

SLIPPERY ROCK

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Solid Surface Rocks at AMC Countertops

by Peter Marcucci

Photos Courtesy AMC Countertops

IT is amazing where a healthy mix of imagination, ambition, and drive will take you. Add a bit of good luck and who you know to the mix, and you're well on your way to success. In the case of Axel Mendez, owner of AMC Countertops in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, it was his brother-in-law, and a company called Stone Systems that helped shape his future.

Growing up in Mexico City, Mexico was not easy, said Axel Mendez. Due to not feeling safe at the time due to rising crime, he wanted to sell his auto parts company and move to northern Mexico. However, unbeknownst to him, fate had a different plan, he recalled. "I had always been an entrepreneur, and toward the end of 1998, my brother-in-law had invited me to come to Minnesota. He was working for Stone Systems at the time, where the beginning of Cosentino and Silestone took place, and when Roberto Contreras was starting the company."

Staying with Stone Systems for three years, Mendez learned the business as a shop foreman, quality control inspector, scheduler, and finally a measure tech for their Home Depot account. Things were going well for Mendez. Nonetheless, three years later, it was time for the entrepreneur to move, again. This time it would be Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where he was met with great approval, he said. "I was welcomed! Fond du Lac is a small city in the middle of Madison, Milwaukee and Green Bay, and a great location to start a countertop company. They were very friendly, and the city was offering loans."

Build It and They Will Come

Now fast-forward to June 2002. The doors of AMC had opened, and the fabrication of quartz countertops was underway, continued Mendez. "Naturally, in the



White Moon Sensa Granite island. Kitchen fabricated and installed for AMC's client, Premier Builders. AMC Countertops offers a variety of materials, including marble, Silestone, Cambria, Q Quartz and Dekton. Inset: Fantasy Brown leathered marble kitchen.

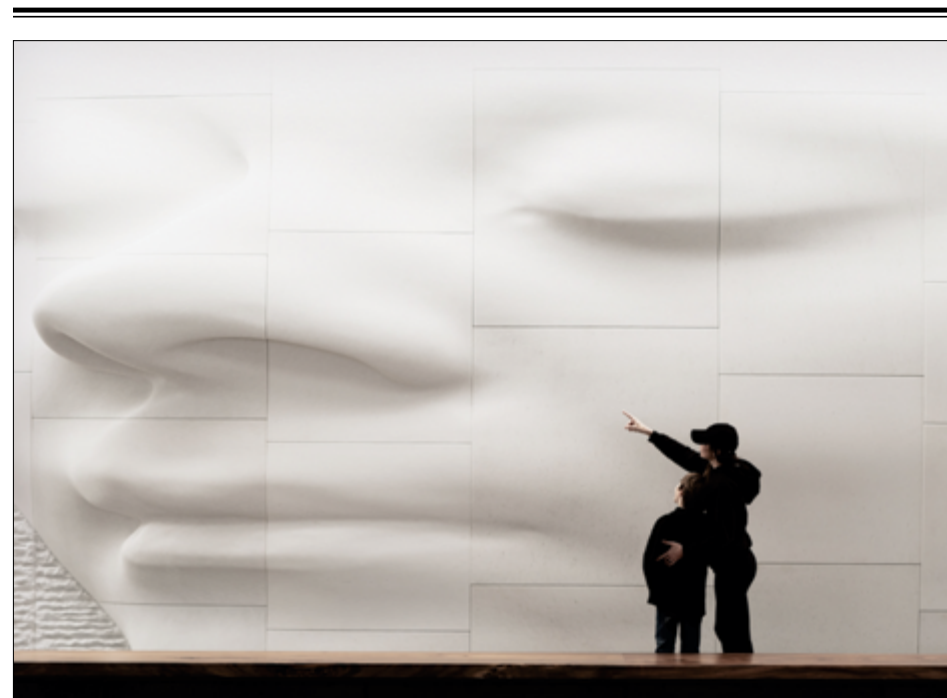


beginning, I became a quartz fabricator, because that's what I started with, not natural stone. When I did start fabricating granite, it was for Lowe's in 2008/2009 when the economy was down."

A few years later, again looking for opportunities, Mendez recognized the next big thing on the horizon. It was Dekton, a new material that seemed to intimidate many natural stone fabricators, at the time. Nonetheless, after getting Dekton certified by Cosentino in 2014, Mendez added production of this new and unique ultra-compact countertop material to his shop's offerings. "You know, I've always been interested in solving problems that nobody else wanted to work with. It's my nature."

At present, AMC has a total of 25 company team members. This includes Mendez's wife, Carmina, who's been with the company since the beginning. Carmina is a Moraware expert, and does everything as an owner, but marketing, sales and customer service are her specialties.

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Grande Pinnacle Award winner Utopia is an immersive experience installed in the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, Michigan. [See page 18](#)

AMC Countertops

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The shop consists of 12 team members who take care of fabrication, material handling, machine operations and programming, as well as all day-to-day logistics, while 13 other team members fill the administration, sales and design roles.

Currently, installations are performed by subcontractors, and will stay that way for the foreseeable future, said Mendez.

“We have a very strong team right now. ‘Great things in business are never done by one person. They are done by a team of people.’ That’s one of my favorite quotes, by Steve Jobs. It is so true, because if you have a great team, you can do a lot of great things. So, yes, I recognize that without my team, their efforts, and them being here every day supporting this company, it wouldn’t be what it is. Sometimes we’ve worked 14-hour days, and Saturdays while working on a project that had to be done, and they were so willing to do it. AMC is not one person. AMC is a team.”

That team puts out an average of 8,000

square feet per month, which equates to approximately one-hundred sixty kitchens, vanities, and extras. AMC has approximately three-hundred slabs on hand at any one time, most of them purchased from local suppliers. Their clientele, at present, consists totally of residential customers, mostly mid to high end, and includes ten Home Depots, local builders, kitchen centers, designers, and walk-in retail customers. AMC also offers sinks and faucets, with samples shown throughout the newly built, 5,000 square-foot showroom full of vignettes.

Shop Equipment and Production Software

Their shop equipment consists of a Park Industries Fusion CNC, a Donatoni CNC Saw, a Marmo Meccanica LCX622 edge polisher, and a Marmo Meccanica LCV711 edge polisher. Two jib cranes are used to safely move all materials around the well designed, 12,000 square-foot shop.

To help facilitate and coordinate the company’s work flow, AMC uses Moraware Software for estimating and scheduling, Job Well Done software for communication between the company and clients, and Pinpoint software, also for communication between company and clients, as well as storing all information relevant to each job. They use Slabsmith software for managing inventory and workflow.



Left: Laminated 6cm CNC edge.

Below: AMC Countertop’s Park Fusion is a busy machine – shown here with multiple jobs lined up for sink cut-out production.



Viatera Rococo Quartz kitchen fabricated and installed for a Premier Builders high-end residential development.

