

How we helped create a modern-day masterpiece

By KATHARINE AGRELL-DOLDAN of Agrell Architectural Carving



➡ **IN ARCHITECTURE AND** interior design, woodcarving rarely exists alone. Usually it's integrated into the millwork, such as mouldings, columns, brackets and cabinetry. That means a woodcarving workshop must either be part of, or comfortable partnering with, joinery workshops and vice versa.

The working relationship between woodcarver and joiner has existed for centuries. My company, Agrell Architectural Carving, has decades of experience partnering with joinery companies using tried-and-true techniques passed down through generations of our trades. My job as account manager is to ensure our hand-carved ornamentation integrates perfectly into joinery projects.

One recent example of this partnership was a complex library we did with Somerset-based bespoke joinery company Artichoke Ltd. Artichoke had been seeking a woodcarving workshop that could produce a large

volume of high-quality carving in a short amount of time. Artichoke, like all high-end joinery companies, works to a tight production schedule and has a hard-earned reputation for meeting tight deadlines. When they promise delivery to their clients, they need to be able to trust their subcontractors to do the same.

Agrell Architectural Carving has also earned a reputation for exceptional service and delivery. Thanks to our large workshop and dedicated account managers, we are able to meet virtually any deadline – while never sacrificing quality. We had not worked with Artichoke before and were keen to develop a lasting relationship with them. It was a perfect match.

Artichoke had been commissioned to produce a grand library in a late 17th century Grade II listed Georgian hall in the English countryside. The exquisite design was based on the Philosophical Hall of the Strahov Monastery in Prague – a library built in a lavish Baroque style with typically bold features such as gilded ornamental woodcarving. Our task was to create hand-carved decoration as opulent and as beautiful as the original. Artichoke needed more than 120 hand-carved acanthus leaf ornaments, in addition to numerous mouldings, swags and other decorations, delivered in just over eight weeks. Obviously we didn't have the luxury of time on our side.

There would be more than 2,000 carving hours in this project – impossible for a small workshop of one or two carvers. Because there are very few woodcarving companies existing today with the capacity to deliver a large number of carving hours in such a short time, a joinery company might have to work with a loose collective of woodcarvers. Obviously that can create potential issues such as inconsistent quality and complicated personnel management.

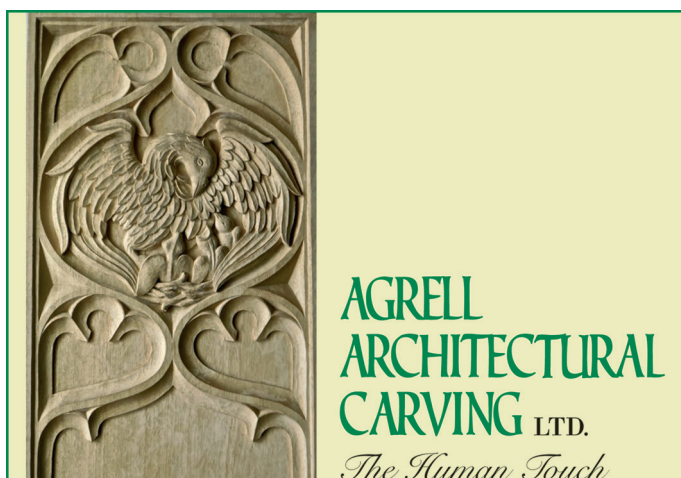
Luckily for Artichoke, our workshop is able to produce 50,000 carving hours annually. Additionally, we have dedicated account managers to keep everything moving efficiently. Artichoke appreciated having a single point of contact – in this case, me – while working through the project.

To get started, we collaborated with Artichoke to produce samples that would help verify design and construction details and establish quality expectations. They sent us drawings, templates and photographs to communicate relevant information, and we returned to them beautiful hand-carved samples in our own timber. Throughout the process we kept them informed of our progress with regular updates and photographs.

Samples went back and forth over a couple of weeks, allowing for minor tweaks that would ultimately guarantee that all the actual pieces would fit perfectly. We then hand-carved each individual ornament and returned everything to Artichoke for gilding.

Retaining complete control of all the construction details saved Artichoke time and money, and it ensured a smooth installation within the promised delivery schedule. Best of all, the end result was a stunning library that remains a true masterpiece of our time. □

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