



Anderson Woodwork

CUSTOM BUILT-INS · SOUTH SOUND

A HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE

Custom Built – Ins, *Done Right*

What every South Sound homeowner should know before adding built-in cabinetry, shelving, or storage to their home — from a craftsman who builds it by hand.

PREPARED FOR HOMEOWNERS ACROSS
THURSTON & PIERCE COUNTY

ANDERSONWOODWORK.NET

WELCOME

A built-in isn't furniture you buy. *It's furniture made for your home.*

Most storage gets bought off a shelf, hauled home, and pushed against a wall it was never meant for. It fits the room the way a rental suit fits a man — close enough, but never right.

A true built-in is the opposite. It's measured to your wall, scaled to your ceiling, and joined to last longer than the house's next coat of paint. When it's done well, it stops looking like something you added and starts looking like something the home was always supposed to have.

I built this guide because most homeowners come to me with the same good questions — about wood, about cost, about what "custom" really buys them. The answers are worth knowing before you spend a dollar, whether you end up working with me or not.

Read it at your own pace. When you're ready to see what's possible in your own space, the first conversation is on me.

Brian Anderson

OWNER & CRAFTSMAN, ANDERSON WOODWORK

01

Is Your Space Right for *Built-Ins*?

Almost any wall can hold a built-in. The better question is whether one will earn its place there.

Built-ins shine when a space has a job it isn't doing well — storage that's overflowing, an awkward nook collecting dust, or a room that feels unfinished no matter how you arrange the furniture. Here's where they tend to pay off most:

- ◆ **Walk-in closets & dressing areas** — where wire racks and bins never quite tame the chaos, and tailored cabinetry turns it into a room you enjoy using.
- ◆ **Living rooms & dens** — flanking a fireplace, framing a window, or wrapping a TV wall with shelving and concealed storage.
- ◆ **Home offices & libraries** — wall-to-wall shelving and a built-in desk that uses every inch of a small room.
- ◆ **Mudrooms & entries** — benches, cubbies, and cabinetry that catch the daily mess before it spreads.
- ◆ **Pantries & kitchens** — freestanding hutches and cabinetry that add storage without a full remodel.

A CRAFTSMAN'S HONEST NOTE

If a space is purely about cheap, temporary storage, a big-box shelving kit may be the right call — and I'll tell you so. Built-ins are worth it when you want something permanent, beautiful, and sized exactly to your home.

THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- ◆ **Will I be here a while?** Built-ins reward homes you plan to keep — and they add lasting value when you don't.
- ◆ **Is the awkwardness structural?** Sloped ceilings, odd alcoves, and tight corners are exactly where custom work beats anything off a shelf.
- ◆ **Do I want it to feel intentional?** If "good enough" has stopped being good enough, that's usually the sign.

02

Wood, Finish & What They Actually *Mean*

The species you choose shapes the look, the longevity, and the cost. Here's the plain-English version.

SPECIES	CHARACTER	BEST FOR
<i>Walnut</i>	Rich chocolate tones, dramatic grain. The heirloom choice.	Statement pieces, floating shelves, feature cabinetry.
<i>White Oak</i>	Pale, durable, with a clean modern grain. Ages gracefully.	Contemporary built-ins, high-traffic surfaces.
<i>Maple</i>	Smooth, light, near-uniform. Takes paint beautifully.	Painted cabinetry and crisp, modern looks.
<i>Cherry</i>	Warm and reddish; deepens richly with age and light.	Traditional libraries, warm living spaces.

PAINTED OR NATURAL?

A natural finish shows off real grain and ages with character — every board is one of a kind. A painted finish gives a clean, architectural look and pairs well with trim and millwork. Painted work is typically built on a stable hardwood like maple or poplar so it stays crisp for decades; the wood underneath still matters.

WHAT DRIVES LONGEVITY

- ◆ **Solid hardwood vs. veneer over particleboard** — solid wood and quality plywood survive moves, moisture, and decades of use. Particleboard swells and sags.
- ◆ **The finish itself** — a proper multi-coat finish protects against moisture and daily wear, and can be refreshed years down the line.
- ◆ **How it's joined** — which is worth a section of its own.