Never Let the Customer Down

“What makes us different from others is our service,” continued Mendez. “We are not cheap, and don’t try to beat everyone’s price. That is not the way we want to sell. From the initial contact to the installation, we don’t let our clients go without an answer, without a solution, or something that we can do for them. We are not perfect, but we never let them down, and talk to them truthfully from the very beginning. We’ll tell them how many weeks out our installs are. It could be one week or five weeks, and then they can decide if they want to be with us or not. Fortunately, we have a lot of clients who do want us.”

Plans for the Future

When asked about his plans for the future, Mendez said with confidence, “Well, I want to keep my current customers happy. I also want to update our machinery and expand into other areas without making this facility bigger. Ten years ago, it was volume, volume, volume, and running a second shift week after week. I was doing more and trying to get out more square footage, but sometimes it’s just not worth it!”

“I was here six days a week for 60 to 70 hours. But I also wanted to get more quality work, so we could become more firmly established in the high-end market, and we’ve done that”

Please turn to page 3

AMC Countertops

Continued from page 2

It's no secret that change can be difficult, but for those willing to take a chance and sometimes make a bold move on a well thought-out plan, the rewards can sometimes be great. For Mendez, first it was quartz, then granite, then Dekton, then porcelain... makes us wonder what's next for this successful entrepreneur?

AMC is a member of The Rockheads, The National Stone Institute, The Builders Association of Fond du Lac, The Builders Association of Oshkosh, and The Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, the largest business association in Wisconsin. AMC is also a decade-old customer of BB Industries.

For more information visit www.amccountertops.com.

Top: Onyx bartop fabricated and installed for the Take 5 Bar in Madison, Wisconsin.

Center and Bottom: Silestone Bianco Calacatta mitered cubic island and full height splash grace this spacious, open-plan working kitchen.



CaraGreen Offers Sustainable, Eco-Friendly Countertop Choices

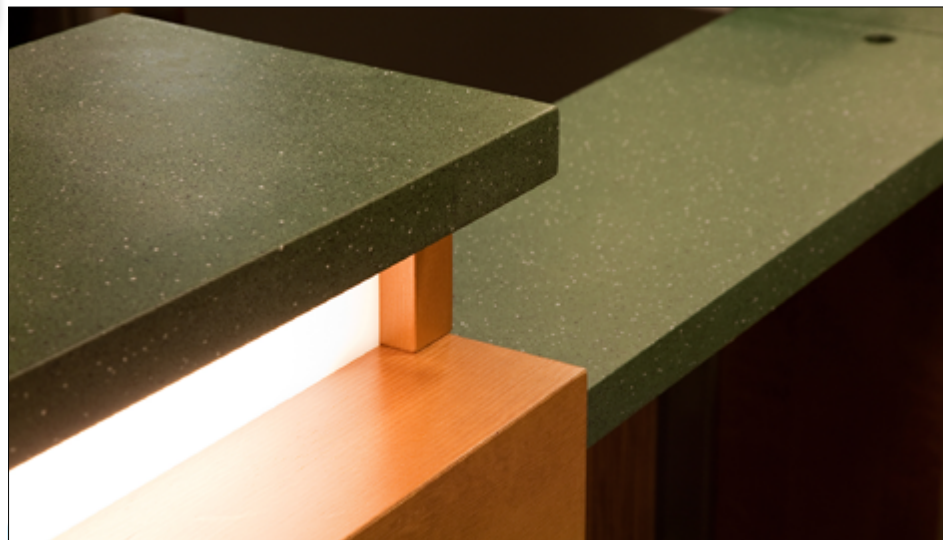
CaraGreen was launched in 2008, when developers were constructing a building in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, named Greenbridge. It was not only going to be the tallest building in town, but they were targeting LEED certification, a globally recognized symbol of sustainability achievement that comes in four levels: Certified, Silver, Gold and Platinum.

LEED levels are determined by the number of points acquired due to the amounts of recycled or recyclable materials used in its construction as well as lower carbon emissions, saving money by improving efficiency, and creating a healthier place for people. In the case of Greenbridge, they were pursuing Platinum certification, but did not quite achieve that level. They did receive certification, but not easily, recalled CaraGreen President Jessica McNaughton.

time CaraGreen started, most recycled-content brands were sourced outside the U.S. Since then, the company has expanded to represent fifteen manufacturers of sustainable products, both recycled and recyclable, that are used on walls, floors, cladding, partitions, sound control and, of course, countertops. Most are produced in America, said McNaughton.

"We've worked really hard over the last seven years to bring more local brands to market. For example, Gilasi is recycled glass out of Chicago, Durat is recycled solid surface now produced in Georgia, PaperStone is recycled paper composite out of Washington State, and elementAI is recycled acrylic out of Buffalo, New York."

From the beginning, CaraGreen's goal has been to successfully commercialize sustainable material brands, be it their own or from other manufacturers, and supply all



Durat – a solid surface material from CaraGreen – installed in a spa setting. Durat is now produced in Georgia from recycled materials.

"The designer chosen to do all the finishes started looking around for sustainable materials to meet the Platinum criteria, but she could not find any. So she approached some family members saying, 'I think there is a real opportunity here for a distribution model that brings sustainable materials to the Southeast market,' and that's how CaraGreen got started."

A Portfolio of Sustainable Products

Initially, materials such as bamboo, recycled glass from the manufacturer Meld, cotton insulation called Ultra Touch, and Durat, a solid surface based out of Finland were the first products CaraGreen represented. At the

necessary elements to do so, continued McNaughton. "If you have a small or medium-size brand, it's really hard to break into the market and be successful, and we are a partner who helps you do that. It's not simply distribution. We add marketing and data services and analytics and imagery to existing brands that are struggling to get a foothold, and then make them successful."

Brands such as Durat and elementAI, which CaraGreen manufactures, are available worldwide, while most others are only available nationally to the trades through CaraGreen, though they have distribution partners in other areas, said McNaughton.

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TRAINING & EDUCATION

Does Your Shop Have a Safety Training Program?

Safety is just as important to a smaller sized business as it is to a large well-established production company. In fact, Safety can play an even more critical role to a small business. The financial and operational impact of an accident or injury can be much greater because there may be fewer resources to absorb the costs and maintain operations. Injuries can shutter schedules, bottleneck production and hinder morale. Implementing a Safety Program can help create a strong foundation for a business to grow and thrive over the long term. By prioritizing safety, employers can create a workplace that is healthy, productive, and conducive to employee well-being.

Zack Smyser
Stone Industry Consultant

Safety Training and New Hires

Incorporating safety training during the onboarding of a new hire should be mandatory.

It's imperative that new employees understand the fundamental safety rules and regulations of the stone industry. We want them to perform their duties to the company's standards and do so in the safest manner possible. Whether the new hire has experience in the stone industry or not, it's best to err on the side of caution and not assume they have adequate safety training.

Here are some important safety training topics to get you started:

1. Basic Shop Safety
2. Safe Slab Handling
3. Slab Fall Shadow Safety
4. Material Loading and Unloading
5. Requirements for Personal Protective Equipment
6. Silica Exposure

Documentation of the scope of training should be made as well as who taught and conducted the training, and when. All training logs can be stored in the employee's personnel file or in a separate Safety Training binder. It's best practice to not allow a new hire to begin any work within your company until Safety Training is complete and signed with a memorandum of understanding. The Natural Stone Institute has great educational courses on safety which allow your new hire to test his or her understanding of each course. A printed certification for each can be stored in their personnel file.

