

# Lovers Island

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## SPACES

Interiors

Ever since that first tree was cut down, we've had wood. Over the centuries, custom woodworkers have plied their trade to create something useful and beautiful from that wood. John Starck Jr. has been in the custom cabinetry business for a little over 20 years. "I love what I do," he says. "I guess it's in my genetic makeup." It most certainly is.

Starck's grandfather and great-grandfather began the family business in Brooklyn about 70 years ago. "Originally, we were a home improvement supply company. Back in 1933 it was like a Home Depot of today," he explains. "In the '40s and '50s we evolved into custom cabinet makers, a separate division."

Today, although the company name and location have changed, the Starck family is still at the helm. At one point, the company had three generations working together. Today, John Starck Jr., president, who serves as senior designer, and his brother, Anthony Starck, vice president of sales, work with their father, John Starck Sr., vice president of operations.

Located in Manhasset since 1999, Showcase Kitchens designs exclusive custom kitchens, baths, built-in home libraries and media rooms—custom cabinetry for every area of the home. The firm has 12 employees and serves homeowners, architects, interior designers, custom builders and contractors in the greater New York tri-state area, as well as clients in Florida and the Caribbean. "We've expanded into the south shore market in Island Park, and we recently acquired a satellite location in the Westchester market of Mount Kisco," says Starck.

In contrast to mass-produced products, custom kitchens are hand-crafted. "When you have a group of craftsmen who build a custom kitchen, their name is on the finished product. There's a pride of ownership when completed, an uncompromising attention to detail . . . that's what gives the unique look that most clients yearn for," explains Starck. And it's the designer who is entrusted with conveying those details to the manufacturer.

Showcase Kitchens uses three major manufacturers: Quality Custom Cabinetry, Signature Custom Cabinetry and Redf. The firm also is an exclusive distributor of LaCornue, a custom cooking range that has been made in France for more than 100 years.

"We always send our staff for training to receive the latest updates in technology and product development. It's an invaluable tool when educating your clients," explains Starck. Recently, two employees—kitchen

designer Louie Viteri and manager/processor Mark Stybel—achieved "certified professional" status from Quality Custom Cabinetry after completing a dealer-training program at the company's Pennsylvania headquarters.

According to Duane Dagan, director of marketing for Quality Custom Cabinetry, "We manufacture what they design. They bring the creativity into the equation." He describes the process: "The designer works with the customer in the showroom to determine the style and color desired. The customer then signs off on a sample. John tells our staff how to cut each piece of wood. We can cut wood in as small as 1/8-inch increments. Some large hoods and islands, which must be broken into pieces for installation, require special cuts."

According to Starck, appliances have evolved to enable the designer to create a much more custom product. "Innovativeness is what keeps us going. Each year we see a new product on the market that enables us to push the bar with custom design."

What are some of the current trends people are asking for? "It depends on what type of home the client has," explains Starck. "Manhasset homes are typically vintage center hall colonials or English Tudors—not likely candidates for contemporary. As far as the national trend, it is shifting to contemporary."

Showcase Kitchens has installed more than 1,000 kitchens and more than 500 bathrooms. Kitchens typically cost anywhere from \$30,000 to \$150,000 for a complete budget, depending on size and selection. Starck usually works on projects that range from \$100,000 to \$250,000. He recently completed a \$450,000 project. "It's all relative, since the home was built for a little less than \$15 million," he says.

Kitchens can take several weeks to produce, and the more custom ones can take three to five months. Although construction and installation vary depending on site conditions, most installations are completed within two weeks, says Starck.

As senior designer, Stark overlooks each project. "The entire design staff acts as one team. Everyone is encouraged to participate in each project. This keeps us most innovative and cutting-edge in design."

The most challenging job, Stark recalls, was for a couple that entrusted him to complete their project when they were away for the winter. They established a budget, wrote a check for the total amount and entrusted him to select everything without any input on their behalf. "It's a challenge when you aim for complete satisfaction and you have no input at all. Luckily, they were extremely satisfied," says Starck. "They were even more elated that we came in under budget."

## ALL IN THE FAMILY

**CUSTOM CABINETS  
BUSINESS SPANS THE GENERATIONS**

By LYNN ZAWACKI

