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Steven Kaye, owner of Paper Craft Interiors in Algonquin, poses with his award from the National Guild of Professional Paperhangers. Kaye won second place in the small spaces category for work he did on a woman's shoe closet in Chicago.

Wall wonder

Algonquin paperhanger earns national award

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ALGONQUIN – There are two career choices Steven Kaye never regrets. One: going to a school to learn the paperhanging trade, and two: joining a professional guild geared for his career.

The National Guild of Professional Paperhangers, of which he heads the Midwest chapter, has afforded him many opportunities, not only to network, but to show off his skills.

Recently, Kaye, of Algonquin, was awarded second place from the organization's small spaces category. He wallpapered a Chicago woman's shoe closet, in a high-end design that earned him the attention of the guild judges.

He accepted the award at an annual Convention and Vendor Showcase this September in Columbus, Ohio.

Kaye, 54, owns Paper Craft Interiors in Algonquin.

The 11-inch-deep, 12-inch-wide closet was the smallest he's ever worked in, and provided quite the challenge. He almost had to be a contortionist to get paper in between eight shelves.

"I hit my head on the shelves, I scraped my arms," he said. "I could barely get to the top shelf. I didn't know how I was able to do it."

He used a tufted pillow look on the walls and back of the doors, where shoes by Prada and Yves St. Laurent and other haute couture names sit. He lined each of the closet's shelves in pink leather wallpaper.

That's right, folks. Wallpaper is no longer limited to the floral prints



Provided photo

Kaye used a tufted pillow look and pink leather wallpaper in the shoe closet above.

in grandma's kitchen, or striped patterns in your parent's den. Nowadays, wallpaper is all about texture.

But some styles never die, and trends only last so long, Kaye said.

"There are a lot of textures now, but traditional will never go out of style," he said. "Those patterns will forever be popular. Today and 100 years from now."

Like many businesses, Kaye has had to adapt with the economy. His clientele went from average Joes to high-end housewives. Security was so tight on his most recent job, that he didn't even know who the homeowner was.

Majority of his customers once came referrals from paint stores, and now come from interior designers, who often point him toward high-end jobs, like the shoe closet in Chicago.

Kaye started hanging wallpaper in 1977 after graduating from the now-defunct United States School of Professional Paperhangers in Rutland, Vt. He struggled in high school and always knew he wanted to go into the trades, and found hanging wallpaper a good fit for his perfectionist tendencies.

"There are days when you think you can hang paper with your eyes closed," he said. "But you can [make mistakes] if you're not focused."

Kaye has won several of the guild's awards in the past, but this was a first in the small spaces category. In 2005 he won first place in the residential category, and second for commercial.

"I'm not going to say I'm the best, but I'm an excellent paperhanger," he said.