

Van-tastic!

STORY & PHOTOS BY BRYAN BULLOCK

Nothing breaks up a band faster than a long tour crammed in a lousy van. Those seeking a little more legroom—or the ultimate in mobile luxury—can find it at Creative Mobile Interiors in Grove City.

From rock stars to Arab sultans to OSU tailgaters, CMI has crafted custom vans and buses for every need.

Walking through their 10,000-square-foot facility is like taking a trip through a theme park: Every vehicle has its own unique style and function.

One of the 45-foot buses they are working on during my visit is a high-tech mobile set to broadcast live shows for C-SPAN's Book TV; nearby there's a sterile medical bus that will serve as a portable gynecological office. In the garage next door there's a converted racecar trailer designed for a garden company to feature mahogany archways, stone walls and an 800-pound fountain.



Owen Connaughton sees mobile luxury as much more than cup holders.

"Every project is totally different. We rarely do two of anything," said Owen Connaughton, president and founder of CMI.

Connaughton's often-dusty sport coat and jeans reflect his dual role of salesman and overseer. Through starting as a cabinetmaker and working his way up, he's amassed an intimate understanding of the entire conversion process.

And there's certainly much to learn, as CMI offers a dizzying array of customizable features. The process starts with a customer selecting a vehicle and creating an original floor plan.

"We have never had anything we couldn't do. If anything, the problem is they can't afford their idea," Connaughton joked.

With features such as custom paint jobs, leather couches, flip-down plasma TVs and pounding sound systems, the cost of a fully tricked-out bus can quickly approach a million dollars.

But not all their clients demand such luxury, and the company still creates its share of vans and RVs that are spacious and well-equipped enough to keep small groups and families from turning on each other.



This 40-foot coach is being updated with in-motion satellite TV and GPS navigation. It features a kitchen, full bathroom and a variety of places to put your feet up.



New vehicles arrive at the warehouse stripped of all fixtures, and CMI builds everything from cabinets to steering consoles. This C-SPAN bus was completed and made its television debut last weekend.

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