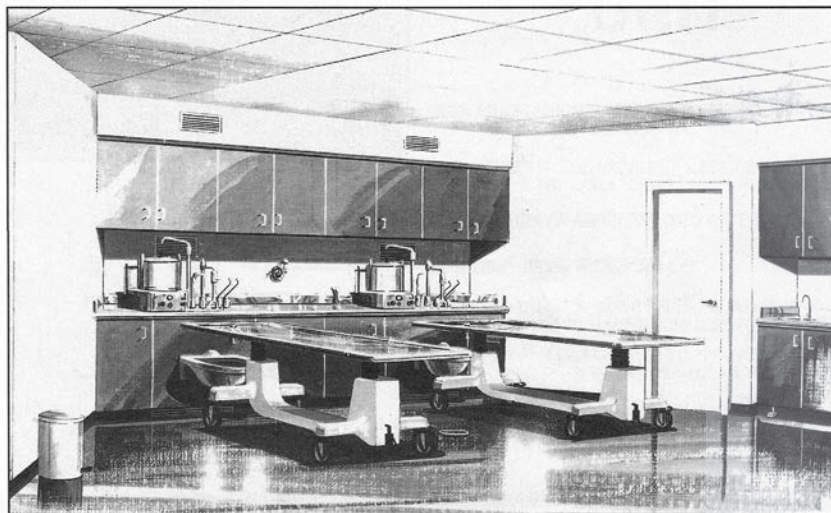
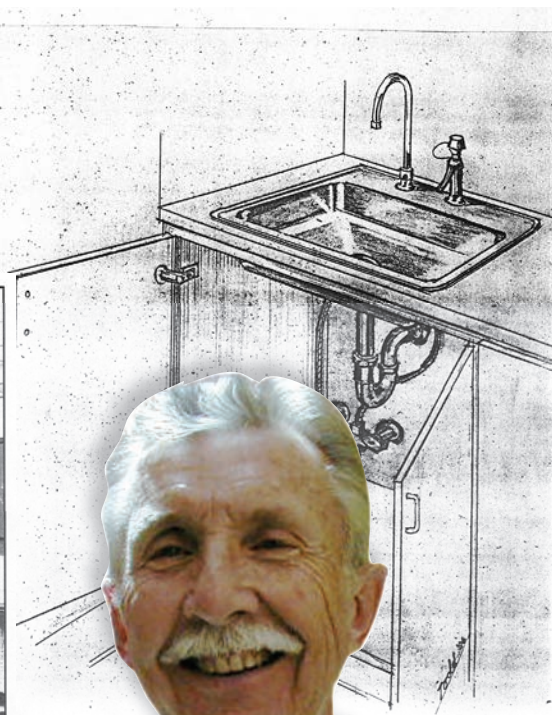


# Prep Arts

By Patti Martin Bartsche



J. S. Todd Limited Mortuary Enterprises, Dallas, Texas



## A Legacy of Service

When noted architect J. Stuart Todd, a pioneer in the field of funeral home architecture, decided to retire in 1990 from the firm he founded years earlier, he could have easily just sat back and enjoyed his post-retirement years.

But that's not who J. Stuart Todd, who died in 2005, was.

Shortly after retiring, Todd started receiving inquiries from funeral director friends concerned about new Occupational Safety and Health Administration preparation room mandates. Todd's friends were looking for help with the new rules and regulations.

Todd came out of retirement, "the next thing you know he was providing

not only PrepAir systems, but overall guidance, room designs and most of the equipment needed for a well-functioning (preparation) room," his son, Duncan Stuart Todd, explained.

It was in 1991 that J. Stuart Todd founded what was first called Mortuary Enterprises and is now known as Duncan Stuart Todd Ltd. in Boulder, Colorado.

While a lot has changed in funeral service in the past three decades, one

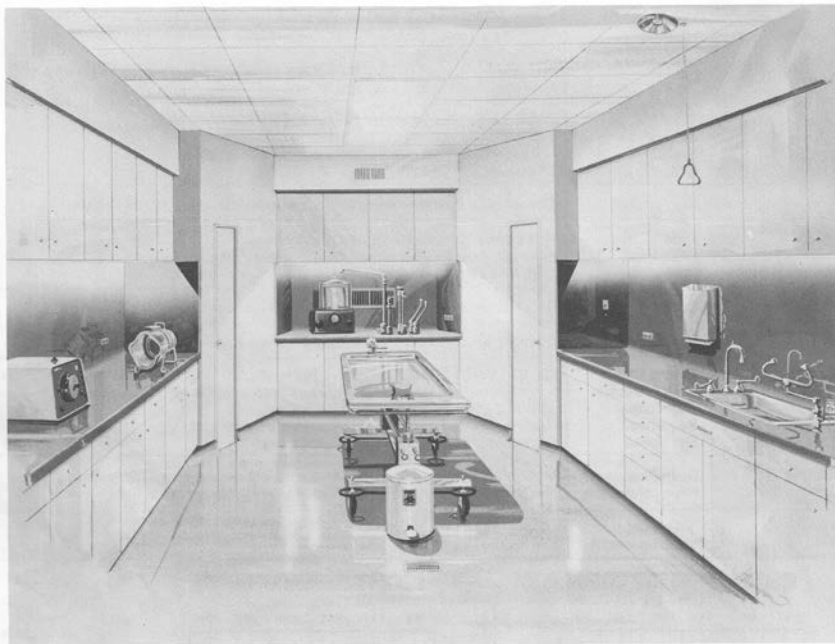
thing has remained constant – the Todd family's commitment to service and innovation.

