film and television industry for nine years.

Hern is a graduate of both the University of Calgary and SAIT Polytechnic with an emphasis on industrial design, 3-D modelling and functional prototyping, where he combines new technology with excellent craftsmanship. Hern is a professional member of the Industrial Designers Society of America.

After working for other Calgary companies, they decided to launch Replicate Designs in 2004 in just 500 square feet of workspace. Their first task was a ceiling dome for the home of their landlord and the first major model creation was a six-by-four-foot display for Sable Developments of its Sable Ridge property in Radium, B. C.

Since then, they have built many models of residential properties, including Statesman's Pleasant Harbor development near Seattle.

A huge tabletop model was built for Three Sisters Mountain Village of the surrounding area from Kananaskis to Peyto Lake showing communities and ski areas.

A similar type of model was produced for Canadian Mountain Holidays of the Selkirk Range, showing heliskiing areas that fit under a glass-topped coffee table, enabling guests to have a three-dimensional look at the slopes they were enjoying.

Rooke says the firm has been quite involved in the energy sector and made a model for Enbridge of its Kitimat oil terminal, which required placing 16,000 individual trees. Others have been for trade shows, such as the intricate model of a methanol recovery unit for Methanol Recovery Canada.

Replicate Designs has moved to much larger premises on Alyth Road and now has a staff of seven. Much of its work is for development and architectural companies, but marketing is also a very strong sector where its creative skills are tested.

Venture Communications has brought three Toyota projects to Replicate, which designed and built a maze used in an advertisement for RAV4 and 35 Styrofoam brown trout that toured Western Canada in the back of "Call of the Tundra" trucks. It also built a handmade dollhouse decorated to the smallest detail, which Toyota used as a web-driven promotion for safety in its vehicles.

Rooke's ceramic mould skills were put to good use by Kevin Costner's Open Range film, which required several reproductions to be made of a particular tea set, which was later smashed during the film. And smaller models were made of the Anne Frank House displayed at City Hall and for a diorama for Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park. Larger models include an 11-foot-wingspan Douglas C-1 plane for the museum at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois.

Replicate Designs is a fun place to tour, but the milling machine, paint spray booth, vacuum foaming machine and Rapid Prototype, which produces three-dimensional models, show it is also a very technical environment requiring a ton of experience and creative skills.

I expect a full house at the next NAIOP breakfast meeting in the Devonian Room of the Calgary Petroleum Club on Sept. 17.

It's the association's annual market overview and many will be interested to hear the views of presenters Angus Fraser, downtown office leasing at CB Richard Ellis; Chris Law, suburban office leasing, and Jon Mook, industrial sales and leasing at Colliers International; and James Miller, investment sales at Avison Young.

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