Hazard Assessment/ Safety Inspection

It's important to get a baseline from which to start. Conduct an inspection of your work areas and identify potential hazards.

A few basic examples include:

1. Obstructions to walkways and exits
2. Frayed or damaged extension cords
3. Non-GFCI outlets (especially near water sources)
4. Unsecured flammable liquids

Once hazards have been identified, develop policies and procedures to address them.

Hazard Assessments should be broad and all-encompassing. The potential for hazards is not limited to the fabrication floor and slab area but should cover the entire property including show-room areas, bathrooms and parking lots. A Hazard Assessment should be conducted regularly to ensure compliance as well as be signed and dated by the individual doing the assessment.

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INDUSTRY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 2023

Synchronous Solution Elevate Forum and ActionCOACH BizX Conference

When: Monday, April 4 to April 5, 2023

Where: Opryland Resort and Convention Center, Nashville, TN

Contact Sales@SynchronousSolutions.com to register or call (216) 336-6900.

NSI: Working with Your Countertop Fabricator to Set Expectations

When: Thursday April 6, 11:00 AM — 12:00 PM (ET)

Where: Online. Visit naturalstoneinstitute.org/events/calendar to register.

NSI: Virtual Quarry Tour: Lyons Sandstone

When: Thursday April 13, 11:00 AM — 12:00 PM (ET)

Where: Online. Visit naturalstoneinstitute.org/events/calendar to register.

Coverings: The Global Tile and Stone Experience

When: April 18-21, 2023

Where: Orange County Convention Center, Orlando FL

Visit www.coverings.com for more info and to register.

NSI: Virginia Stone Summit and Town Hall

When: April 22, 2023

Where: MSI Surfaces, Dulles, VA

Visit naturalstoneinstitute.org/events/calendar to register.

ActionFlow 2023 Profits and Peace Retreat

When: April 25–26, 2023

Where: 1 Convention Center Boulevard, St Charles, MO 63303

Visit <https://eventee.co/en/e/actionflows-2023-profits-and-peace-retreat-15567> for more info and to register.

May 2023

ISFA Italy Trip

When: Monday, May 1, to Friday, May 5, 2023

Where: Various destinations in Veldago, Verona, and Moderna, Italy

Visit www.isfanow.org for more information and to register.

NSI: Utah Stone Summit: Know Your Business

When: May 4, 2023

Where: 2291 S Commerce Center Drive Suite 400, West Valley City, Utah 84120

Visit www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/events/calendar to register.

NSI: Block Talk: Women in Stone's Virtual Stone Chat

When: Tuesday May 16, 2:00 PM — 3:00 PM (ET)

Visit www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/events/calendar for Zoom information.

June 2023

NSI: Minnesota Stone Summit

When: June 1, 2023

Where: Plymouth, Minnesota, UGM Surfaces

NTCA Regional GPTP/Slabs Training

When: Thursday, June 8

Where: Floor & Decor, Orlando, FL

Visit <http://www.tile-assn.com> to register and for more information

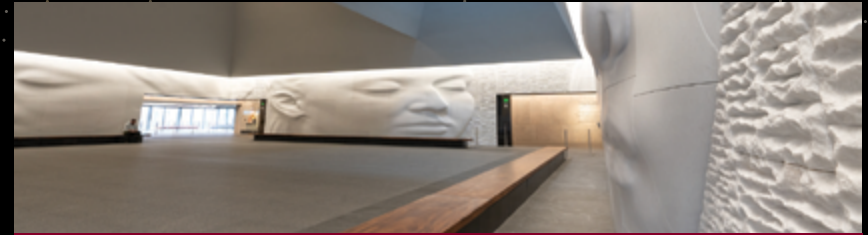
NSI: Oregon Stone Summit

When: June 15, 2023

Where: Arizona Tile, Beaverton, Oregon; Visit naturalstoneinstitute.org for more info.

You Are Doing Extraordinary Things

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PINNACLE AWARDS



INDIVIDUAL AWARDS



SCHOLARSHIPS

Submit Your Entries by **MAY 20.**
naturalstoneinstitute.org/awards



DESIGN AWARDS

Encourage your A&D customers to submit projects to the Tucker Design Awards by July 14.

naturalstoneinstitute.org/tuckerawards

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ActionFlow Profits and Peace Retreat

The ActionFlow Profits and Peace Retreat is fast approaching. Scheduled for April 25-26th at St. Charles Convention Center in St. Louis, Missouri, the retreat will have sessions, workshops, and discussions on how shops can solve key business management problems and implement best practices in the stone industry.

ActionFlow is excited to welcome Rick Stimac, BB Industries CEO as the keynote speaker, and know fabricators will gain valuable insight into managing and leading their shop from him.

Event sponsors are industry experts and their knowledge and product offerings help elevate the industry, reducing chaos and increasing profits for fabricators. Sponsors include Fabricator's Choice and Synchronous Solutions (Platinum), BBI (Gold), and DeFusco Industrial Supply, PinPoint Status, and SPEEDLabel (Bronze).

The stone community is hardworking, niche, gritty, and always looking to improve, and ActionFlow envisioned the retreat as a place that fosters those characteristics through forming and strengthening relationships. Grace Hunt of ActionFlow commented, "We don't want to miss the opportunity to celebrate our community and we plan on having a ton of fun doing so! Join us for great food, drink, and high-speed go-karting!"

For general information, visit the event website: <https://eventee.co/en/e/actionflows-2023-profits-and-peace-retreat-15567>.

If you are interested in partnering with ActionFlow as a sponsor, contact Grace Hunt, grace@actionflow.net. For current ActionFlow users to register, visit the event webpage. If you are not a current ActionFlow user and would like to attend, reach out to Theresa Obert, theresa@actionflow.net.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

How Can Google Analytics Help My Countertop Shop?

AS a countertop shop owner, understanding your website visitors behavior and preferences is critical to growing your business. You need to know what material they are interested in, which pages they are spending the most time on, and what's driving the most traffic to your website. This is where Google Analytics comes in. Plus the best part...

It's free! Yep — it's 100% free to use.

Here are some ways Google Analytics can help your countertop shop.

Track Website Traffic

Google Analytics allows you to track how many people are visiting your website, where they are coming from, and which pages they are visiting. This information can help you identify what material is most popular and which pages need improvement. For example, we often see that people on the material pages on your website spend 2X as much time as they do on other pages of your site. That's a long time! You can see that from the numbers in the example below. This is directly from Google Analytics.

Understand Your Audience

Google Analytics provides data on your website visitors demographics, including age, gender, and location. You can use this information to tailor your marketing efforts to homeowners you want to gain as customers. If you find that most of your visitors are women between the ages of 25-34, you may want to adjust your marketing campaigns to appeal to this group. Or maybe the town right outside of your main area is bringing in more leads. You

Stephen Alberts
Countertop Marketing

can focus more budget there.