03

What "Custom" Actually Buys You

The word gets used loosely. Here's the difference you can see, and the difference you can't — until years later.

A flat-pack cabinet and a hand-built one can look similar in a showroom. The gap shows up in how they're held together, and how they hold up. The joinery is where a piece either becomes an heirloom or becomes landfill.

MASS-PRODUCED

- Particleboard and stapled or cam-lock joints
- Standard sizes forced to fit your wall
- Edges banded with glued-on tape
- Built to last until the next move
- Looks added-on, not built-in

HAND-BUILT BY ANDERSON

- Hand-cut dovetails and mortise-and-tenon joinery
- Measured and scaled to your exact space
- Solid hardwood and quality plywood throughout
- Built to outlast the house's next remodel
- Looks like it was always meant to be there

WHY HAND-CUT JOINERY MATTERS

A dovetail joint interlocks like fingers laced together — it gets stronger the harder it's pulled, with no hardware to loosen or fail. A mortise-and-tenon joint seats one piece of wood deep inside another, the same connection that's held timber-framed barns upright for centuries. These take longer to cut by hand. That's the point. They're the difference between furniture you replace and furniture your kids fight over.

THE COLLECTOR'S MINDSET

The homeowners I do my best work for aren't shopping for furniture — they're commissioning a piece. They think less like buyers and more like collectors: choosing something built once, built right, and built to be handed down.

04

Budget & Timeline, Without the *Mystery*

Custom work is quoted custom — but you deserve to know what shapes the number before you ask for one.

WHAT DRIVES THE COST

- ◆ **Size & complexity** — a single bookshelf and a wall-to-wall closet system are different animals.
- ◆ **Wood species** — walnut and white oak sit above paint-grade maple or poplar.
- ◆ **Joinery & detail** — hand-cut joinery, inlay, and fine detailing are time, and time is the craft.
- ◆ **Finish** — number of coats, color matching, and hand-rubbed finishes all factor in.
- ◆ **Hardware** — soft-close mechanisms, custom pulls, and integrated lighting.

HOW I PRICE

Every project starts with a free, no-obligation on-site estimate so I can see the space and give you a realistic range. There's no cost and no pressure — just an honest read on what your project takes.

HOW THE PROCESS WORKS

1

FREE ON-SITE ESTIMATE

I come to you, see the space, and talk through what you have in mind. You leave with a rough range — at no charge.

2

DESIGN FEE & CUSTOM PLANS

If we move forward, a design fee covers detailed, made-to-measure plans drawn specifically for your space.

3

THE BUILD

I build your piece by hand in the shop, with the joinery and finish we agreed on. You'll know your timeline before a board is cut.

05

Before Your *Free Estimate*

A little prep makes the first visit faster, sharper, and more useful for you. None of it is required — but all of it helps.

- Save a few photos you love.** Screenshots from Pinterest, Instagram, or magazines tell me more about your taste than a paragraph ever could.
- Note rough measurements.** Even ballpark wall width, height, and depth help me picture the space before I arrive.
- Think about how you'll use it.** What goes inside? What frustrates you about the space now? Function shapes the design.
- Consider your finish direction.** Drawn to warm natural wood, or a clean painted look? No wrong answer — just a starting point.
- Have a rough budget in mind.** Even a loose range lets me steer the design toward something that fits it.
- Clear access to the wall.** If it's easy, pull furniture back so I can see and measure the real space.

ONE THING WORTH KNOWING

Anderson Woodwork focuses on what we do best — designing and building heirloom-quality custom pieces. We don't take on installation or interior door work, which keeps every hour pointed at the craft itself.

THE NEXT STEP IS ON ME

Let's see what's possible in *your space*.

You've got the lay of the land. The best way to know what your room can become is to have a craftsman stand in it — and that first look is free.

- i.* Reach out and tell me about your space
 - ii.* We schedule your free on-site estimate
 - iii.* You get an honest range — no cost, no pressure
-

BOOK YOUR FREE ESTIMATE

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Serving Thurston & Pierce County, WA

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