If the ship’s purser was shocked into open-mouthed amazement at his first exposure to the kind of man John Charles Craig is, well, it was his own fault.

Because today — four decades after he left the purser staring at his back as he walked down the gangplank to the Honolulu dock — Jack Craig is still at it.

Consequently, the 6 foot 2 inch 200-pound plus ex-Californian is the prototype of what a wall and ceiling contractor should and can be. No one in the Hawaiian construction community will accept a second place listing for holding him in respect and honor—and some claim first place for holding him in awe.

He is the kind of contactor who will—a fact known to every member of the design profession in the Islands—review carefully the plans and details of a job, re-work it, make corrections and suggestions. And then he’ll send it back—with no obligation that he be paid, be given an inside shot at the job, or even be asked to bid on it.

The key to contracting success according to Jack Craig is matching your overhead to the scope of your operations and cash flow, keeping these elements in balance.
This Honolulu Contractor Has Established an Outstanding Reputation-And His Industry Gains

His reasoning: Jack Craig simply wants to improve his industry.

If an owner, developer, or designer has a problem and needs construction know-how, Jack Craig will provide whatever expertise and information he possesses—no strings attached.

He and his firm have a standing offer to architects and engineers: they are on call to help with job specifications—free—just to assure a good job regardless of who gets the contract.

Small wonder, then, that the ship's purser, in charge of payrolls for the pleasure ship, “Malolo,” frowned when the young Chief Scullion, who was leaving the ship in Honolulu, returned a few moments after being paid off.

“I think you’ve made a bad mistake.” Jack told him, counting out $15 in cash and planting it back in the purser’s hand. “You overpaid me—and I want to return it now because I won’t be seeing you again.”

In those deep Great Depression days, the amount represented a full month’s pay. As Jack stepped back down the gangplank, the purser was still mumbling to a shipmate, “I don’t believe it . . . . I don’t believe it, no one does THAT.”

The purser and Hawaii were both to learn that Jack Craig does, indeed, do THAT. Which helps explain why Craig and Company Ltd., of Ward Avenue, Honolulu, is respected Island-wide and is today in the $2,000,000 volume range, specializing in such construction applications as drywall, acoustics, insulation, sound control, painting renovation, cold storage, industrial boilers and refractory work.

His company operates out of a two-story light beige stucco finish building with Jack’s large office occupying part of a jive-office suite on the second floor. There is also a 20,000 square feet warehouse located some 7 blocks away on Waimanu Street.

Born 68 years ago in Berkeley, California, son of the late George W. and Mary Alice Malline Craig, Jack received his early schooling in California, graduating from Porterville Union High School and then entering Stanford University as a major in pre-clinical science.

While at Stanford, he was a light heavyweight boxer and played fullback, tackle, and then end for the famous “Pop” Warner where he warmed some of the finest benches on the coast. His boxing skills he picked up from his father, a real estate and Orange Grove proprietor, who packed some 230 pounds on a 5-foot 6-inch frame with an enormous reach—a characteristic which enabled him to swat back the ears of his six-foot plus son with intermittent fatherly pride.

Without the money to finish medical school, Jack drifted into a night clerk job with a small hotel, then worked as a horticulture inspector for San Francisco’s port. When the Malolo brought him to Honolulu an old college chum convinced him to stay and his first job there was as a printing salesman for Paradise Pacific Magazine.

Later, he got into flooring construction with Associated Contractors, a firm that designed and sold middle class custom houses. He eventually wound up as the superintendent at a rock plant, and then during World War II served as the plant manager. On December 7, 1941, Jack was simply driving to work when the infamous attack took place and he saw of that event only a single Japanese airplane lolling around the sky.

But for the immediate period after the attack, he worked without end for five straight days in charge of a first aid station, a responsibility that demanded every personal skill he possessed because the aid men were all Japanese—and feelings were understandably running rather high.

At war’s end, Jack joined forces with a master salesman, Roy C. Pullen, and the two men operated a company specializing in Venetian blinds, flooring and insulation. Once started on his own, Jack was among the first to introduce drywall into Hawaii in the late 40s, using welded 16 gage metal studs. He spread the new drywall product throughout the Pacific Islands—Wake Island, Guam Island, the Marshall Islands, as well as the South Pacific.

In a survey he was asked to make in Australia, he helped introduce drywall technology there with steel studs and screws while designing acoustical ceilings, too. Despite their success together, Jack and Pullen parted on the most amicable of terms in 1953, and Jack formed Craig & Company.

Jack is married to the former Ruth Ray, a native of Philadelphia, Miss., who lived most of her life in Portland, Ore., and was teaching school there when she met her husband while on a trip in Honolulu. They are the parents of four sons, John, Jr., Harold, Barry, and Timothy. John, Jr. is employed by the company as an estimator and insulation manager.

