

Stairs reflect a step up in style and design

By CAROLE BUCKNER

Ever since man decided to build up, stairs have been an integral part of architecture. The detailing and styling of staircases reflects the tastes and craftsmanship of a given culture. And as a culture undergoes the subtleties of time and the whimsy of thought, the staircase has demonstrated these changes.

Although a style can be baroquely ornate to sleek and simple, the design itself is restrictive and set. Building codes for staircases are stringent and must be followed exactly by a builder in order for a structure to pass an inspection.

Building a staircase can be a challenge and an art. They can be

made of wood, stone or steel. To a staircase builder, the entire staircase structure is called a balustrade. A balustrade is comprised of several segments. The steps include a horizontal plane, the tread, and a vertical plane called the riser. The height of the riser is fixed. The bottom stair is called the curtail step. Newel posts, or end posts as most people call them, are the supports for the handrail. The smaller standards that between the newels are called balusters. The surfaces on the walls paralleling the risers are the wall strings. The distance between the top and the bottom is called the "going." What determines the number of stairs is the

incline and the area the stairs will be occupying.

Because stairs are significant in public buildings, stores and homes, they have become a central feature in designing a building. When considering the details of a staircase, an architect decides what material will be used in the construction and the style.

A staircase can be open, airy and sleek to enclosed, massive and ornate. Once the plans are decided upon, the task of constructing and installing it begins.

Skill and time are required to build and install staircases. At Roseland Stair Works in Orland

Park, the job of building and detailing stairs has been a trade for more than 60 years.

The company began in 1914 and was located in the section of Chicago on the south side known as Roseland. Since that time it has been owned by three men. The current owner, Ed Lautenbach and his son, Ken have continued with the tradition of building stairs the painstaking, crafted way of hand shaping, and hand sanding that marks the quality of their work.

According to Larry Pecor, general manager, the average cost of a straight forward two story installation of an oak staircase is \$3,500 to

\$4,000. Pecor said that the company has built staircases for many famous people, including Loni Anderson, Michael Jackson and closer to the area, Ed Vrdolyak, Chicago alderman of the 10th ward.

Pecor said the company has constructed thousands of staircases for structures throughout the U.S. and in foreign countries including England, Ireland and Germany.

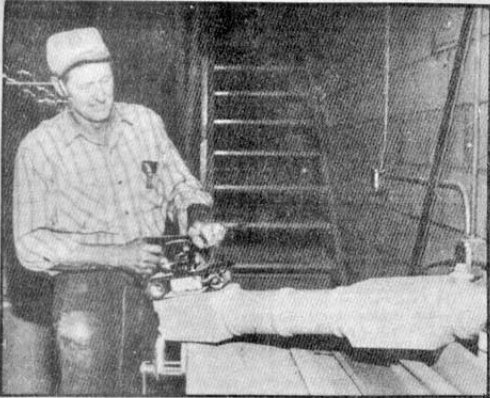
The steps from tree to stair is a long, tedious process, requiring expertise and craftsmanship that has been used for generations.

According to Pecor, a tree is selected for its grain and possible yield. He said the company uses mostly red and white oak for their stairs, although he said the firm has used exotic woods and other materi-

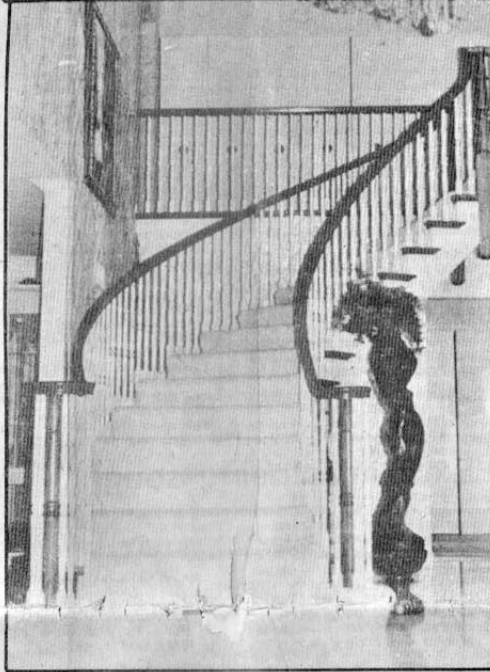
als in constructing a staircase.

After the tree is cut down it is cut into boards by a bandsawing operation. The it is kiln dried for about two months' or until the moisture content is at seven per cent. The board is then strato-planed, which "trues" the board, making it even on all sides. It is then shipped to Roseland, where the carpenters hand shape and form it on a template to the desired style and shape of a staircase.

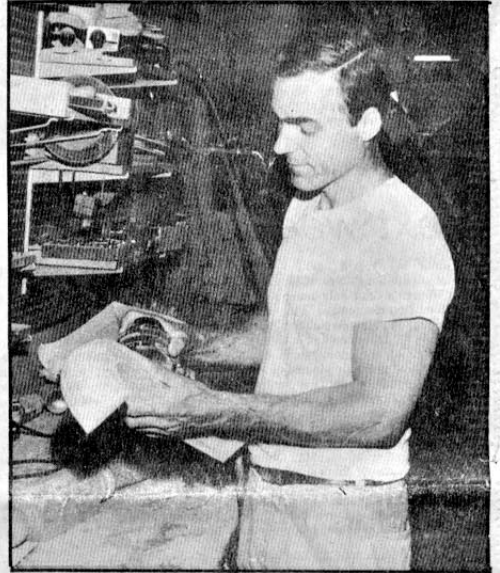
Pecor said that the company works primarily with builders and architects, but within the last few years he has noticed an interest in retail sales. "People are installing the railing themselves," he said. A certain amount of skill is needed to install the railings.



