

Craftsman turns screen doors into artistic touch for homes

By Scott McFetridge

Of the Emerald

Willie Mims says a screen door should be thought of as a piece of furniture, just like a sofa or coffee table. But since the aluminum-happy 1950s, it has been difficult to find a screen door to be proud of.

Mims, the owner of Oregon Wooden Screen Door Co., plans to change that.

"The screen door is very important for the entryway and can be as artistic in design as anything else that goes into the house," he says.

Mims' interest in the doors began when he became involved in renovating a historic Eugene-area home and found there was little to choose from in the way of screen doors. Area department stores stocked only aluminum doors, and other regions of the country had little more to offer.

Mims decided to try his hand at crafting the door on his own, and soon after, he and his wife Sally Van Horn began producing the doors as a full-fledged business. Oregon Wooden Screen Door Co. celebrated its first anniversary in June.

"We're not a traditional business," Mims says. "We're making most of it by hand, and that's not traditional."

Although Mims will advise customers as to what style of door he feels would best suit their homes, he will construct any design the customer chooses. Mims offers a number of different styles, any of which can be modified to suit the customer's particular needs.

"Deciding on a home is a big undertaking, and we're saying the door should be a part of that decision," Mims says. "It should represent who is inside."

Mims says since beginning the company, he has strived to use the finest wood available; usually pine or Douglas fir. Even the most simple design contains at least \$30 worth of wood, he says.

"We wanted to be sure the kind of screen door we made would last the life of the house."

Mims' screen doors vary in price from \$163 for a fairly plain door to \$430 for the ornate

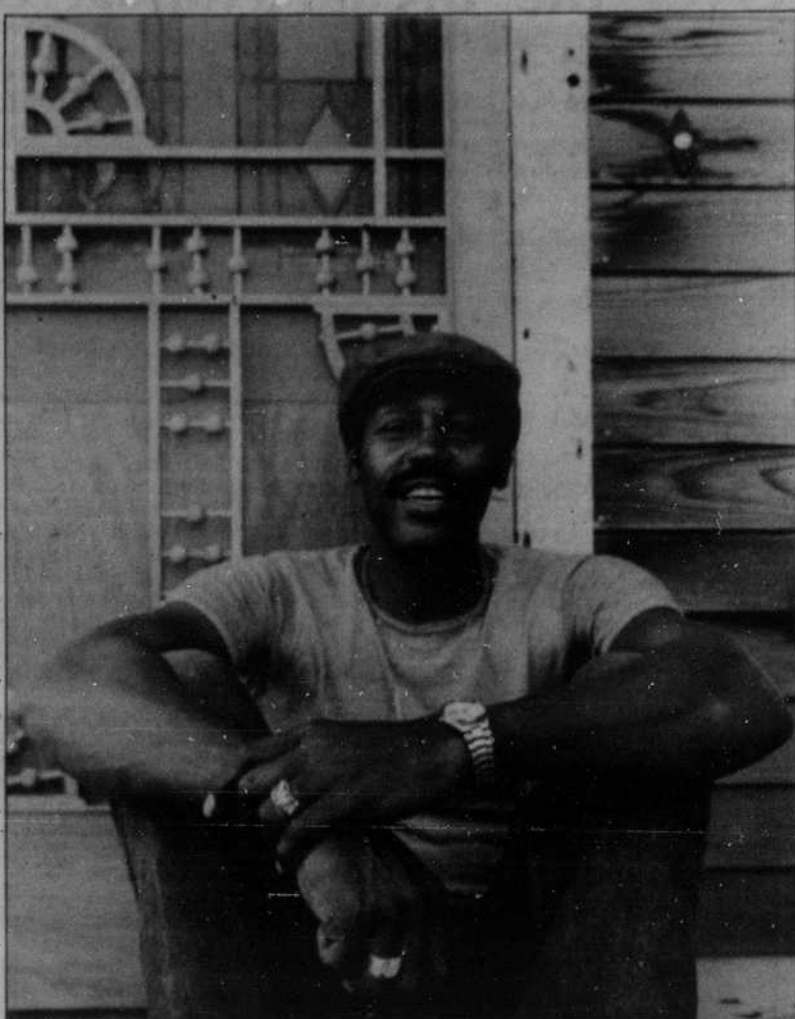


Photo by Karen Stallwood

Willie Mims, who started the Oregon Wooden Screen Door Co. more than a year ago, believes choosing the right screen door is as important as choosing furniture.

"Queen's Parlor" door. Oregon Wooden Screen Door Co., which employs one craftsman in addition to Mims and Van Horn, produces about two doors daily, but construction of the most intricate doors can take up to a week.

"That's not much money if you're looking for quality," Mims says. "Top of the line metal doors will cost you about the same."

A quick check of area department stores shows Mims to be correct. Sears Roebuck and Co. offers screen doors ranging in price from \$79 to \$250, and Montgomery Ward and Co. has doors priced from \$99.99 to \$139.99.

All doors at the two stores have the advantage of interchangeable glass and screens that provide more efficient weather-proofing purposes, but Mims says he plans to offer similar features in his doors soon.

Mims' doors have been selling well in the Eugene-area, but he says 60 percent of his business goes out of state. A large percentage of orders are from East Coast residents. In fact, he recently sent three doors to Vermont.

Since Mims' doors were featured in several national home-furnishing magazines, orders have increased. Mims says his company has received more orders since April than all of last year, and orders are backed up until October. He says he is considering expanding the business, but because employing one more worker would double the daily output, he wants to be sure the market can absorb more of the doors.

Mims says his only competition is another Eugene-based company called Old 'N Ornate. No other company in the country offers anything close to the quality of these two companies, he says.



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