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For 30 years an amateur competitive sailor (“I’m a rag man, now, not a stink potter.”), Jack still enjoys a competitive day on the water, having crewed in the

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CRAIG: (Continued from Page 19)
Cal 33 and 210. He was on the crew that won the first 750-mile race ever held around all the Islands. His favorite boat remains the Hong Kong-built Catamaran, Maunakai 23.
A long-time member and organizer for GDCI, Jack maintained a discrete silence about the impending consolidation with iaWCC—even though he favored consolidation—lest he exert improper influence on his colleagues. When the consolidation went through, he plunged into the new organization to assure its success. When CONSTRUCTION DIMENSIONS caught up to him he was pressed for time as usual, was awaiting an airplane flight for a series of meetings elsewhere—but he still had time to sit down, talk about his feelings for an industry that has been good for him and to whom he has been equally kind.)

DIMENSIONS: Jack, nearly every former GDCI contractor refers to you as 'the one, true gentleman in this industry.' That's a rather tough reputation to uphold, isn't it?
CRAIG: Well, they've referred to me with other phrases, too, so I'll let them get away with that one. But—and I don't want to be overly philosophical about this—but I really do believe in the dignity of man and I believe myself to be an honest man. At least I try to conduct myself like one.
DIMENSIONS: Where does—from a business standpoint—all this get you?
CRAIG: I've never really measured it. But it does give me the satisfaction of knowing that I'm doing the best I can and that I'm helping my industry.
DIMENSIONS: Doing work for nothing in the construction industry has often been described as a formula for a quick slide to ruin?
CRAIG: It is. But my concept is: give them a better job. If you have expertise give any and all information to anyone who wants it on the basis that you're trying to improve the industry and the rewards will come back to you. Maybe the rewards won't come immediately, but they will come.
DIMENSIONS: Then you really do figure a job for absolutely nothing?
CRAIG: You know, I used to tell myself, 'I'll figure this job and then bid it according to the plans and specs.' But that's a waste of time. Now I ask for details of a job and I make corrections and suggestions and send it back for review with no idea of getting paid or getting an inside advantage.
Sure it costs me—but I know they'll get a better job and I know then that my competitors will have to do the job right.
We're on call to architects and engineers to help with their specifications and to advise on what approaches are best, what materials to use, and what it should cost. We'll set the specs so others will have to do the job properly. And we do it as a service for the good of the industry but, basically, so these people will have a good job.
DIMENSIONS: How about your own work, though? It sounds as though you do a considerable amount of negotiating in your work?
CRAIG: Oh, yes, we do a lot of negotiable work. I'm a perfectionist—and my customers know it—so it has to be done right. I criticize my own work probably more severely than anyone else. And that's just good business. In this business, call backs can kill you. Do it right the first time and you won't have to keep coming back.
DIMENSIONS: Jack, do you make a distinction between what is termed a selling type of contractor vs. a bidding type?
CRAIG: A contractor, who just bids to the specifications and gives nothing to the job in the way of expertise is just that—a bidder. What I try to do is improve the job and thus promote our industry. That involves getting the proper job on paper. I've had 41 years of expertise—and I'm glad to give it to a designer to help him get the right job at the right price at the right level of quality.
DIMENSIONS: Aside from your own personal approach, is there any great difference between doing business in the Islands than on the mainland?

CRAIG: Except for the logistical problem, there’s no difference. Over in the Islands, we usually carry a much larger inventory than most state side contractors because we have to. On the mainland, you can often call up a supplier on the phone and have it in a week; we can’t.

Here, you order in April and receive in September. As a result, we carry about $300,000 in inventory at a minimum. In drywall, you can often order as you need it.

But the need for a tremendous variety of types and sizes in acoustical, insulation, duct insulators and refractory sizes—well, you have to cover yourself just to stay competitive.

DIMENSIONS: That pretty much puts warehouse space at a premium here, doesn’t it?

CRAIG: I should say so. In addition to our warehouse, we often use boat holds for warehouses. Anyway, experience gives us roughly the lag times on various items so we order accordingly.

DIMENSIONS: How does the business picture look to you in Hawaii right now?

CRAIG: Pretty much like it looks in many other sections of the country. Currently, there is a declining market for construction here now and some of us will have to go. In condominiums, we’re overbuilt and the construction industry is overpopulated here. Trades are running 50% on the bench with the others on a 32 hours week.

All in all, I’d say we won’t recover in the Islands for another 4-5 years.

DIMENSIONS: Would you describe yourself as a pessimist about immediate business prospects for the industry?

CRAIG: No, not a pessimist. I’m more of, let’s say, an optimistic pessimist. I think some of the economists are too optimistic. Some areas—such as Texas, Oklahoma, a few midwestern states—haven’t felt the brunt of this thing, but it’ll catch up to them.

