



John D. Cadena

August 11, 1934 - January 18, 2025

Our beloved husband, father, brother, uncle, grandfather, great-grandfather, and friend, John D. Cadena, passed away on Saturday, January 18, 2025. He was born on August 11, 1934, in Pearsall, Texas, to Patricio and Francisca (Espronceda) Cadena.

In addition to his parents, he is preceded in death by his wife of 66 years, Francisca C. Cadena; his daughters, Ana Luisa and Mary Grace Cadena; and his sisters, Adelina, Hortense, and Olivia.

Mr. Cadena is survived by his children, John A. Cadena (Maria del Socorro), Adriana Cadena-Covarrubias (Richard), Patricio Cadena (Jenna), and Lorena Rodriguez (Carl); grandchildren; Alejandra, Cristina, David (DJ), Andrew, Adrian, Ashley, Hanna, Haley, Carl, Victoria, Zachary, Gavin and 7 great-grandchildren; his twin sister, Angelina Moran; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Mr. Cadena followed a path often associated with the "American Dream." He considered himself a woodworker and led a life marked by various achievements. Starting from humble beginnings, he married, had a family, worked diligently, and continuously learned new skills through practical experience. He valued honesty and humility, formed meaningful friendships, seized opportunities, started a business, and met challenges head-on. Eventually, Mr. Cadena owned and operated a successful business

specializing in creating custom VIP interiors for corporate and private airplanes. For 35 years, his business produced intricate interiors for aircraft ranging from Gulfstreams to Boeing 747-400s, serving clients such as corporations, entertainers, heads of state, royal families, Sultans, and Kings.

Mr. Cadena's interest in woodworking began at Irvin Middle School in San Antonio, TX, where he took a woodworking class. His teacher, Mr. Siller, became his first mentor, employing him after school, on weekends, and during summers to make toys, windows, furniture, and paint houses. Following middle school, Mr. Cadena attended Fox Tech High School (class of '54), where he learned drafting. The drafting skills he acquired over two years allowed him to read and draw construction plans, which became essential in his later business endeavors, especially when creating aircraft cabinet designs on large drafting tables.

During high school, Mr. Cadena also worked at Mission Planing Mills under Mr. Pablo Rodarte, where he fabricated kitchen, bath, and home cabinets and began to understand how to interpret cabinet construction drawings.

At the age of 21 and newly married, Mr. Cadena commenced his employment with Mr. Victor Deisel, a contractor for the esteemed Dee Howard at the HDW Company, a pioneer in custom interiors for corporate and private jets. It was in this setting that Mr. Cadena was introduced to the aviation industry and befriended Mr. Dee Howard and Mr. Howard Timlin, a respected designer and architect of aircraft interiors.

By the age of 23, Mr. Cadena had distinguished himself as the youngest employee there, displaying exceptional skill, determination, and leadership qualities. This led to his promotion to oversee the cabinet shop and engage regularly with Mr. Timlin to review cabinet drawings. It was during this period that Mr. Cadena began creating his own detailed cabinet "shop" drawings based on the designers' conceptual sketches. His approach from the fabricator's perspective greatly facilitated the cabinet-making process, making

it more efficient and streamlined.

In 1964, at 30 years old, married with four children, and having recently left the Victor Deisel Co., Mr. Cadena was approached by Howard Timlin with a job opportunity. Mr. Timlin had a customer named Charles “Charlie” Steen, a Uranium miner who hit pay dirt in Moab, Utah. Mr. Steen needed someone to build kitchen cabinets for his large ornate kitchen made of Teak wood at his 27,000 sq ft mansion he was building on the shores of Lake Washoe near Reno Nevada. It was a 3–4-month job. Mr. Cadena took the job and, with his best friend Raul Olivares, left for Nevada. After completing the job, Mr. Steen was so impressed with the work that he asked Mr. Cadena if he would be interested in building out the whole house, cabinets, built-ins, walls, furniture, etc. all made of Teak wood. It would be a 2 ½ year project. Mr. Cadena and Mr. Olivares accepted the offer, moved into mobile homes on the ranch with their families, and proceeded to build the interior of this magnificent mansion. Mr. Cadena's fifth child, Patricio, was born there six months before returning home to San Antonio. Mr. Cadena recalled this time as the best of his young adult life and cherished the memories throughout his life.

Upon his return to San Antonio, Mr. Cadena applied for a job at the HDW Company, where he was hired on the spot by Dee Howard. Soon after, Mr. Cadena was overseeing the cabinet shop, working alongside Dee Howard and Howard Timlin. Mr. Cadena learned the inner workings of the aircraft interior business, which would be instrumental in the near future.

