



## The Journey to CNC

You may recall in June 2019 CKCA shared the story of Casa Flores Cabinetry in Alberta who were awarded a federal grant of \$100,000 that provided much needed seed money to allow this company to expand. Part of the grant process required Casa Flores to also fund a portion of that expansion. See the original story [here](#).

Much progress has been made and now Casa Flores is enjoying the benefits of a fully functioning CNC machine. While many companies contemplate this step forward, we are pleased to present “Part Two” of Casa Flores’ story. The opinions expressed here are those of the company and are shared as part of CKCA’s vision to inspire innovation and progress in the industry.



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For years I was afraid to get a CNC. I had heard horror stories of shops that had invested in a machine which then threw their entire operation into chaos for months. We had a nice busy little shop and had developed some good systems and a solid client base of contractors and designers. The last thing I needed was to have this all turned upside-down.

But ultimately our business hit a ceiling in its growth and I realized that, in order to take it to the next level, we would need to invest in CNC technology. This is the story of our journey from being a small, manual shop to a growing business with the latest technology.

### **Software**

An integral part of getting a CNC is deciding what software to use to design and produce your jobs. There are so many factors to consider: cost, ease of use, ability to create complex cabinetry and millwork, among others.

I had tried various software programs in the past. However the decision had always been driven by cost, and the programs were usually too basic for our needs (we do a lot of custom work). This time I was looking for the right program, not necessarily the cheapest.

In the end we settled on Cabinet Vision. It can be purchased in four different levels – Essential, Standard, Advanced and Ultimate – each with increasing capability. There are also two components – the design/quote component and the screen-to-machine component which sends the jobs to the CNC. We went with the Ultimate version for the design component and Advanced for the screen-to-machine.

Cabinet Vision is definitely pricey and no doubt that compels many people to look at other options. However we wanted to make sure it would meet all of our needs and be able to continue to meet them in the long term. In total we spent just over \$50,000, which included an additional “Drafter” license and about \$10,000 for training (which is obligatory when you purchase the software).

Thankfully software can be leased, and even the \$10,000 training could be included in the lease (which surprised me). This has made it easier to spread out the cost.

## **CNC**

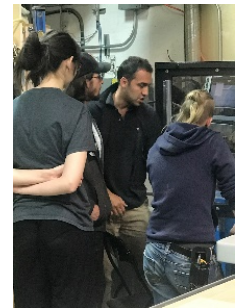
Equipped with our new software, we now needed to find the machine, which proved to be a more difficult decision. We knew nothing about CNC machines and had no idea what to look for. We looked at different machines which ranged in price from \$106,000 to \$130,000. All the machines were made by reputable companies and were similar in their capacity and ability, which is what made the decision a difficult one. What set each one apart?



In the end we chose the Biesse. Calgary company DIRT had several Biesse machines, which reflected well (DIRT is well-respected and known for their innovation – if they trusted Biesse then surely we could too). Secondly, Biesse offered online support and had a local technician should we have any issues with the machine. This was important because we have run into issues with other equipment and it is a real problem when there is no one that can come and fix it for you. Finally, Biesse offered a free one-week training course for two of our staff. (I say “free” but the training took place in Anaheim which meant purchasing flights, hotels and meals for those two staff members).

## **Additional Requirements**

The training was great for a few reasons – not only did we end up with two trained staff members, but the trip was an opportunity for them to get to know each other better and obviously a trip to Anaheim was a great staff perk (we gave them money for Disneyland).



However, a more important result of the course was that it came to light that our existing compressor and dust collector would not be adequate. We had tried to find out whether our equipment would be sufficient, but the information we were given was difficult to understand. Had it not been for the two people attending the course, we would not have been able to run the machine when it arrived.

With the delivery of the machine only two weeks away, we suddenly had to obtain these two additional pieces of equipment – an unbudgeted cost of around \$20K. Our leasing company was quickly becoming our best friend! On top of that, we had to replace most of the ducting on our dust collection system, since larger ducts were needed for both the CNC and the dust collector.

Another important consideration was the electrical requirements. Our shop thankfully has plenty of power, but we needed new electrical installations for the CNC, as well as the new compressor and dust collector.

## Installation & Training

The day finally arrived – “Bessie” (as she has affectionately become known) arrived at the end of August.

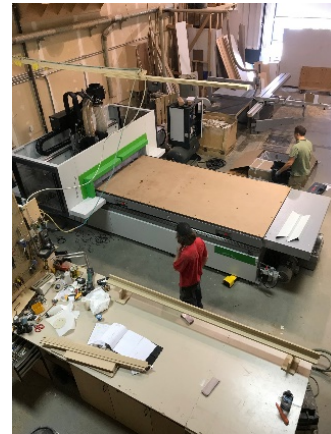


We had hired a crane service to take her off the truck and set her in her place of honour in our shop. The following week the Biesse technician was on site to set up the machine and train our staff.

With the machine up and running, the Cabinet Vision trainer arrived on-site and spent a week integrating the machine, and making sure everything was running smoothly. This is surely something we would not have been able to do on our own. By the time she left, we were confident and knowledgeable enough to run the machine on our own.

## Keys to Success

As I said at the beginning, my biggest worry about getting a CNC was that it would throw our entire business into chaos. However the whole experience has been very positive and the integration of the machine has been surprisingly smooth. There are a few factors that I think have been key to our success that I would share with anyone looking at getting a CNC:



1. **Learn the software first** – I hired a CAD designer at the end of April, who spent four months learning the software before the machine arrived, and had several jobs already programmed and ready to run when the CNC came. I have heard of people getting the software and the machine at the same time. I think these must be the people with the horror stories.
2. **Invest in training** – our CAD designer had several online training sessions while she was learning the program before the machine arrived. This is pre-paid and required when you purchase Cabinet Vision but proved invaluable. We then had two staff members who went to the training at Biesse in Anaheim. This was then augmented with the onsite training provided by the Biesse technician who set up the machine. Finally, the Cabinet Vision trainer was at our shop for a week and made sure that we were able to actually able to run our jobs on the machine.
3. **Capitalize on employees’ unique skills** – We have three key employees who work with the CNC, all of whom come from different backgrounds.

Our CAD designer had never worked with Cabinet Vision before but had worked in other shops with similar software programs so was able to pick it up quite quickly.

It may have seemed an obvious choice to send the CAD designer to the Biesse training. However I wanted have a broad range of employees be trained in various aspects of CNC operation. Instead I sent one of our cabinet makers and one of our other office staff. The cabinet maker had no experience with CNC machines and has admitted she is not good with computers. But she knows how we do things in the shop and how cabinets are built.

The second person I sent to the Biesse training was my 21-year old daughter, who has been working in the office for the past few years performing basic administrative duties. She has an excellent understanding of computers, even though she has no formal training. This turned out to be a wise choice - not only does she feel like she plays a more important role in the business, but she can often troubleshoot problems with the software or the CNC that confound the rest of us.

By having them work together we benefit from their various strengths, and it is great to see how they have pulled together as a team. It is also interesting to note that these three people are all women, which I think is rather unique in our industry.

4. **Choose suppliers that offer support** – both Planit Canada (the Cabinet Vision supplier) and Biesse have been there to help us whenever we needed it. Recently the CNC had error codes that we could not figure out. The Biesse support department was just a phone call away. It turned out we needed a part that was shipped out immediately (under warranty) and arrived the next business day.

We have been up and running with the CNC for just over four months now and it is one of the best decisions we have ever made for our business. It has vastly improved our capabilities and our production capacity. At a time when many businesses in Alberta are struggling, I am pleased to say that our future is looking bright.

The best part is the yahoo moment!