Duncan Todd, who followed in his father's steps and became an architect, had established his own firm in California, where he lived with his wife, Marjori.

"Nine years later (after establishing Mortuary Enterprises), my father woke up one day only to realize that, wait, he was supposed to be retired!"

# PREPAIR™

## Prep Room Environmental Control Modules



Duncan Todd said. “That prompted a very surprising phone call to my wife, Marjori, and I in California ... we agreed to take over the business and within a week, the phones were ringing in our new office.”

At the beginning, it was Marjori Todd, who left an engineering career in California, who was the main operator of what became Duncan Stuart Todd Ltd. Over time, Duncan Todd became more involved.

“Who would ever have known that Marjori and I would spend the next 21 years continuing to grow the company?” Duncan Todd laughed.

But that’s exactly what these second-generation owners have done.

“It was OSHA regulations that resulted in the formation of the company in the first place ... (and) we have focused on air quality solutions ever since,” Marjori Todd said. “We have also developed products and material selections to minimizing airborne toxins and reduce the places bacteria and other potential hazards can survive, creating very sanitary and safe

environments, all in response to OSHA regulations.”

It should come as no surprise that today’s prep rooms bear little resemblance to those of decades gone by.

“Many preparation rooms of the past were just patched together with bits and pieces needed to get the job done,” Duncan Todd said. “This was what it was like when Stuart first started his company and decided he needed to do more to help the industry. Rooms had poor ventilation and were often dark, cramped, and used unsanitary materials.”

That said, “not all were terrible, and many tried hard to be compliant, but over time practices, equipment and materials continually evolved while the rooms did not. Thankfully, correcting those deficiencies and obsolete approaches was a niche dad was well suited to address and one we continue to this day,” Duncan Todd said. “In our experience, a room approaching 20 years of use is due for an upgrade for a multitude of reasons. It is really no different than

**Both pages: Duncan Stuart Todd Ltd. ads from the 1990s. Insert: J. Stuart Todd. (Photos courtesy of DST Ltd.)**

a kitchen or bathroom in an older house – eventually they need to be upgraded.”

As the demands of families change and evolve over time, industries – including funeral service – have adjusted and taken on new shapes to fit newly formed molds.

“The funeral industry does not look anything like it did 50 years ago, and the processes used surely are not the same,” Duncan Todd said. “Historically the prep room was often hidden away and not viewed as important as the ‘front of house’ spaces.”

As a consequence, Duncan Todd pointed out, embalming rooms had the potential to be neglected, underfunded and largely lost in the bigger picture. Fast forward to today’s reality with far more family involvement in arrangements and one finds ample evidence that the image of the embalming room requires greater focus.

“Families are asking questions from a new and more informed perspective while considering more providers and more options,” he said. “They are walking more facilities, both physically and virtually, and questioning how their loved ones will be cared for throughout all services offered. To address these developments many funeral homes are modernizing their care centers, while facilities with older, outdated prep rooms will likely suffer a competitive disadvantage.”

From Marjori Todd’s vantage point, there is little doubt that in today’s market the most successful funeral homes will be equipped with modern, code-compliant prep rooms that reflect the pride, dedication and mission of their organizations – and provide families with the highest possible level of confidence when selecting a firm to honor their loved one.





**Left to right: Today's DST prep room is architecturally designed and OSHA compliant. Duncan and Marjori Todd.**  
*(Photos courtesy of DST Ltd.)*

“Evolving from a room in the basement to today’s stand-alone professional care centers, the now-termed ‘preparation room’ has come into its own as a profit center and even as a feature to share during preplanning or arrangements,” Marjori Todd said. “Indeed, more and more funeral directors are recognizing that the preparation room can contribute added value to their operation. As one funeral director was heard to say, ‘The prep room – that’s where the money is.’”

Since taking over the reins of Duncan Stuart Todd Ltd., Duncan and Marjori Todd have worked to ensure that the firm continues to offer a service that is valuable to its customers, developing solutions and innovations to meet the funeral profession’s changing landscape.

When the Todds took over the company, Stuart Todd had been providing a single hand drawn 8.5-inch by 11-inch design to help customers improve their room layouts.

In addition, he supplied about half of the products needed for the room, focusing on the critical equipment.

Although retired, Stuart Todd continued to provide room designs for Duncan and Marjori until his death in 2005. After that, Marjori Todd took the design and equipment concept to the next level, creating “Premier Source Design.”

