

## Management & Leadership

### Lobster sans Larry King Live on Utah's Death Row

PATRICK BULGER

WHAT more could a man on Death Row ask for but an hour, alive — and yet so close to death — on Larry King Live? But Ronnie Lee Gardner was refused his 60 minutes, less 20 for ad breaks, on CNN. All he got was a Tweet, as Utah attorney general Mark Shurtleff tweeted his 7 000 followers, “A solemn day. Barring a stay by Sup Ct, & with my final nod, Utah will use most extreme power and execute a killer. Mourn his

#### LATE NIGHT NEWS

victims. Justice”. Thus did the very odd US state of Utah note the passing, by firing squad last week, of Gardner, a double killer, possibly brain-damaged. It was nearly 25 years since he shot his last victim, a lawyer, in court, after having earlier called time on a bartender. A quarter-century of appeals and legal manoeuvring ended without Larry King, but with the obligatory last meal of lobster tail, washed down by a 7Up.

Inevitably, the execution has restarted the “debate” on capital punishment, with the Twitter flourish adding an up-to-date, but some say inappropriate, touch to a necessary evil. Much like the modern meat-eater, the public has no idea how beef and chicken come to be on the table, and prefers it that way. Likewise, the search for smarter and more “humane” methods of dispatch, to gas and injection and, in extreme cases, hours of Larry King re-runs, at gunpoint.

Of the now-deceased Gardner, one can only but salute his studied mastery of public relations, even if it all came to naught. By choosing the firing squad, he was imitating Utah's most infamous killer-son and ne'er do well, Gary Gilmore, a misfit canonised in Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* when he was executed by firing squad in Utah in 1977. Partly through Mailer, Gilmore became an antihero of the desperate '70s, and *The Executioner's Song* a herald for a new and frightening age of mindless criminal violence — often

# Company that rises above rank and file

Award-winning design is not often associated with filing, unless you're Orgafile's Arnold van Wijk, writes Katy Chance

ARNOLD van Wijk, MD of Orgafile in Somerset West, was still in his 20s when he heard that guaranteed clarion call to business glory: “Get into filing!”

More than 30 years later he's turned the world of filing on its head, shifted design parameters and almost made filing sexy.

“Joe Botha is a friend and file manufacturer. He told me there were problems in filing,” says Van Wijk. “People outgrow systems; they need more cabinets and so on. This was 1976, so paper was important.”

It still is. The paperless office we've all been promised is a pipe dream. “Paper is user-friendly. It's lasted because it's easy to work with,” says Van Wijk. I'd add that it's an intuitively human product; we like its tangibility and its malleable ability to bend and fold to our will.

Van Wijk started Nolon Office Furniture, which soon morphed into Optiplan — which “created and led the world of filing” — as he was disillusioned with working for others.

“When I became branch manager (of an office equipment sales company) I got to go to meetings which I thought would be heaven, as that's where decisions happen, but at meetings people would say they'd do this and do that, but nothing got done. I'd go to the directors and ask them why nothing had been actioned — and still nothing got done!”

Prior to that, though, it must be said that Van Wijk didn't get much done. Born in Paarl, after his mandatory army stint he went to university where he failed at medicine and psychology in quick succession. “I felt like such a loser,” he says.

His father and uncles were all doctors and Van Wijk attributes his later work ethic and success to the motivation of earlier losses.

After his brief brush with academia, Van Wijk's mother gave him a ticket to London and £100. He arrived with £88, having spent the rest on “mostly beer on the boat”.

After Europe, where he “worked like a skivvy”, life in the slow lane that is Paarl was unthinkable, so he moved to Joburg and eventually got into the heady world of filing.

He was selling German Mappel files and still maintains a close relationship with this and other German firms. He sold Optiplan in 1996, sort of by accident. “I hadn't thought of selling but wanted to move back to the Cape and leave a guy in charge in Joburg. Then I was offered four times what I thought the company was worth and took it.

“It was a good deal, but in hindsight it wasn't good for me.” He had unfinished business.

As early as 1991 he had spent time in London with big clients such as Mobil Oil and Cambridge University. “In SA we had designed special trolleys for

delivery and installation, but here we have lots of space and inexpensive labour. In London, with its winding staircases and narrow passageways, I was astounded by the amount of energy, effort and time that went into just getting filing cabinets into place. And once they were in place, that was it, for good.”