After a few years, the HDW Company dissolved and became the Dee Howard Company. A former HDW partner, Mr. John Draker, asked Mr. Cadena if he would be interested in going into business together building aircraft interiors. Mr. Cadena accepted, and they named the business Le-Jon Builders. For 15 years, they built aircraft cabinets exclusively for The Dee Howard Company,

which had become a world-class airplane modification center. During this time, Mr. Cadena would lose two teenage daughters to a drunk driver and his great friend Howard Timlin to cancer. He would also meet a new young Interior Designer named Michael Reese, who would become a great family friend and an instrumental piece of the Cadena family future.

After 15 years, Le-Jon Builders closed its doors, and Mr. Cadena and his oldest son, John Jr., who was also in the aircraft interior business, started Cadena Enterprises Inc (CEI). Not long after, Pat Cadena joined the company, and the three worked together building aircraft cabinets for several companies in the USA and Canada. After a few years, one of those companies, KC Aviation, a large aircraft modification company owned by the giant Kimberly-Clark Corporation, approached Mr. Cadena with an offer to buy CEI. While considering the offer, John Jr. and Pat Cadena attended a National Business Aircraft Association trade show and ran into Michael Reese, the designer who had become a family friend. Mr. Reese said seven words that changed the trajectory of the company: “Don’t Sell, I’m Working On Something Big.” Mr. Reese had become a highly sought-after aircraft interior designer, known for his elegant and complex designs. He turned to Mr. Cadena, the man he knew could bring his visions to life.

Mr. Cadena then brought on his daughters Adriana and Lorena, and together for the next 12 years, they worked alongside Reese Design, building full interior flying palaces on several wide-body jumbo jets for a Middle Eastern Sultan. Mr. Cadena later referred to this period as the best of his adult life. He achieved great success, generously shared it with his 100+ employees, made lasting friendships, mentored dozens of craftsmen, draftsmen, engineers, and subcontractors, and worked with all his children, who saw his extraordinary talent and greatness firsthand. It was the pinnacle of his career, cementing Mr. Cadena as a pioneer and legend of his craft.

Mr. Cadena semi-retired after this time and spent more time with his beloved wife, Francisca (Mi Reina), until her passing in 2021. Mr. Cadena was 90 years old.

Visitation will begin at 2:00 P.M. followed by the Rosary at 3:00 P.M. on Sunday, January 26, 2025 at Mission Park Funeral Chapels North, 3401 Cherry Ridge Drive. The Funeral Mass will be celebrated at 12:00 P.M. on Monday, January 27, 2025 at St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church, 700 Dewhurst. Interment will follow at San Fernando Cemetery II, 746 Castroville Road.

Cemetery Details

San Fernando Cemetery #2

746 Castroville Rd.
San Antonio, TX 78237

Previous Events

Holy Rosary

JAN 26. 3:00 PM (CT)

Mission Park Funeral Chapels Cherry Ridge
3401 Cherry Ridge Dr
San Antonio, TX 78230
(210) 349-1414
<https://www.missionparks.com/>

Mass of Resurrection

JAN 27. 12:00 PM (CT)

Saint Gregory the Great Catholic Church
700 Dewhurst Rd
San Antonio, TX 78213

Tribute Wall

RO

“ Rose Gonzales and family(Rosie Olivares) purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of John D. Cadena.



Rose Gonzales and family(Rosie Olivares) - January 27, 2025 at 10:25 AM

MS

“ Mary & Mary Ann Santana purchased the Enchanted Cottage for the family of John D. Cadena.



Mary & Mary Ann Santana - January 26, 2025 at 12:11 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of John D. Cadena.



January 25, 2025 at 11:55 PM

AF

“ ATKG Family purchased the Gracious Lavender Basket for the family of John D. Cadena.



ATKG Family - January 25, 2025 at 02:41 PM

BC

“ *Bill and Amy Chapman purchased the Beautiful Dreams for the family of John D. Cadena.*



Bill and Amy Chapman - January 24, 2025 at 11:36 PM

BC

“ *John was a remarkable man that will be deeply missed. I've known John since the late 1970's and I can't think of a finer person. My thoughts and prayers go out to his wonderful family.*

Bill Chapman

Bill Chapman - January 24, 2025 at 11:21 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of John D. Cadena.*



January 24, 2025 at 12:40 PM

BC

“ *Bil and Kay Culpepper purchased the Amazing Arboricola for the family of John D. Cadena.*



Bil and Kay Culpepper - January 23, 2025 at 08:04 PM