

DESIGNERS

# One to Watch: This Calgarian Handcrafts Modern, Custom Rolling Ladders

Designer Phil Robinson reaches new heights with Calgary-based Custom Ladder Company.

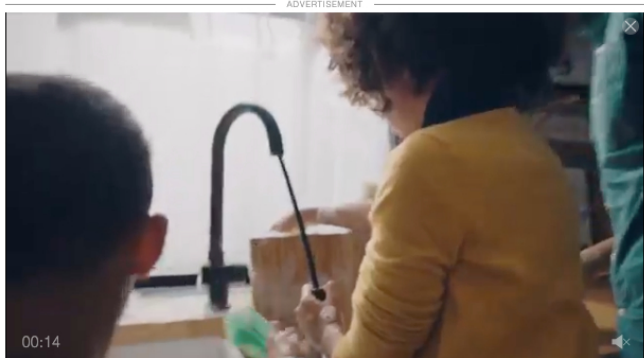
By Keagan Perlette / January 17, 2023



Custom Ladder Company

There's something undeniably romantic about a rolling library ladder.

Harkening back to an analogue era of rooms filled with books and candlelight, rolling ladders are evocative of slowness, quiet, and intentionality—feelings that can be hard to come by these days. In the modern home, a rolling ladder is the kind of unexpected detail that adds character and a sense of legacy to a space. And as it turns out, building something long-lasting is at the core of carpenter Phil Robinson's vision for his business, Custom Ladder Company.

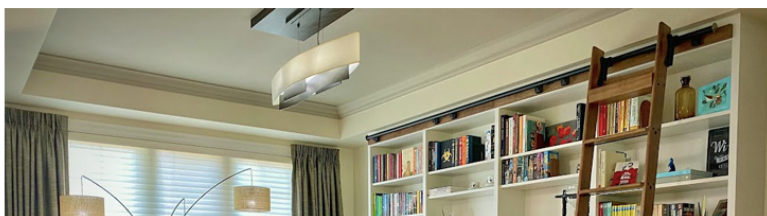




Custom Ladder Company's Walnut ladder.

Robinson began his foray into custom furniture in 2021 in his garage workshop in Calgary. He started upcycling family heirlooms and beloved vintage furniture into pieces that were more functional for today's homes, selling his wares through Etsy. As a kid, Robinson spent a lot of time in libraries, absorbing their charm and immersing himself in the worlds between the covers of his favourite books. In the midst of upcycling furniture, he decided to make himself the rolling library ladder of his dreams. After posting the ladder on Etsy, the requests for custom ladders poured in. "The ladders took over," Robinson remembers. He pivoted the business away from upcycled furniture, solely selling ladders built for kitchens, lofts, tiny homes, offices, and, of course, home libraries.

[Custom Ladder Company](#) is the only bespoke ladder business in Canada. Typically, if you're looking for a rolling ladder, you'll find one-size-fits-all kits that can be pricey and may not fit your space, requiring custom millwork to accommodate installation. Robinson wanted to change that, offering a completely personalised ladder design experience for his customers. "It all starts with the client," he says, "When I get a request, I pepper them with questions about what their space looks like and where the ladder will go. People don't know what options are available to them—different types of wood, finishes, and hardware. Many times I'll mix and match hardware from different companies for a more custom look."





This hands-on approach allows Robinson to make ladders that reflect not only the client's style, but how they'll use the ladder every day. "I ask customers who will be using the ladder and how," Robinson explains. "For example, if children or older people are using the ladder, I can make the incline a little more gentle so that it's safer to climb." Recently, Robinson worked with a customer who needed to move her ladder from one end of her 10-foot tiny home to the other on a daily basis, so he advised that the ladder be made of fir because it's much lighter than other types of wood.

It's this collaborative creative process that drives Robinson's business. "It's not about selling ladders, it's about taking someone's vision and making it real," he says. "It's really important to me that when people get their ladder they say, 'Wow, it's better than I imagined.'" And that's what Robinson's ladders are all about, after all—referencing the library as a nostalgic space for nourishing the imagination while adding a touch of timeless class to any space.