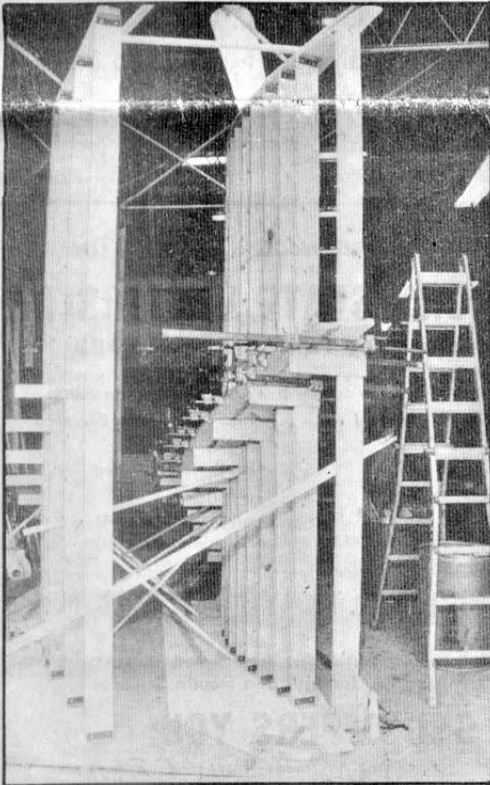
Harvey Ankor, a carpenter, sands one of the newels used in the construction of a staircase.



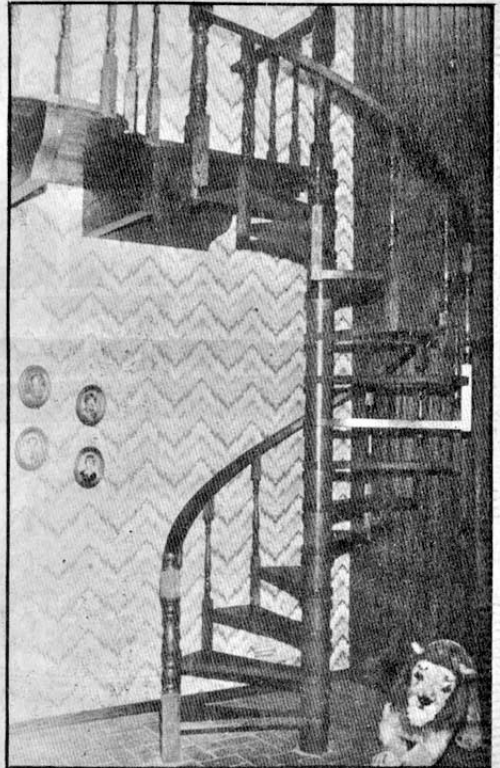
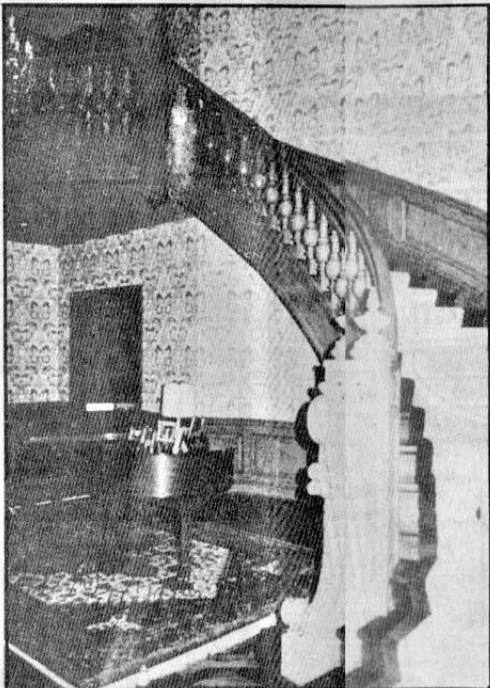
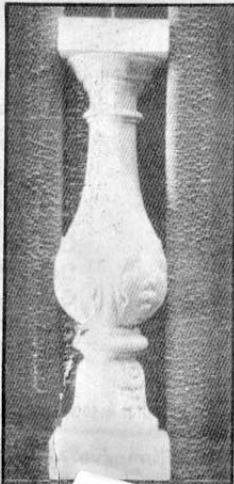
A winding staircase, above, is one of the designs built by Roseland Stair Works. Below, two employees of the company go over plans for the installation of a staircase to built and shipped to Arizona.



Ray Dekker is shown hand sanding a curved handrail.



Above a template is used to hand shape and laminate the curved design of a staircase. Below a plaster baluster that will be attached to wood blocks and assembled on a wood handrail is shown.



Photos by

Gene Milkowski