

SUNSHINE INDUSTRIES

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GARAGE OF DREAMS

HIDDEN IN DANIA BEACH, A WORKSHOP
BUILDS AND REBUILDS EXOTIC CARSBY JENNIFER LBOVICH
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Jett Wenig, all of 3½ feet tall and years away from his drivers license, bounds through his parents' shop, mostly oblivious to the carefully appointed pieces surrounding him — past the white vintage Rambler and the 1967 burgundy Jaguar E type.

Don't run, prompts Jason Wenig, his dad and owner of The Creative Workshop, a granary turned high-end custom car restoration and coach-building business where a normal restoration costs between \$125,000 and \$300,000.

The elder Wenig is standing toward the back near a gleaming Italian beauty, the one-door 1953 Stanguellini Bialbero, a rare racing car. The engine uncovered in a wine cellar in France. The proper wrapping of the wiring possible only through the work of an Italian translator and the Stanguellini Museum.

ONLY 20 BUILT

The bright red car with burgundy vinyl seats made its debut at Pebble Beach and is back for a little fine tuning.

"We did a complete restoration of one of the rarest and most famous Italian sports cars," Wenig, 37, said. "They built about 20, there's only about six left, and this is the only one with the original body."

It's just one of about three dozen cars Wenig's crew has restored since he and his wife, Kim, bought the business six years ago.

Although Wenig grew up tinkering with anything he could get his hands on, including his parents' 1967 Jaguar 420 sedan, it was his first go at running his own operation.

Both Jason and Kim had spent their professional lives working in New York City.

He graduated from business school and started at an advertising agency, working on a campaign dealing with diapers. As he puts it, "I was a young bachelor dealing with training pants."

Then he left to work on Wall Street and from there, to an Internet company as a director of marketing, dealing with the purchase of car parts online.

The job reignited his love of autos. Kim had been helping to run a textile company in the fashion district.

When the Internet bubble burst, so did Jason's company, and the two decided they wanted to start a business working with cars.

REINVENTION

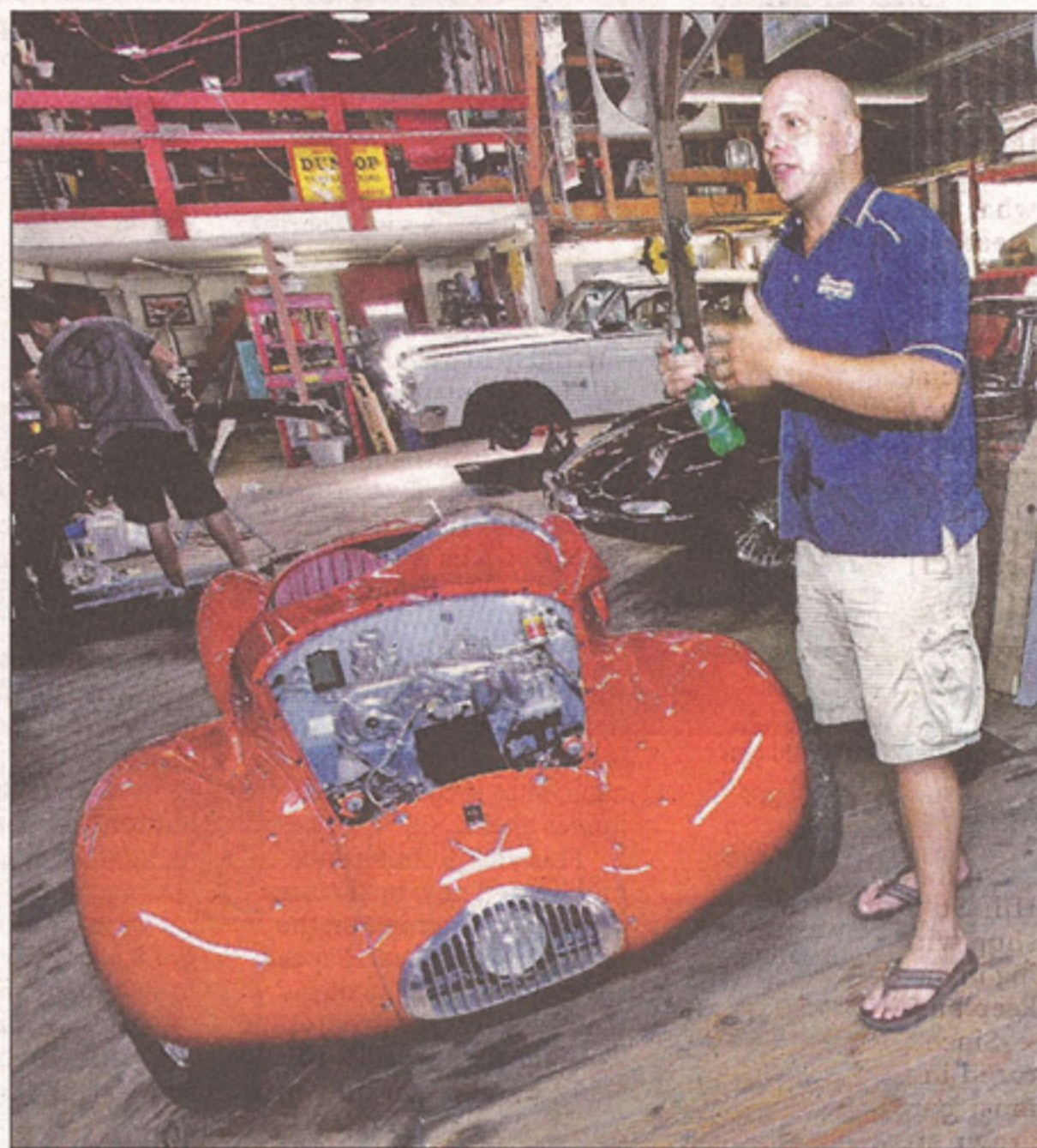
A downturn in the economy and a job loss can push people in a different career direction, said Tom Tworoger, chair of the entrepreneurship department at the Hui-zenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship at Nova Southeastern University.