Premier Source, Marjori Todd explained, is an all-inclusive package that incorporates professional architectural design with a range of time-tested preparation room equipment, all provided by DST.

“It is a very cost-effective solution to the intricacies of the preparation room. It also helps our clients capitalize on our expertise,” she said. “Our all-inclusive package ensures that nothing is overlooked ...it offers our clients peace of mind.”

As Duncan Todd noted, outside of a select few, the typical engineer or

architect will never be called on to design an embalming room. And when those few are, they quickly discover that there is not much available information out there to educate them sufficiently to really work everything out to best practices.

“This isn’t a criticism of many highly experienced and competent designers; it is just a fact of the marketplace,” Duncan Todd noted. “With 30 years of experience solely with preparation rooms, trade services and larger care centers, Duncan Stuart Todd is the premier expert in the field. Speaking as a licensed architect, I believe one of the best values we offer is that we provide everything in the room, from the flooring and paint, to the OSHA compliant ventilation system, to the modern water control units.”

DST clients, he added, directly benefit from the firm’s 100% focus on preparation room design and equipment, and the goal is to provide

customers with the absolute best products and service.

While it's not often talked about, a properly designed prep room is important to the overall functionality of a funeral home, the Todds stress.

"It can be said that when your preparation room is equal to the other rooms in your facility, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," Duncan Todd said. "Funeral directors are recognizing that the preparation room can contribute added value to their operation.

"Many directors upgrade their preparation rooms for their employees' health, staff satisfaction and to meet local and OSHA code requirements," he continued. "While these are necessary and desirable reasons to update the work environment, a modern and well-maintained preparation room is also a good business investment, offering the secondary benefits of a public relations asset and an educational resource. Perhaps this is true now more than ever."

So, what do the best prep rooms look like?

For the Todds, the answer is simple.

"A prep room should look clean, well laid out and modern. A well thought out design will demonstrate an ergonomic awareness of the embalmer's tasks so that he/she will be able to work with a minimum of movement at the table," they said. "The workspace should be organized, providing ample storage and coordinated products to keep the space uncluttered. Our preparation rooms include a coordinated color palette for custom cabinets, flooring and walls. We believe a 'best' prep room should be inviting to work in as well as safe."

While it is important for a prep room to look nice, it is equally important that it is well designed, Marjori Todd said.

"The most important criterion in

evaluating a prep room is to note whether safety needs have been met," she said. "Safety in the prep room encompasses a large and varied range of considerations, the greatest being the need for safe (OSHA compliant) air quality.

That the embalmer is safe and feels comfortable in the prep room environment has a direct correlation to health, efficiency and productivity, Marjori Todd added.

Closely following safety, Duncan Todd added, would be ergonomics, sanitation, ease of use and properly specified equipment.

"By providing the best environment possible, embalming arts can achieve markedly improved results," he said. "We are often told about the increased staff satisfaction realized after a new room goes into use and the impact it has on the funeral home's ability to better serve their families."

### **Family Legacy**

While neither Marjori or Duncan Todd ever envisioned their respective career paths would intersect in funeral service, these days they can't imagine not working together – or carrying on the legacy started by J. Stuart Todd 30 years ago.

"I've been blessed to have had a family that is pretty easy to work with," Duncan Todd said. "Even after Marjori and I took over from Stuart, he continued to develop product, support our efforts and even attend conventions with us. Mom was great as well, providing marketing and advertising support for 15 years. Many in the publications side of things will tell you Doris Todd was the best. Now at 93, she has finally retired, but I must confess we still call on her. It's hard to find a better editor!"

Each and every decision the company makes circles back to one of J. Stuart Todd's most important business tenets – how does it best serve customers and families?

Does a funeral home need a four-station prep room or would a design with a smaller footprint fit its need?

"What we want to do is offer our customers the best possible outcome ... whatever that outcome is," Duncan Todd said. "That's what brought my father out of retirement ... the desire to provide clients with the best outcome with the new OSHA regulations."

Over the years, many of the clients have become friends, not just with Stuart, but with the rest of the Todd family, including Duncan and Marjori's daughter, Patty, who attended her first convention at four months and attended every annual National Funeral Directors Association convention until she was 13.

"Our customers know they can pick up the phone and talk to us any time, about anything," Duncan Todd said. "We've been able to thrive over the past three decades because this company was built on the foundation of customer service and innovation ... it's what my father believed in and what we continue today."

As for the future, Duncan Stuart Todd Ltd. plans to be around for a good, long time.

"Our years of hard work have resulted in a smooth methodology to provide the best rooms at the best value available to the industry," Duncan Todd said. "Our PrepAir OSHA systems provide the cleanest air possible while our product line is all inclusive.

"In spite of the rise in cremation rates, the prep room is far from being less important. The demand for funeral services, and hence the need for modern, efficient preparation rooms and care centers, will continue to grow," Duncan Todd said. "The past 30 years have been a pleasure, and we look forward to the company continuing for many, many more." •