

# Secret Shopper

SHELTER GOES UNDERCOVER



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## A "Charm"ing Experience Lumber Company Has an Old World Feel

"You're mighty brave to come all the way here for the first time by yourself." That's what Martin Yoder, who works in the kitchen department at Keim Lumber in Charm, Ohio, said to me when I visited the store for new kitchen cabinets. Charm, you see, is the kind of town you might not want to be stuck in during a blizzard. It's in the heart of Ohio's Amish country, about a 30-minute drive from shopping, dining and electricity in every home, store and building. It also seems to have just as many horses and buggies as it does auto-

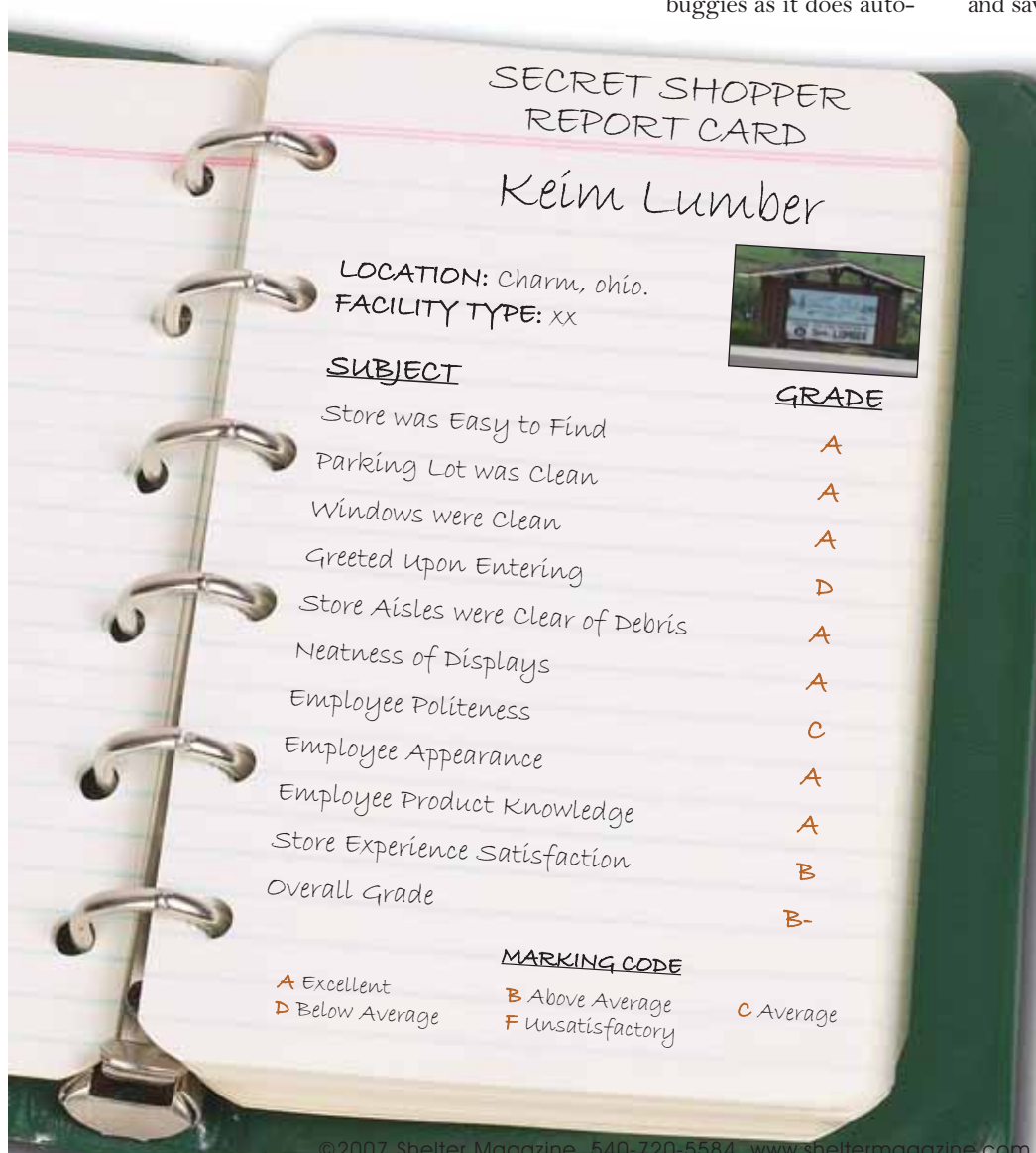
mobiles. There's a quaint general store, rolling hills, and Keim Lumber, which is practically as big as the town itself with its 80,000-square-foot showroom of decking, doors, windows, cabinetry and much more.