"Whenever times are tough for an industry or an economy, that's where adversity creates opportunity," said

Tworoger, adding the trend of people reinventing themselves has followed two paths. "The trends are the younger generation isn't staying in companies for a long time, and then you have older groups who did something for 25 years and are wondering, 'What do I do when I grow up?'"

Those decisions for a different career can often be "passion directed," Tworoger said.

*TURN TO CREATIVE, 5



PHOTOS BY MARSHA HALPER/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

THE RAREST: In his workshop, Jason Wenig shows off the most exotic car under restoration, a 1953 Stanguellini, a small-displacement Italian racing car. His business, The Creative Workshop, is devoted to the restoration of rare and classic cars and the design and building of exotic vehicles.



FINISHING TOUCH: Installer Dean Watts works on kick panels on a 1955 Mercury Montclair Sun Valley, a restoration project at The Creative Workshop in Dania Beach.



DISPLAYED: Old hubcaps and vintage license plates decorate the interior of The Creative Workshop.

Couple driven to switch careers

*CREATIVE, FROM 4

Such was the case with Wenig. "The idea was almost to become car stylists," he said, sitting on a red leather chair in the loft area above the work space. "We call it car couture, where we could understand what someone is trying to get out of their car — I want the world to see me as this, or I love the shape of this car — but then apply modern technology upgrades so they can not only appreciate it from an aesthetic perspective but also from a performance perspective. It's a blending of modern technology with classic styling to create the ultimate car."

SEARCHING FAR AND WIDE

The search took them to nearly 20 spots in New York, Arizona and Florida before settling on the old barn in Dania Beach in 2002.

The place was in disrepair, with dead animals and an unpleasant stench, but it just had "an unbelievable vibe," Jason said.

So they bought the business at 118 Hill St. and started rebuilding the shop with a few customers and taking in most projects that walked in to keep business growing.

Since then, the cars have been featured in magazines and at the foremost car shows. And business has grown steadily, doubled in size each year over the first three years.

By about the fourth year, the shop had almost reached capacity, 23 projects at a time with 10 employees working on the custom cars.

Kim comes in two days a week to run the office. The rest of the time she takes care of Jett, 3½ years old, and their 10-month-old, Luke. Jason Wenig works on cars a few days a month and steps in at crunch time.

The key is bringing in the higher end projects, Wenig said.

Landing those projects is a combination of advertising and networking. He recently returned from showing one of the company's pieces at an exotic car show on Rodeo Drive. He travels to similar ones throughout the country.

"For every repair project we're doing at \$7,000, \$10,000, or \$15,000, that spot could be occupied by a project at half a million dollars," he said. "You can see where the profitability can go. It's my responsibility to fill every spot with the best possible project I can."



PHOTOS BY MARSHA HALPER/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

PLENTY OF WORK: Doug Chatham shapes a bumper at The Creative Workshop, a car restoration shop in Dania Beach that is operating near capacity.



AT HOME IN DANIA BEACH: The Creative Workshop was created in an old barn restored by owners Jason and Kim Wenig in 2002.

A typical restoration at The Creative Workshop takes about a year to a year and a half. For rare restorations, it's two years or longer.

Another masterpiece, the aptly named Creative Workshop Sport Speciale, was built from scratch for Barry Smith of Scottsdale, Ariz.

Smith saw one of Wenig's ads in an automotive publication and called

him, trying to figure out if his concept of a car could be built.

"After a few minutes of discussion, I told him what my concept was, and he said he could do it," said Smith, a retiree who started, ran and sold advertising agencies.

He wanted a car inspired by Ferrari racers from the late '50s to early '60s that looked like those cars but

THE CREATIVE WORKSHOP

Purchased: August 2002

Owners: Jason and Kim Wenig

Website: www.thecreativeworkshop.com

Some of the cars they've restored: 1953 Stanguellini Bialbero; 1954 Mercedes 220; 1953 Cooper MG; 1953 Connaught L3/SR; 1955 Cadillac Eldorado; 1965 Jaguar E-type; 1969 Camaro RS/SS; 1966 Pontiac GTO; 1964 Chevy Impala

with the performance of a car built to today's standards.

"I didn't want the car sitting in a garage. I wanted to drive it."

They communicated a few times a week, working through aspects of the design like the color (a very dark Ferrari red from the mid-'50s) to the fenders' shape (very curvaceous).

"I sent him probably \$175,000 to \$200,000 in checks before I ever met him," Smith said. "He conveyed a great deal of energy and conviction."

Smith takes the custom car, which can reach speeds of 250 mph, out about once a week. He's quick to point out he's never taken it above half throttle.

UNIQUE MODEL

"It's great fun. It is truly a one-of-a-kind car that will never be built again," Smith said. "Jason, I'm sure, will build cars from scratch for other people, but it won't be this car."

Building the beauty took about 7,000 man-hours over two years. The car's been featured in glossy magazines and an hour-long television special and in other media.

Smith won't give up the final price for building his exotic car, other than to say "a bunch. We don't even want to get into that, but a lot of money." And while the team at Creative Workshop finished Smith's dream car, they've also been working on Wenig's.

Wenig bought a 1959 Sunbeam Alpine for \$6,000.

"When I picked a car for myself, I didn't pick the rarest, I didn't pick the most expensive," he said. "It's the damn sexiest, hottest, coolest sports car that fits Americans. This \$6,000 car will be a \$200,000 car that no one would think of doing."