Zora & Elfi Arkus-Duntov's Personal 1974 Corvette

From 1953 when Zora Arkus-Duntov went to work at GM until 1974 when he retired, Zora was photographed with all kinds of stock and experimental Corvettes. He even got to drive many of his “engineering mule” Corvettes home!

But here's the kicker! Zora and Elfi only ever “owned” one Corvette, this mildly-optioned 1974 Corvette with a then-trendy custom paint job. The National Corvette Museum currently has the car under restoration.

Corvette News, the free to all Corvette-owners bi-monthly magazine, covered Zora and Elfi's 1974 Corvette in the October/November issue. Enjoy this interesting piece of Corvette history.
- Scott

CORVETTE NEWS

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John Gibson

American Custom Industries—

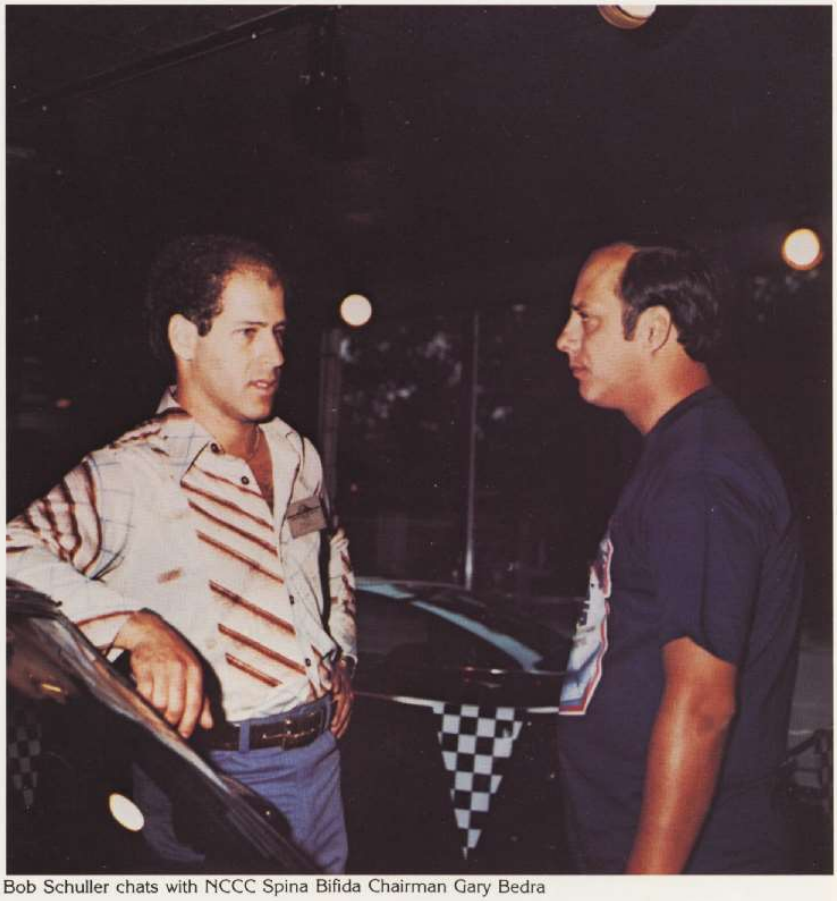
a successful Corvette business that got started by "accident"

Sometimes an accident can be a blessing in disguise. At least, that was the case when Bob Schuller's 1962 Corvette was involved in one near Toledo, Ohio about 13 years ago. Schuller was unable to find a bump shop that could repair the damage right, and he ultimately decided to launch his own Corvette repair business. His American Custom Industries (formerly American Custom Shop) has grown and diversified over the years and is now one of the fastest-growing Corvette supply operations in the country.

At the time of his fortunate accident, Schuller was a second-year engineering student at the University of Toledo. He planned to become an architectural engineer like his father, but the accident changed all that. When he couldn't find anyone to repair his damaged Corvette, Schuller took his frustrations to the local public library. He made off with everything he could find on fiberglass repair, fabrication and painting.

Step by step Schuller painstakingly repaired the car. In fact, he wasn't content with mere repairs. He brought his 'Vette up to show car condition. It wasn't long before Toledo area Corvette owners were bringing their cars to the Schuller family garage for repairs and Schuller soon had a parttime business. His repair "shop" expanded until his parents ordered him to get his tools and equipment out of the garage to make room for the family cars.

This turned out to be another blessing in disguise. Schuller was growing tired of his engineering studies anyway, and this was the spur he needed to get into a business of his own, working on Corvettes fulltime. So, armed only with his "library learning," a modest amount of experience gained in the family garage, plus lots of guts and determination, Schuller opened his humble Corvette enterprise in Sylvania, Ohio, a Toledo suburb.



