

## International & CRAFTSMANSHIP & FRIENDSHIP

By Burt Bollinger

A gathering of hardwood flooring professionals from across the globe recently descended on a small castle in Brzeg, Poland to showcase their wood flooring skills, mentor the next generation, and create connections that will last a lifetime.

The event, called Workcamp Parquet, is held yearly, and brings master craftsmen, professionals, and apprentices from more than 20 countries together to collaborate and pass along tradition.

At this year's event, NWEA Regional Instructor Lenny Hall was on-hand to participate.

"Workcamp Parquet finds historic structures in need of repair. They then reach out to quality tradesmen in the industry, and have them work on the floors. The event also functions as a learning academy for young professionals attending trade schools in the local areas," explains Hall.

"The structure we worked on was Brzeg Castle. It was built on the ruins of a former castle back in the early 1960s, and it acts as a museum for the heritage of the area around it," says Hall.

With so many professionals from so many locations around the world, coordination was a challenge.

"I found the event was well-managed for it being multicultural and having multilingual issues. There was also the challenge of coping with varying levels of talent."

To converse across languages could take 1-2 intermediaries who could translate across various languages: English-Spanish-German-Russian and back again. To overcome the language



barrier solo, Hall

says he would

use a translator on his phone to type out his part of multilingual.

"Alternatively, we would just draw it on the floor, do a lot of finger-pointing, and the craftsmen I worked with would generally get the idea," says Hall.

Hall says his main reason for attending was to understand European floor work from a first-hand perspective.

"I also got the chance to see how I compared to the top craftsmen in Europe. It was so nice to work with these master craftsmen from other countries, learning their methods and approaches to our trade and sharing mine with them. They gave me many pats on the back, told me I was appreciated, and that my skills matched their own. That was a heartwarming experience for me."

The work on the hardwood floors within Brzeg Castle included an immense Great Hall.

"The Great Hall is a 4,000 square foot space that needed sand and refinish of





existing white oak/maple parquet. The floor was very much worse for wear, being now more than fifty years old. The floor probably needed to be torn out and replaced, but for now, they wanted to refinish it." A Polish Herald was fabricated by Russian craftsmen and the herald placed into the Ballroom floor.

A second room, the Trophy Room, was a large hall that would need to have a new parquet floor installed.

"We took the old parquet, which was 40cm by 40cm square, with a diagonal strip of maple on two sides of white oak. This design pattern looked like a large lattice, with concentric boxes going to the center of the corner of every square.

Hall was assigned to the team salvaging this parquet so they could install it in another area of the castle. They were able to repurpose about 60 square meters or about 700 square feet, and put it into a 50 square meter, or 550 square foot area used as offices.

"A new parquet for the Trophy Room was built out of two different colors of white oak, one of which had been chemically treated with a form of Iron Acetate that penetrated through and through, making it look Wenge. That acted as the center dot and perimeter border of the design. Finally, we put a herald into the floor. The floor was then sanded and finished with a few coats of a European oil finish. No stains were



All photos courtesy of Lenny Hall

involved anywhere," says Hall.

Reflecting on his experience, Hall says it was more enriching and informative than he ever could have imagined.

"I wanted to understand European floor work from a first-hand perspective, and I was certainly able to get a better, broader understanding. The other thing I gained was international friendship. I have lifelong friends from across the world now. It was a fantastic experience and should be on the bucket list of anyone who is a die-hard wood floor guy." ■