The standard then, as now, is fixed-frame cabinet filing systems. “Even then I thought if only we could supply individual drawers, for manoeuvrability, it would make life so much easier.”

**“In London ... I was astounded by the amount of energy, effort and time that went into just getting filing cabinets into place**

Locking is the key, and it was the key to unlocking a new way of looking at filing. The locking unit is fixed for the dimensions of a whole cabinet, not by drawer, and every designer he went to told Van Wijk it couldn't be changed.

During his mini retirement he attended trade fairs in Europe, and even German designers said “no can do”.

Then he spoke to Stellenbosch University's Japie van der Westhuizen about his



TOP DRAWER: Orgafile's Arnold van Wijk refused to give up on his now award-winning idea even when a number of designers in Europe told him that it could not be done. Picture: KATY CHANCE

idea with the brief that a woman of 80, with one arm and partially blind, should be able to assemble the drawers.

The designer came back with two squares which “spoke to each other” in terms of locking. Van Wijk paid for the research, which became the springboard for further development.

It took six years from his idea of modularity to physical fruition, but Orgafile is the result, with all designs completed by Van Wijk's son, Adrian, a Canadian-based industrial designer.

The three hurdles he overcame are now three Orgafile patents: LinkFit, TouchFit, and DrawerLock.

The first ensures tool-free assembly. In front of me, Van

Wijk slotted a new drawer on to an old one without a screwdriver in sight. It clicked into place and was instantly robust.

TouchFit is a safety catch that allows only one drawer to open at a time. This sounds basic but is a fundamental paradigm shift in the mechanical design of filing “cabinets” from fixed-frame to isolated modularity.

Like any row of drawers, when one is open, the others need to be locked. This meant creating individual locking mechanisms such that each added module recognises and reads the adjacent drawer's mechanism, and instantly becomes part of a larger system. The adaptation is built into the design with no external

adjustment required.

The third, DrawerLock, ensures that when tilted, drawers can't run out. This, too, sounds basic but is a safety issue, legislated in some countries, and is an “old” but essential feature of filing systems.

So far, Orgafile has won the Best of Canada Design Awards in 2007; the SABS Chairman's Award for Design Excellence in 2008; was a finalist in this year's International Design Excellence Awards; and next month will receive the design world's greatest accolade, the Red Dot Award for Product Design.

The Red Dot Award was won from more than 4 000 entries from 57 countries and will see the design get a permanent

place in the Red Dot Design Museum's exhibition at its World Heritage Site in Essen, Germany, the first South African design to do so.

Then, two weeks ago, Van Wijk was notified by the German Design Council that Orgafile had been nominated for the Design Award of the Federal Republic of Germany for next year. This is the “highest official recognition for design excellence in Germany” and is awarded by the federal minister for economics and technology. To be eligible, a product must already have won a national or international award. Which makes Orgafile two for two.

His German contacts are aware of the awards and are already speaking to Van Wijk about European distribution, but people are creatures of habit and resist change, unless it is cheap. The Orgafile system is currently made from extruded wood, a “green” product made from post-consumer fibre. And anything eco-friendly is expensive.

Due to its flexibility, however, potential applications for the design are vast; for offices as well as for interior designers and, as the drawers can be made from solid wood, for residential use too. I see it in ad agencies and artists' studios where portfolio collections are constantly in flux.

Van Wijk says Orgafile's future may be as the world's locking system specialists, supplying wholesalers.

“This is a functional design breakthrough; the best way forward may be to sell the patented components to manufacturers or middlemen, and let the consumer overlay their own aesthetic.”

I would also like to see the design used in bookshelves, because you're guaranteed to add more and more over a lifetime. If you're into paper, that is. And clearly you are. chancek@bdfm.co.za

## Intuition is often the best guide

AUSTRALIANS are a great market for all things Virgin. They share the sense of fun and the entrepreneurial spirit that motivates Virgin. From sustainable energy to design, the Australians are busy innovating. Maybe that's why I get a lot of questions from down under. Here are some recent ones:



Richard Branson

meant that we provided frills like onboard massages. For