My mission in visiting Keim Lumber was to find out about some cabinetry, which I will need for the house my husband and I plan to build next year. Though we're only at the beginning stages of the process, I know just what I want in my kitchen and am eager to start shopping. I checked out Keim's website earlier in the day and saw that they could do computer-generated layouts. So I brought along a drawing of the kitchen and its dimensions in hopes I could have someone do a virtual illustration to show exactly how the kitchen would look.

Pulling into my parking space at Keim Lumber, the first thing I noticed was the horse-and-buggy tie-up area. I have to admit; it was like falling asleep and waking up in a completely different time.

I walked inside and found myself in the middle of a huge, open showroom/foyer area. A large staircase wound its way down from the upper level where the offices and employees' family area were housed. A diner that serves breakfast and lunch throughout the week, the Carpenter's Café, also was upstairs.

The hustling, bustling busyness, so typical of a big-box store, was clearly absent. There was a certain reserve about the place ... very quiet. No one greeted me with a jovial "Hello! Welcome to Keim Lumber!" but there was a small information desk where a young Amish lady was working. I stood in the center of the foyer for a moment, looking around from corner to corner, end to end in search of the cabinet





In the heart of Amish country, Keim Lumber not only has parking spaces for cars, but also has a buggy tie-up area for horse and buggies.

area. The lady at the information desk never looked up from what she was working on and never asked if she could assist me. There were displays of saws and cutting equipment, plumbing and fixtures, hardware, paints, doors and windows—everything you'd expect in such a store. It was very neat and organized.

I started making my way inside and saw that there was a huge help-desk area in the center. I walked slowly around, just waiting for someone to ask if they could help, but no one did.

I finally saw the kitchen cabinet section tucked away in a far back corner. I headed in that direction, where I saw one associate assisting someone who I presumed to have been a customer, but no one seemed to notice me. I walked through the displays, and there was a good number, several of which caught my eye—one in particular of which I was quite fond. It had a dark stain, stainless steel hardware, and some of the doors had frosted glass paneling. This is definitely it, I said to myself, but kept walking, waiting and looking for someone to help me. In the back corner I saw a man working at a desk. I lingered around for a moment or two thinking certainly he'd see me and ask to assist me, but he did not. A moment or two later he got up to go and speak with the other person in the area, the one who I figured for an associate. As she was leaving, this gentleman from the back finally noticed me.

"Is there something I can help you with?" he asked quietly. His name was Martin Yoder and I found out that he was responsible for the store's kitchen department.

"Yes. I am going to be building a house next year and I wanted to see about cherry cabinetry for the kitchen."

"Well, that display is cherry and so is this one," he said pointing toward two different displays.

"What about this one?" I asked as I walked toward the one that I liked most, the one with the frosted glass.

"That's birch wood."

"I like the darker, reddish color it has."

"That's the stain on it. You could have the cherry wood stained like that, too."

Next I showed him the drawing and asked whether he would be able to do a virtual illustration for me.

"Well, we usually only do that when you have your blueprints. You could come back when you have your blueprints and we could do it for you then," he said.

"OK. Well, do you have any information or anything about the different cabinets I can take home?"

"I can give you some literature." So we then walked back toward his desk where he rounded up a few brochures that showed different stains and styles.

"What about your countertops? Do you know what you want there? We can help you with that, too," he asked.

Countertops—boy, had I ever thought about countertops. I've had my heart set on granite for some time now.

"I like granite," I told him.

"We've got granite, as well as the Corian® and Zodiaq® products." He gave me some brochures on those products, too, and added that they could also assist with flooring and all of our building materials.

"That sounds great. I really appreciate all of your help," I told him.

We talked for a moment, then I thanked him and made my way back to the front to leave. I walked through a few of the other displays to see what the store offered, but was never greeted or approached. Heading to my car, I resisted the temptation to pet the horses; instead, I took a picture. 🏠



Keim Lumber has an 80,000-square-foot showroom of decking, doors, windows, cabinetry and much more.