Analyze Website Performance

Google Analytics allows you to measure the performance of your website, including the bounce rate, time on page, and conversion rate. By understanding these metrics, you can identify areas of your website that need improvement and make data-driven decisions to increase conversions. I'll explain these 3 in more detail below and why we tell shops to look at these numbers.

• Bounce rate

Bounce rate is the percentage of visitors who leave your website after viewing only one page. A high bounce rate indicates that visitors are not engaging with your website and are likely not finding the information they need. A low bounce rate, on the other hand, suggests that visitors are finding what they're looking for and are more likely to continue exploring your website. I want to see this number as low as possible but 50-70% is decent. Too high and that means people are coming and going really quickly.

• Time on page

Time on page measures how long visitors spend on pages of your site. A high time on page suggests that visitors are engaged with your content and are finding it useful. A low time on page may indicate that visitors are not finding what they're looking for and are leaving your website quickly. As I mentioned above, we usually see



the material pages having a long time on page. They like to look at different colors and material options. The more time they invest in your site, the better!

• Conversion rate

Conversion rate measures the percentage of visitors who complete a specific goal on your website, such as filling out a contact form or a quote form. A high conversion rate indicates that your website is effective at driving visitors to take action, while a low conversion rate may suggest that there are barriers preventing visitors from completing their goal. Conversions we look at with shops are phone calls, texts and quote/contact form fills.

Measure Marketing Campaigns

Google Analytics allows you to track the effectiveness of your marketing campaigns, including social media, email marketing, and pay-per-click advertising. By measuring the performance of these campaigns, you can identify which channels are driving the most traffic and conversions and adjust your marketing budget accordingly. Remember you **MUST** track conversions! If you don't, it's very hard to measure the effectiveness of a campaign.

Improve User Experience

Google Analytics allows you to track how users navigate your website and which pages they are leaving from. By identifying pages with high exit rates, you can make improvements to your website to provide a better user experience and keep visitors engaged. The goal is to keep them

on your shops site longer and fully engaged with your content.

Steps To Setting Up Google Analytics

Follow the steps below to get this setup on your shops site.

- Sign up for a Google Analytics account using your Google account.
- Set up a property for your website by entering your website's name, URL, and time zone.
- Copy the unique tracking code provided by Google Analytics.
- Add the tracking code to your website's code.
- Verify that the tracking code is working correctly in your Google Analytics account.

Currently we use the Universal Google Analytics code for the shops we work with. We will be upgrading them this spring/early summer to Google Analytics 4.

I highly suggest you set this up for your shop and try to look at the numbers each month. Understand the bounce rate, time on page and conversion rate. You can dig further but just knowing those few metrics will help you understand your overall numbers. And remember to setup conversions! Which is basically tracking each time a person calls your shop, submits a form or texts you.

Additionally, you can find a freelancer to set this up for your shop. It shouldn't take more than a few hours to get this all going or you can take a shot at setting it up yourself. If you ever want to figure out your ROI on your marketing efforts, you must start with setting up analytics and tracking.

Stephen Alberts is the owner of the Countertop Marketing Co and STONE ENGAGE. They specialize in helping countertop companies grow the retail side of their business outside of word-of-mouth and referrals. They also offer software to help you engage more with customers and close more countertop projects. To learn more visit countertopmarketingco.com or stonengage.com. Email Stephen at steve@countertopmarketingco.com.

Page ?	Pageviews ? ↓	Unique Pageviews ?	Avg. Time on Page ?
	660 % of Total: 100.00% (660)	564 % of Total: 100.00% (564)	00:02:42 Avg for View: 00:02:42 (0.00%)
1. /	267 (40.45%)	229 (40.60%)	00:01:52
2. /quartz-countertops/	72 (10.91%)	55 (9.75%)	00:04:03
3. /granite-countertops/	53 (8.03%)	39 (6.91%)	00:03:47

Google Analytics gives you the tools to assess your website's performance, track the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, improve user experience on your website, and drive conversions.

Shop Safety Training Program

Continued from page 4

Creating a Hazard Communication Program

The purpose of a Haz/Com program is to educate employees of potential hazards associated with the chemicals and materials they work with and provide them with the necessary information to protect themselves. Firstly, you need to identify what hazardous materials and chemicals are in your business. Each item should have a corresponding SDS sheet that informs you on the specific hazard it poses. You can reach out to your suppliers for copies of the SDS for items such as adhesives and sealers. Part of the Hazard Communication Program should be training employees on these hazards and the safety protocol while using and handling. Each employee should know where the SDS binder is kept and how to navigate its content to find the

specific item they intend to use. **Note: This is an OSHA requirement.**

Safety training is not a one time activity that can be checked off a list and then forgotten. It must stay on the forefront of the minds of your employees so they don't become complacent.

The goal of monthly or weekly safety meetings should be to create an open and collaborative environment where all employees are encouraged to participate and share their concerns, experiences and ideas.

This guide is far from a complete safety program but should act as a springboard for your organization to begin its safety journey. For more information on safety and training courses, visit www.naturalstoneinstitute.org.

Zach Smyser is a Richmond, VA native with over a decade of experience through various roles within the Stone Industry. Zach is templating and safety specialist at Granite International in Cicero, New York.

“The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars.

We are made of star-stuff !”

– Carl Sagan



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HERE'S WHAT'S
COMING UP:

ISFA SUMMIT
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MARCH 21-23

**SOLID SURFACE
FABRICATION TRAINING**
SAN ANTONIO, TX
MARCH 28-29

**MEMBERCONNECT
MEETING**
VIRTUAL
MAY 18

**SOLID SURFACE
FABRICATION TRAINING**
LAKEWOOD, WA
JUNE 6-7

FABRICATOR CRAWL
CHICAGO
JULY 18-20

**SOLID SURFACE
FABRICATION TRAINING**
SAN ANTONIO, TX
AUGUST 8-9

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TRAINING & EDUCATION

How to Close Every Sales Prospect

DO you follow-up on all your quotes? If not, you should!

If you do follow-up, how many times do you call or email before you finally give up? What's the timing and sequence of that follow up – 2 emails and then a call or 3 calls and then 5 emails – and on what schedule?

Here's a better question: Do you need to follow-up on a quote to close the sale? What if there was a way to close the sale before you even quote? Is that even possible?

Of course, those 'born' salespeople, those unique folks with the gift of gab, the ones who will talk to a fence post if it stands still long enough – those uniquely gifted folks close all their quotes, right?

If you think that salespeople are born and not made, if you think only a few 'special' individuals are true salespeople, then you are not alone. Most of the folks I talk to think that same way. Fortunately, they are wrong.

None of us were born knowing how to fabricate countertops. We all learned it somehow. The ability to sell is no different. None of us were born knowing how to sell. Through mistakes, feedback, persistence, and maybe a little coaching, we have learned how to sell relatively well.

But what about those of us who need to sell well but are uncomfortable with that process? Can we be taught to sell effectively? Can we be taught to close every sales prospect? The answer is, "Yes"!

