

**Jim Stiven**  
**Vintage Woodworks**  
**Victoria, British Columbia**

It started when Jim Stiven and his wife bought their first home—a small Victorian house. They had the idea that they would restore the beautiful wooden trim and heritage features. But they couldn't find a supplier of replacement parts for the missing trim.



At the time, Stiven was working as a professional boat builder. He saw an opportunity to fill a void in the building trades. With a partner, he opened Vintage Woodworks in 1980.

Now, 27 years later, Jim Stiven is still in business. The company he started has outgrown its first tiny shop in Victoria and moved to a larger facility. The staff has grown too, with 35 employees and a payroll of more than \$1 million.



Vintage Woodworks has established itself as a respected manufacturer of architectural woodwork and trim, windows, doors, mouldings, brackets, porch posts and stairway parts. Their products are in great demand—especially for the restoration of historic sites and heritage properties.

Stiven has become an expert in the field of restoration and adaptive re use of heritage buildings. He is the treasurer of the Heritage Legacy Foundation and a member of his local Heritage Advisory Board.

His business includes a plant that he has tooled to manufacture woodwork for Victorian, Edwardian and other historic buildings.

Surprisingly, you don't need antique equipment to do the machine work involved in wood restoration. Stiven buys his equipment from Europe. They are modern wood-processing machines designed to cut new "vintage" pieces.

Most of the lumber is homegrown in British Columbia. Douglas fir is the material of choice—for the beauty of its tight grain and ease of handling. Western red cedar and oak are also used.

When asked to name a favourite project, Jim Stiven mentions the Greenhouse Restoration project, at Royal Roads University, Hatley Park National Historic Site. The estate was built in 1914 as the retirement home for James Dunsmuir, former premier of British Columbia.

The greenhouse was in remarkably good shape. Vintage Woodworks was able to retain about 90% of the original glass and find replacement glass for the missing areas. The period glass is what gives the greenhouse its special look, Stiven explains. The old glass has more distortion and is less transparent than modern glass.

Another job that earned the firm much praise was the extensive window restoration of St. Ann's Academy, a national historic site.

In 1858, even before Victoria was incorporated as a municipality, an order of nuns from Québec arrived in the area to start a teaching and nursing mission. Their Academy functioned as a Catholic girls' school for more than 100 years. The historic site



The Vintage Woodworks team in front of the restored greenhouse at Royal Roads University, Hatley Park National Historic Site, Victoria



Davyd McMinn begins removing glass from section four of the greenhouse



Hoff Boyle completes glazing the south side of section five

today contains notable buildings from different periods—the original chapel from 1858, a four-storey building from 1872, and the school's west wing from 1910.

Vintage Woodworks had the job of restoring 360 windows, all single-glazed and built right into masonry openings.

The crew learned by trial and error when it came to restoring the old chapel windows, since they were not familiar with the Québec style. The restoration of the 1872 windows was easier, while the windows, dating from 1910, actually required the most attention because of the effects of weathering.



Restored dormer windows at St. Ann's Academy, Victoria

On a recent visit, ten years after the restoration, Stiven inspected the project and was pleased with what he saw. The windows are in excellent shape. Except for maintenance and caulking every 40 years and a paint job every ten years, the windows should stay strong indefinitely.

Jim Stiven thinks that one reason for his company's success is the system of incentives that municipal governments have established for restoration work. A growing appreciation of built heritage in British Columbia has brought forth a number of public and private clients. The federal government's Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places is another tool that supports the restoration business.

Vintage Woodworks has created a niche for itself in this growing market in British Columbia. It's a great field for a young person interested in carpentry, Stiven thinks. His employees—most of whom have stayed with his company for ten years or longer—obviously agree.

Vintage Woodworks

<http://www.vintagewoodworks.com/>

"Heritage Greenhouse Restoration at Hatley Park National Historic Site/Royal Roads University Nets Two Awards" –

Royal Roads University press release

[http://www.royalroads.ca/about-rru/the-university/news-events/news-releases/2007/greenhouse\\_restoration.htm](http://www.royalroads.ca/about-rru/the-university/news-events/news-releases/2007/greenhouse_restoration.htm)

St. Ann's Academy National Historic Site of Canada

[http://parcscanada.pch.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/non\\_admin/stAnn\\_e.asp](http://parcscanada.pch.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/non_admin/stAnn_e.asp)

<http://www.bcpcc.com/stanns/>