Bob Schuller chats with NCCC Spina Bifida Chairman Gary Bedra

After much trial and error, the business began to grow, and Schuller added custom paint and body work to basic body repairs. As various Schuller-built cars appeared in shows throughout the midwest, his reputation for quality craftsmanship began to attract custom work from all over the country.

During the mid-1970's, Schuller joined forces with John Greenwood, the noted Corvette race car driver and

builder. The pair developed a series of high performance street machines, including a custom built turbocharged Corvette, all marketed under the banner of the American Custom Shop. Though no longer affiliated with Greenwood, American Custom continues to market many of these custom cars, including the turbo.

And now American Custom is in the mail order business — selling Corvette parts and accessories. And Schuller says response to the company's first mail order catalog has been good.

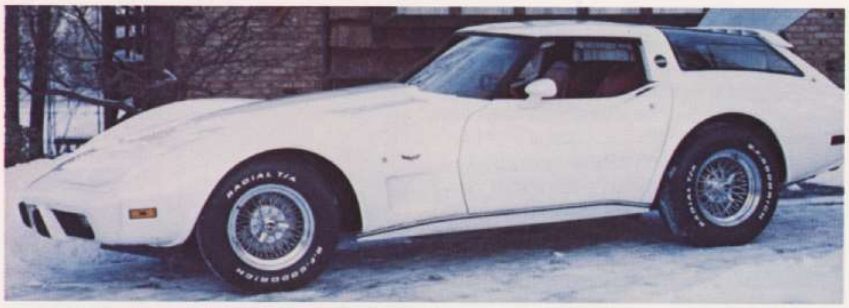
American Custom Industries sponsors Corvettes Inc., a local club sanctioned by the National Council of Corvette Clubs. For the past several years, Schuller and Corvettes Inc. have hosted an annual bash for Corvette buffs at the American Custom headquarters in Sylvania. **Corvette News** staffers along with Corvette engineers Art Belmonte and Bob Vogelei, and retired Corvette Chief Engineer Zora Arkus-Duntov sauntered down to Sylvania in June to join in this year's festivities. It was called "Showcase '79." The array of Corvettes on display was impressive and so were the facilities and equipment of the American Custom plant in Sylvania.

"Showcase '79" proved to be a full weekend, with a welcoming cocktail party on Friday night followed by a two-day car show on Saturday and Sunday. To help the Spina Bifida Association of America, autographed photographs of Duntov were presented to all who made donations.

American Custom has come a long way from the little repair shop Bob Schuller "accidentally" started in his family garage. Today, there is more Corvette body repair work than the shop can handle. Custom paint and body work are in high demand; custom built cars are selling well; and the catalog parts and accessories operation is humming along at a brisk pace. Overseeing the total operation, which now employs about 35 people, could keep Schuller busy in the office and out of the shop all day.

But for Schuller, the shop is where the action is, and nothing is going to keep him away for long. For customers, that's a good thing because Schuller is one of the most skillful and imaginative fiberglass car painters in the country. We watched him working-over a 1978 Corvette owned by a woman from Troy, Michi-

Top center: Fiberglass fabrication is a meticulous process with American Custom Industries. Below: ACI display vehicles. Top right: Zora Arkus-Duntov with his car "in process." Corvette Engineer Art Belmonte inspects ACI Turbo unit. Middle: CN's John Gibson chats with Showcase guests. Zora Arkus-Duntov signs autographs for benefit of Spina Bifida. Bottom: Owner inspects delicate detail work of Schuller paint treatment.



gan. She was pleased with her car but wanted Bob to come up with something to add life to the car's light blue exterior.

Within a few days, Schuller had added an Indy Pace Car spoiler set and a rear fiberglass bellypan, both manufactured by American Custom. He rubbed out the light blue body finish and laid on a magnificent metallic blue and burgundy striping scheme that transformed what the owner described as her Plain Jane into a stunning show car.

Then we watched Schuller work his magic on Duntov's 1974 Corvette. Duntov simply said that his favorite color was blue and left the rest to Schuller's skill and imagination. The pictures of these cars tell the story. Words just don't make it.

It's fun watching Schuller work. He loves working on Corvettes, and his enthusiasm is catching.

Corvette News Readers interested in obtaining a copy of American Custom Industries' new Corvette parts and accessories catalog should write directly to the company: American Custom Industries, 5035 Alexis Road, Sylvania, Ohio 43560, Phone: (419) 882-2091.

This article is part of a series on Corvette parts and accessories suppliers. Although our research on these suppliers is extensive, the articles should not be interpreted as an endorsement by Chevrolet Motor Division or Corvette News. Articles on other suppliers in the U.S. and Canada are scheduled for future CN issues.

Examples of the paint and body work that has given Bob Schuller an enviable reputation. Bottom: Duntov congratulates Schuller on his finished product.

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