Everything is Taught

I have a friend who says, "I didn't know my name was Jason until somebody told me!" Just like we learned our own names, we can learn to sell.

In our industry, we tend to think the main part of sales is the technical knowledge and decorating skill. We tend to hire people who understand which colors go together the best, and who either know our product or can learn it. Those skills are certainly important. However, they are not sufficient.

If we want to close every prospect, if we want to compete on something other than dollars per square foot, if we want to prosper during challenging economic times

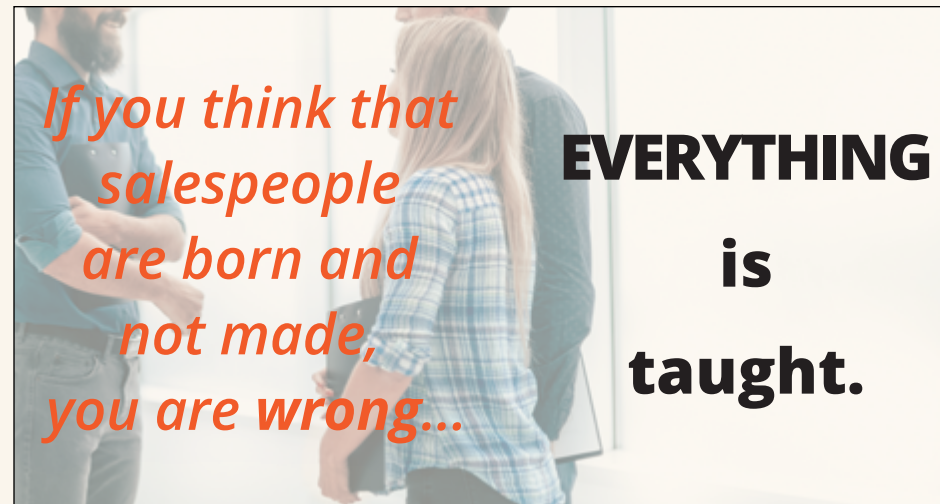
Ed Young
Fabricator's Business Coach

Stevenson Brooks
Sales / Management Coach

What if there was a way to close the sale before you even quote?

– then we need to learn sales skills beyond decorating ability and product knowledge. **We need to understand how to get prospects to buy from us before we quote.**

This starts with understanding our prospective customer.



At a basic level, people buy from people they like, and they tend to like people who are like them. If you pay attention to your salespeople, or yourself, you may notice that they tend to act like themselves. Unfortunately, this means they may not be adjusting enough to match each prospective customer's differing style.

Think about it. Some people prefer to move quickly and others more slowly. Some are detail oriented, while others prefer the big picture. Some are intense, while others are laid back. You get the idea.

So, if you are acting like yourself, there is a good chance that the customer is actually having to adjust to work with you. This means that if they happen to meet

a different salesperson who is more like them, they might decide to not work with you – just because it didn't feel right.

Sales professionals need to be adept at identifying characteristics of their prospects quickly so that they can adjust their style to match, as well as the sales process and closing strategy.

Next up is the idea of learning from your customer, rather than teaching your customer. So many salespeople feel compelled to "educate" their prospects so that they can make the right decision. But often, the customer is really hoping for some guidance and support in solving their problems.

The customer isn't necessarily qualified to figure out the perfect solution, even with your attempt to educate them. But guess what—YOU are qualified!

The key is to build trust with your prospect by asking great questions. The more you understand their situation, the more they will trust that your solution will be the best for them – not for you (or your bottom line, or your installers, or whatever you

have in inventory).

People are inherently worried that salespeople will try to sell them something that they don't need, for too much money. By breaking down the typical sales pattern, you can help prospects feel at ease, open up, and ultimately decide to buy from you well before you've ever put the quote together.

One of my favorite questions to ask is, "Have you already selected which company you are going to work with for your countertops?" If they haven't yet, find out why! Find out how they will make that decision and when.

Once they pick you, design them something amazing!

**Technical Knowledge
+
Decorating Skills
≠
A Great Salesperson**

The Benefits of Sales Training

Lack of organized sales training is one of the largest gaps in this industry. Without solid sales training, the sales and marketing engine of your company won't be effective. Investing time and money to generate more sales leads is wasted if your salespeople can't turn them into orders.

Structured training delivered by a professional sales trainer can deliver the following benefits:

- Lower turnover for your salespeople – Companies that invest in their people have lower turnover.
- Higher customer satisfaction – when salespeople position themselves as the "trusted advisor," prospects are happier with the outcome of the sales process.
- Not just more positive customer ratings, but ratings with stronger language – the customer becomes your advocate.
- More sales and larger sales – salespeople who are seen as "trusted advisors" close more deals and close larger deals.
- Improved profitability.
- Grow market share when your competitors are struggling.

Your business is running exactly the way you have designed it to run. Your salespeople are only as good as their training. If you want to improve how your business is run, if you want to improve the performance of your salespeople, drop me a line at Ed@FabricatorsCoach.com.

Stevenson Brooks is a master sales coach who has rewritten the sales training handbook for competitive bid markets. His sessions are fun, motivating, industry specific, and effective. You can reach Stevenson at Steve@mbsllc.com, and [#EverythingIsTaught](https://www.instagram.com/EverythingIsTaught).

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TRAINING & EDUCATION

How to Build a Sales Engine to Drive Business Growth

IF you're looking to grow your business and drive revenue, building a strong sales engine is crucial. Without a sales engine, your shop will likely struggle to consistently meet its growth goals due to inconsistent sales due to seasonality, market competition, and economic factors.

So, you might have heard the term "sales engine," but what does it actually mean? Well, it's a fancy way of saying: a system and set of processes that are specifically designed to produce the volume of sales the business requires to grow and or be profitable.

Does your business need a sales engine?

Ask yourself these questions to quickly assess:

- Can you accurately forecast your sales over the next four quarters?
- Do you know how many leads and or opportunities you will receive next month?
- Can you ramp up your sales as needed?
- Do you know if your marketing efforts produce a positive ROI?
- Does your business have a sales channel outside of word-of-mouth and referrals?
- Do you have a clear sales process to ensure you don't leave money on the table?

If you answered "no" to the questions above, you'll want to read this article.

We will cover the three main components of a sales engine, including lead generation, lead nurturing, and sales conversion. In a future article, we will discuss the importance of caring for customers post-sale. But first, we'll focus on the parts of your engine that take you from a lead generated to a sale converted.

**"If a window of opportunity appears, don't pull down the shade."
— Tom Peters**

Justin Shaw
Stone Fabricator Elite

The goal you're aiming for when building a sales engine is to be able to drive **predictable revenue**. When you achieve this, your business will be transformed.

Okay, let's go over the different components a sales engine typically includes:

Lead generation: Attracting potential customers through various channels, such as social media, digital marketing, advertising, and business development

Lead nurturing: Building relationships with potential customers and helping them move through your sales process in a streamlined and efficient manner

Sales conversion: Turning leads into paying customers by persuading them to make a purchase decision and having a system to convert them effectively

Prep Work and Planning

How you design your sales engine will impact the results that you get. You want to carefully consider what your desired outcome is when planning to build your sales engine.