I don’t see a depression, but I don’t see any dramatic improvement either. It’ll be much slower than many of us want or truly anticipate. I expect a number of contractors will go down in the next few years—and this will include some fine ones—because, I don’t think we’ve really bottomed out yet.

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CRAIG: (Continued from Page 59)

DIMENSIONS: Well, given that situation, what tactics should a contractor utilize for survival?

CRAIG: The ability to stay small is the key, I think. Stay too big for your decreased volume and you’re headed for a bad spin. You just have to pull in your horns and cut the overhead as the cash flow dwindles.

DIMENSIONS: That’s fine defensive advice, Jack, but how about some offensive strategy?

CRAIG: Diversification is the only reasonable answer. If it’s within a contractor’s technical expertise, he should immediately plan to develop new services. If it isn’t now within his expertise then he should train himself; you’re never too old for that.

And five years ago isn’t today. By necessity, you’ll have to develop. I just don’t think we have any other choice.

DIMENSIONS: Any suggestions for direction in diversifying?

CRAIG: Sure. It’s toward the interior package. Our industry is going that way now—studs, drywall, door bucks, framing, finishing—the whole thing. Unless you want to remain small you can’t stay in just drywall alone anymore. The situation has changed.

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 DIMENSIONS: Any others?

CRAIG: Get yourself into this association. I mean that. The dissemination of information between contractors is remarkable—when you’re not competing, that is—and only an industry association allows and promotes this.

Membership is really money in the bank because you’re able to talk to someone who’s already solved your problem. Plus, when you get into a hassle, you’ve got an entire industry going to bat for you.

There’s another reason, something similar to what Teddy Roosevelt once said, “You have an obligation to your country.” Well, you have an obligation to your industry, too. Look at the situs bill. Every contractor got into that one with his association and that piece of defeated legislation alone saved every contractor his dues for a generation—and it improved the entire industry, union and non-union.

DIMENSIONS: Diversifying under present conditions can be a bit risky, can’t it?

CRAIG: Certainly. So can breathing. Look, when I first started introducing drywall in the Islands, it was a new system and no one was helping training anyone. Manpower in the Islands has always been a problem so we knew we had to train our own people.

We had 134 high rise hotel starts to man and we also had zilch in the way of people, except maybe for a few California rejects who could no longer cut it on the mainland. We got the laws changed here so we could qualify mechanics in less than four years—tapers, hangers, and finishers. We needed 600-700 men in a hurry, and we trained them.

We also trained acoustical crews. That’s about the time I joined the Gypsum Drywall Contractors Association and became a union operator. We started schools, raised the money for them, and set up using the California training program.

Oh, there was some jealousy about using the California training materials rather than develop our own, but they were the best in the world and everyone knew it. Without an association connection and the support of the California people we couldn’t have achieved what we did so well and so fast. Those California people were absolutely grand.

DIMENSIONS: I know you’ve alluded to this earlier, but where, specifically, do you see the industry going in, say, the next five years?

CRAIG: I don’t think it will be all technical; it’ll be more economical than in the past. The plasterers had it all but blew it with excessive wage demands. Then drywall came in and the tapers went wild to the point where it will be cheaper in Honolulu in the very near future to put on thin coat so the plasterers are coming back.

So the finishes, I think, are the key just as they always have been. Shaft walls have been making great

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improvements, and drywall contractors are now into hollow tile and masonry work. Insulation will become a good move—although a lot of wall and ceiling contractors are already into it.

DIMENSIONS: How do you handle control of your current jobs during these times?

CRAIG: The same as I always have. I visit jobs all the time. I’m my own superintendent on the boilers and cold storage work. I have good people in Larry Correa, who handles acousticals and drywall; Walter Light, who does takeoffs and engineering, and my son, John, Jr., for insulation.

These men get the complete history on the job; you have to do this because it’s dissemination of information that is the construction industry’s biggest problem.

We are computerized and have every day time cards and weekly progress charts. And we stay after our collections. Mrs. Iva Soelberg does an excellent job—and I get after the slow ones.

DIMENSIONS: Then you’re prepared to last it out?

CRAIG: Let’s put it this way: I’m waiting out this depression-or whatever—with my competition in many instances going 40% below me. At that price, they can have it.

DIMENSIONS: Jack, with the industry in the shape it is and future prospects appearing rather debatable, to say the least, have you given any serious thoughts to retiring?

CRAIG: Not a whit. So far as I’m concerned that mandatory retirement law or rule at 65—whatever they call it—is stupidity at its boldest. I’ve worked 12-15 hour days all my working life and if I discontinued, well, I just don’t know what would happen.

I’m in good health and I’ve got to keep myself occupied. Besides, this challenge might be fun.