

One of a Kind:

Featuring unique homes & gardens...
and the people who create them

Story and Photos By Chris Bertrand

A Passion For Wood Floors

In this day and age, women-owned businesses proliferate the economic landscape with few exceptions. Construction related businesses are still one of those exceptions. Few women have ventured there. Marla Jakovljevic did.

In the mid 1990's, Marla Jakovljevic, then Marla Fields, was restless in her executive marketing position at national jewelry chain. Early in life she followed the path set by family to study accounting, but yearned for a creative channel in her life. A Filipino native, she immigrated to the states in the late '80s. A chance meeting threw Jakovljevic and the owner of a local hardwood flooring business together. Marla says, "I learned from the old wood master" referring to Benjamin MacAdoo of Benjamin's Hardwood Floors and furthered her knowledge through the National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA), currently holding a "Master Craftsman" certification from that organization. In wood flooring, she discovered an outlet for her lifelong interest in architecture, design and homes... and her creativity. So she started Pasadena Wood Floors.

Throughout the years Jakovljevic always differentiated herself. Not only as one of only a handful of female wood specialists in the country, but as a highly respected leader and teacher in the global wood flooring industry. You'll see her donating her time to teach at the NWFA schools throughout the country, Pasadena Community College's construction school and at FIDM, the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in Los Angeles.

"No matter how tired or busy I am", she comments. "I always wake up looking forward to the challenges and creativity of each new flooring project. I love to solve the difficult flooring problems with an elegant or unusual solution, particularly one that the architect or designer did not consider. A beautiful, completed flooring job is my personal signature." Often her flooring projects receive awards and recognition from the NWFA, as did three of her projects this year.

She stresses that the right flooring creates the proper foundation, upon which the interior design is built. And it needs to complement the architecture. "I'm honored to have had so many local museums, libraries and significant buildings like the Huntington Library, Pacific Asian Museum, Norton Simon Museum and the Valley Hunt Club entrust their flooring to me."

One of the keys to a great wood flooring installation is the racking process. Wood flooring is a natural product, and by its nature is not homogenous. Gradations of color, grain and other wood appearance characteristics need to be carefully arranged to flow, so the eye is not drawn to a cluster of light or dark in one area. This could appear as a mistake, disturbing the flow of the

room. Often, installers just grab each piece as it comes out of the box, placing it without even looking at the big picture, resulting in a disjointed unprofessional look.

Many people think the only place to buy wood floors these days is from a big box store or discount outlet. There are so many wood flooring options these days. Many exotic woods previously unavailable in the US provide a wide, sometimes dizzying array of decisions. Then you have prefinished or unfinished solid or engineered (for installation on a slab foundation or areas with moisture issues) material choices. The list can go on and on. A buyer can find it hard to feel confident in the materials choice, when the sales person in an orange apron could easily have just walked over from the plumbing or garden department. Pasadena Wood Floors prides itself on their expertise and extensive experience in wood floors and only wood floors. No plumbing or garden supplies. No orange aprons.

"Once you make a name for yourself, owners of high end properties find their way to the door. It's wonderful to do the posh, expensive homes all over LA, but I haven't forgotten my roots. I'm just as happy to install a beautiful hardwood floor in a young couple's first home as a celebrity's dream home. The satisfaction of a job well done is the same, whether it's a 500 square foot cottage or 20,000 square foot estate."

Jakovljevic makes a point to give back to the community. Recently married, husband Alek Jakovljevic, a civil engineer, has now joined her at Pasadena Wood Floors. Together, they are active in local Chambers of Commerce in Arcadia and Pasadena, Arcadia Host Lions Club, Pasadena Women's City Club and others.

As an industry partner of Pasadena's ASID, American Society of Interior Designers and Affiliate Member of AIA, the American Institute of Architects, Jakovljevic often works with high profile designers and architects on large projects for their clients. Pasadena Wood Floors also contributes to ASID charitable projects, such as the upcoming refurbishing of the century old Blinn House In Pasadena, owned by the Women's City Club.

When a job is completed, often there are leftover materials the owner does not want or are impractically short. Those leftovers, plus used job equipment are given to educational institutions for use in their wood shop classes. This positive "recycling" effort is not only charitable, but saves building products that might well have ended up in a landfill.

Jakovljevic. often arranges with building materials manufacturers to donate products to Habitat for Humanity, where she also donates her own time. Recently, she organized manufacturer donations of hardwood flooring for Latino television's first foray into the Home Improvement Show arena, "De Casa A Hogar" or "From House to Home." The Monrovia based project is under way, with filming to start in the Fall.

With all these irons in the fire, her financial background actually helps coordinate the myriad of business details, but the reason she wakes up in the morning is her eagerness to put that long latent creativity to work to deliver a floor her clients will love for years.