Here are a few key questions to ask yourself during the planning stage:

- Who are our most profitable customers?
- How do we attract more of these customers?
- How can we increase the average value of each sale?
- How can we shorten the sales cycle?
- What systems are needed?
- What processes are required?
- Who is responsible for each part of our engine?
- How are we tracking our performance?

Building a successful sales engine is like building a high-performance car. You need the right parts, the right design, and a smooth ride to take you to your destination.

Here are three basic steps to building a sales engine that will drive revenue and growth:



You need to select the right marketing channel to reach your ideal customers.

Step 1: Picking the Right Lane

Just like how you pick the right lane on the highway to avoid traffic, you need to select the right marketing channel to reach your ideal customers. Whether it's social media, PPC, or SEO, you need to identify a single channel that you will focus your energy, time, resources, and money in.

We recommend always starting with one channel and getting it dialed in before adding additional channels. You don't want to spread yourself too thin and not have a clear picture of what's working.

Step 2: The Fuel to Keep Going

To keep your engine running, you need fuel, and that's where lead generation comes in. You will work on creating a strategy and campaigns to run within your chosen channel. Your goal is to be able to consistently generate high-quality leads and or opportunities and eventually be able to turn the dial up or down as needed. Change your input (marketing spend) to directly impact your output (sales volume).

Step 3: Designing a Smooth Ride

A high-performance car needs a smooth ride, and so does your sales engine. Establish a clear end-to-end process that takes potential customers from lead generation to sales conversion. Use a CRM to organize your leads and opportunities and automation tools to streamline the process and make it more efficient.

Once Your Engine is Built

You've successfully built your engine, and it's starting to rev up and drive

business growth. Don't kick up your feet just yet—just like a high-performance car needs regular tune-ups and maintenance to keep it running smoothly. Your sales engine will also need ongoing adjustments and improvements to keep it performing at its best.

It's important to regularly review and analyze your metrics, such as conversion rates and revenue growth, and make alterations to your sales engine as needed. You can also explore new marketing channels, test new tactics, and refine your lead generation and nurturing strategies to improve your sales process.

So don't be afraid to get under the hood of your sales engine and make those necessary changes to help your sales engine perform better and drive sustainable business growth over the long term!

The author, Justin Shaw, will be speaking at Coverings on this topic, and for those not in attendance a virtual webinar will be offered. You can email Justin for more information on dates and times.

Justin Shaw is the founder of Stone Fabricator Elite. Through their flagship program and dedicated team of Sales Sidekicks, they help fabricators systemize their sales and grow their businesses more easily. To learn more, visit stonefabricatorelite.com, or email the author at justin@stonefabricatorelite.com.

Please turn to page 12 for Robin Shaw's Ode to the Industry, inspired by Sir Mix-a-Lot.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Getting Dumped On

When one country sells product into another country at lower prices than at home, the receiving country will call “foul!” The World Trade Organization (WTO) has a set of rules to deal with this type of “non-competitive” practice, and for good reasons – it can destroy the economy of the receiving country.

When I was living in Uganda building houses with Habitat for Humanity International, I got to witness first-hand the effects of dumping – in this case dumping with, hopefully, all the best intentions. Just north of Uganda is the Sudan, which was having a famine. The United States proudly donated tons of corn to help the starving. That corn was shipped from the US and transported by truck through Kenya and Uganda to reach the needy in Sudan.

As is perhaps normal in an impoverished country, much corn “fell off” the trucks on the long drive north. As a result, the local maize (corn) market in Uganda crashed, destroying the livelihood of many of the local farmers. A similar thing happened just south of us in the countries of Burundi and Rwanda when France donated a bunch of their surplus cheese to those countries and decimated the local dairy industry.

Corn, maize, cheese, or steel from China – none of this has anything to do with making countertops for the local market. But the issue of dumping certainly does.

As the larger fabricators continue to grow, they will need to find “the next market” to sell in. If that market happens to be yours, you will get to experience being on the receiving end of “dumping”. Product from hundreds of miles away will be showing up in YOUR backyard at prices that defy logic. You are getting dumped on... and will undoubtedly think “that’s not fair.”

“That’s not fair!” raises two questions:

Is there a “fair” margin for the products you produce?

Does each product you sell have a Profit Margin?

Rick Phelps

Synchronous Solutions

The rules of the game are not what you think they are.

I love to ask my new clients these questions early on in our first engagement. The response is usually a blank stare for a while as they wonder if I am trying to trick them somehow!

“Of course, there is a fair margin, and yes, everything has a profit margin – why else would we be in business?” is the usual eventual response. And of course, they are right... I was trying to trick them to expose their flawed thinking.

There is no such thing as a “fair margin” and products don’t have a Profit Margin. There is, however, a discernible difference in how different jobs or different markets contribute to the potential for profits, but whether or not a specific job directly adds to your Net Profit is entirely situational.

The easiest way to illustrate this is to take a month when a fabricating shop made zero profit. Clearly NO jobs had a “profit margin” that month.

Let’s get back to today’s topic – dumping. Suppose I run a successful fabricating shop here in Cleveland and have already captured the majority of my local market. The only way for me to grow is to:

A) Lower prices to capture the remaining local market from the discounters and desperate, or

B) Expand into a new market.

I don’t want to pursue option A because it will destroy the profitability of my local market and therefore destroy my profits. Option B it must be, then.

To continue with the example: I run a rather profitable shop realizing over 20% Return on Sales because long ago I implemented Synchronous Flow. My continuous improvement activities have created an additional 25% capacity in my shop, so I cast my gaze out a couple hundred miles and see your city. A little market research shows I can capture market share there by charging lower prices than in my home market. Your city is far enough away that those lower prices will not damage my pricing in my profitable home city.

I open a store front, hire a measure tech and an install crew, perhaps even hiring away yours, and just like that you have a new competitor in town undercutting your pricing. You look at my pricing and say “What? There is no way I am making money at those prices.” You say that because you believe:

- There is a “fair” margin for your products, and
- Every product has a Profit Margin.

I don’t believe either of those things.

Now, my Return on Sales is up to 23%.

The Throughput Dollars from the jobs I sell in your city have to cover my incremental costs for being able to sell there, which are minimal, and then the rest is just pure profit, falling straight to my bottom line. Of course, I can only sell the current excess capacity of my shop this way. For now.

I am growing and constantly improving. The cost of scaling my business is decreasing...

I am not China selling steel into the United States. I am Cleveland selling countertops into Pittsburgh, or Toledo, or Columbus. There is no WTO to protect you from my “unfair” practice.

What are you going to do when someone comes to YOUR town and dumps on you?

There is no question the scenario I laid out above is troubling. The idea that some business could come in and steal not only your customers, but your employees as well, is deeply troubling. Yet that is the world we live in.

The “Rules of the Game” are not what you think they are.

If you don’t understand the real rules, WHEN (not if) some fabricator from a hundred miles away comes to play in YOUR market, will you know how to respond?

Will you have the understanding and the strategies to defend your home turf? Will your team and your customers leave you for a few dollars? Or will you have built a business that can withstand the onslaught?

Play by those rules or be played.

We teach, coach, and mentor business to understand the real rules that govern businesses and help our clients win at the game of business.

Epilogue

When the corn from the USA wiped out my Ugandan friends’ livelihoods, I was angry, upset, but most of all confused. I struggled to understand it. Was that foreign aid a good thing – certainly helping the starving is good!?

But that corn could have been locally grown maize, purchased in Kenya and Uganda for a fraction of the money spent on the US corn, and not shipped halfway around the world. That aid money COULD have helped the local economy thrive...

Then it dawned on me. *All foreign aid is local.* The USA wasn’t just helping the Sudan, they were subsidizing their local farmers. Almost all the “foreign aid” money was being spent in the good ole USA.

The French weren’t just helping our southern neighbors, they were subsidizing their own local dairy farmers. It was the right thing to do for their LOCAL economy, and certainly appeared to be the right thing to do for those African countries, IF you lived in America or France, or somewhere else NOT local to the problem.

I strongly believe in local markets and local economies. I embrace the idea of keeping my money local. I eat at local restaurants, not chain restaurants, for this very reason. Keep the profits in Cleveland!

But I am also a realist. I shop at Lowes and Home Depot knowing the profits from my purchases will go to North Carolina or Georgia and not stay in Ohio. It’s worth the convenience.

Many fabricators let the big box stores do their sales for them, and for that convenience let a big chunk of their potential profits also go to North Carolina and Georgia... Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

Please turn to page 12

Getting Dumped On

Continued from page 11

I am old enough to remember when the first Walmart came to town. What a celebration. Huge crowds, banners! What a coup for the local government officials proudly cutting the ribbons.

What an absolute disaster for the local baker, butcher, hardware store, sporting goods store owners. What a disaster for our local downtown.

I also remember sitting practically alone in our usually crowded favorite local restaurant when the newest national chain restaurant opened down the street, with lines out the door. My favorite restaurant held on for a few months, then silently closed... no banners, no fanfare. And a little piece of our local economy died.

What I have come to understand is that life isn't always "fair," but it does seem to follow some predictable rules that are not always visible, not always apparent...

If you found yourself angry at what I have described in this article, great! Do something about it. YOU are an important part of your local economy. Defend it.

Understand the rules, be prepared, and buy local when you can!

If you think having a skilled facilitator to walk your leadership team through this process will make it go a lot more smoothly and efficiently, contact Synchronous Solutions through our website www.synchronousolutions.com/contact-us/.

Rick Phelps has been applying the concepts of Synchronous Flow to difficult industrial problems at dozens of businesses and organizations around the world, since the early 1980s. In 2009, as Cleveland Cliffs' Director of Continuous Improvement, Rick took on a failing Lean Six Sigma organization, refocused their improvement work using Synchronous Flow, and created a shop floor, engagement driven, continuous improvement process that Cliffs credits with creating a sustained \$100M per year reduction in production costs.



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Baby Got Slabs

I like Big Slabs and I cannot lie
 You fabricators can't deny
 When a CG walks in for a large project bid
 And a residential on the side —
 You get paid!
 You wanna pull up tough
 But you noticed there's no dust
 Deep in that anti-etch surfacing
 I'm hooked and can't stop noticing

Oh, baby I like your kitchen
 I think your work is bitchin'
 Those homeowners tried to show you
 That Calacatta Gold (makes me want to
 know you)... Oooh, yard of smooth slabs
 You say you want a quote today?
 Well, use me, use me — I'm the
 best fabber in the industry!
 Make the edge profile wide — To hell with
 Formica! She's smooth — no grooves
 Got it goin' with home improves

Tired of homeowner's interest?
 I'm matchin' designs from Pinterest
 Take the average fabber and ask him that—
 Their budgets have gotta match!

So fabricators (yeah!) Fabricators (YEAH!)
 Your customer buildin' a new home?
 (Hell, Yeah!) Give 'em those quotes
 (QUOTES) quotes (QUOTES)
 And pick that healthy stone — Cause —
BABY GOT SLABS!

The Stone Detective

The Case of the Gray Mystery Stains

I was sitting in my office when she walked in – a tall dame with legs that went on for a while. She was smoking one of those long, thin cigarettes in a holder. She took a puff and said, “I have a marble floor that has these stains all over it, and I don’t know what to do.”

She paused for a moment, exhaling a stream of smoke before continuing. Her gaze was piercing and her voice unwavering. “You’re the famous stone detective and you can help me, right?”

I nodded, gesturing towards the chair in front of my desk. She gracefully sat down, setting her cigarette holder on the edge.

“I’m sure you’ve encountered this problem before,” she stated, her voice low and serious. “I have a marble floor that’s covered in these strange stains. I’m certain they haven’t been there before, and I need to figure out what caused them, and fix it.”

I nodded again, a million questions already swirling around in my head.

“I’ll do what I can,” I said, trying to keep my voice steady and reassuring. “Leave it to me and I’ll find out what happened.” With that, she smiled, thanked me, and left. Little did I know that I’d soon be in the middle of a mystery that would take me down an unusual path.

I arranged a time to visit her home and take a look at these stains. At first, I thought it would be your run-of-the mill wine or some type of food stains.

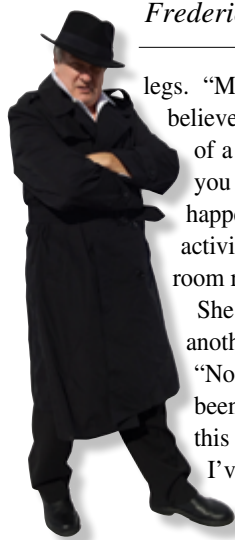
I grabbed my fedora and coat, hopped in the Woody and headed out the door.

I arrived at the address and met the lady at her front door. She led me to the living room, and I immediately noticed these strange gray stains scattered over her marble floor. I asked the standard questions, such as: “How long have they been there? What type of activity goes on in the room?” et cetera. She seemed to know nothing and just shrugged her shoulders on every question as she puffed her cigarette.

I couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something fishy going on. The stains didn’t look like any wine or food stains I had ever seen before.

I needed to take a closer look. As I got down on my knees to inspect the stains, I noticed a strange odor emanating from them. It smelled almost like dirty laundry that had been sitting in the hamper too long. That’s when it hit me — these weren’t ordinary stains.

I stood up and turned to the lady with the



Frederick M. Hueston, PhD

legs. “Ma’am, I have reason to believe that these stains may be of a more serious nature than you initially thought. Did you happen to notice any unusual activity or strange smells in the room recently?”

She shook her head and took another puff of her cigarette. “No, not really. But I haven’t been spending much time in this room lately, anyway. I’ve been busy with other things.”

I thanked her for her time and headed back to my office. It was clear to me that this case was more complicated than I had initially thought. I needed to do some more digging and find out what was really going on.

As I sat at my desk, just pondering the mystery of the strange gray stains and the smell. Something just didn’t add up. But I was determined to get to the bottom of it, no matter what it took. I put on my thinking cap, took a sip of my coffee, and got to work.

While searching for types of stains on Google, I was struck with an idea worthy of Sherlock Holmes. Despite not being a smoker, I ran across the street and purchased a pack of cigarettes. I returned to my office, lit a cigarette, collected some ashes, and spread them onto a piece of white marble. I removed my shoe and ground them into the stone. To my surprise, the same type of stain appeared. I recalled that she had walked into my office smoking a cigarette, and it all made sense. Her cigarette ashes were the culprit behind the stain.

When I informed her of my findings, she seemed skeptical, so I added, “Look: this is a simple fix, using a peroxide poultice. I’ll even give you the name of a local restoration guy who can handle it.”

She agreed that might be a good idea. Another case solved, and one for the books.

The Stone Detective is a fictional character created by Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD, written to entertain and educate. Dr. Fred has written over 33 books on stone and tile installations, fabrication and restoration and also serves as an expert for many legal cases across the world. Send your comments to fhueston@stoneforensics.com.

Dan Rhea Receives Migliore Award for Lifetime Achievement

Dan Rea (Coldspring) has received the 2022 Migliore Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Dan Rea’s long career in the natural stone industry has been marked by outstanding vision, thoughtful leadership, and unwavering commitment to promoting the use of natural stone. After 45 years at Coldspring, he has announced plans for retirement, creating an opportune time to honor him with this award.

Dan began his natural stone industry career at Coldspring in 1977, working in the company’s manufacturing facility. He left to answer a call to duty in 1980, joining the United States Air Force where he served as a weather specialist and provided combat field support and weapon and radar testing until 1988. During his time of service, Dan mastered many skills that would serve him well in the natural stone industry, including discipline and understanding the science behind the work.

Dan returned to Coldspring in the role of a Drafter and by 2003 was promoted to Senior Vice President of Commercial Sales. Recognizing a need in the market to become a strong driver of sustainability efforts, Dan supported both the efforts of the industry and of his Coldspring team to push the movement forward. He committed his team’s resources to strategically drive the Natural Stone Council through the development of the ANSI 373 Natural Stone Sustainability Standard, ultimately completed in 2013. His leadership and support early on were instrumental in helping get the standard to where it is now and where it is going in the future.

Polycor CEO Patrick Perus credits Coldspring for understanding the importance of sustainability twenty years before the rest of the industry: “They saw what we are all seeing today: natural stone is the future of a sustainable construction industry. They must have felt quite lonely for a while, being the only one to carry the torch. They did it for all of us. Generously. We are in the process of becoming a better industry because of Dan and Coldspring.” Retired Coldspring Director of Marketing Kathy Spanier agrees: “His contributions and dedication have been tireless and unselfish to strengthen and unify the industry.”



Dan Rhea, Coldspring, receives the 2022 Migliore Award for Lifetime Achievement

Through Coldspring’s longtime memberships, Dan advocated for support of both the Marble Institute of America (MIA) and the Building Stone Institute (BSI), fully understanding the value each association brought to the industry. While serving as MIA Board President in 2015, he believed that by unifying the two associations this new joint venture would not only defend the natural stone industry from well-organized marketing campaigns touting alternative materials, but also would become a powerful force in promoting natural stone well into the future.

Dee Brown, Inc. President Rob Barnes recalls: “I was the VP of the BSI when the MIA tendered the offer to join the two associations. Dan was the VP of the MIA and we worked closely with each other and our respective committees and boards to enter into an agreement to bring us together as the MIA+BSI. He led well and was able to do what no one had done in several previous attempts. Without his work the Natural Stone Institute as we know it would never have become a reality.”

Please turn to page 15

“The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom.”

– Isaac Asimov

noise, NOISE, NOISE

Stone shops can be noisy places. It's not a secret. We all know it. There really isn't much you can do to avoid the noise the tools, saws, forklifts, and trucks make. Not to mention people yelling to be heard over the noise, and the music being played at the top on the volume control to be heard over all the other shop noise.

The EPA recommends no more than 75 decibels over an 8-hour exposure period, or 70 decibels over a 24-hour exposure period. You can safely listen to 80 decibels approximately 40 hours per week. At 85 decibels, you can only listen to that 8 hours per week. At 90 decibels, the time goes down to 4 hours. At 100 decibels, the recommended exposure time is 15 minutes. Anything over these recommended times can result in hearing loss.

The average conversation in an office is 65 decibels. A refrigerator runs up to 47 decibels. A dishwasher goes to about 70 decibels. In your daily non-work life, so far, so good.

But what about your shop life?

- A grinder averages 85-95 decibels.
- A CNC when cutting can run up to 120 decibels or more.
- A bridge saw, when in use, can go up to 110 decibels, if not more.
- A stone drill, even with a muffler system is around 100 decibels.
- The average forklift is between 85-100 decibels.
- A newer commercial truck averages 100 decibels, more if it's older.

That is a *lot* of noise, probably all at one time, and it can definitely affect your hearing if you aren't careful.

The CDC has recommendations for what you can do to help your ears and hearing not to become damaged in loud environments. Unfortunately, the first 2 recommendations aren't particularly useful for on-the-job noise:

- Turning the volume down and walking away from the noise (NOT a very helpful recommendation for a work environment.) However, there are some other recommendations that are helpful:
- Earmuffs can reduce noise by 25%.
- Foam earplugs can reduce noise by 50%.
- Custom earplugs/earbuds can reduce noise by 75%.

Sharon Koehler

Stone Industry Consultant

OSHA requires employers to have a hearing conservation program if workers are exposed to over 85 decibels averaged over an 8-hour workday. That's basically every countertop fab shop, ever.

Noise-canceling headphones are another great way to drown out noise. However, you must get the right ones. PNC headphones (passive noise canceling) are great for people who work in loud occupations. The thing is that many people find they are uncomfortable to wear for very long. They are designed to envelope the whole ear and can feel tight or heavy. They may take some getting used to.

ANC headphones (active noise canceling) will also reduce noise. However, they don't drown out sudden noise like car horns and they work better canceling lower frequencies.

Like anything else, you get what you pay for. The \$17 noise canceling headphones won't do the job nearly as well as a pair you get custom-made, but there are plenty of great over-the-counter headphones in the \$100-\$400 range. If you prefer, you can get noise canceling headphones that do both PNC and ANC.

How do you know if a noisy workplace is affecting your hearing?

- You have temporary hearing loss after leaving work.
- You have a ringing sound in your ears after you leave work (tinnitus).
- You must shout to be heard by a co-worker who is 3 feet or less away.

Are you wondering how loud noise affects your hearing? It's pretty simple. OSHA actually says it best: *"Exposure to loud noise kills the nerve endings in our inner ear. More exposure will result in more dead nerve endings. The result is permanent hearing loss that cannot be corrected through surgery or with medicine."*

[Please turn to page 22](#)

The PREMIER TRADE GROUP

of the Stone Fabrication Industry



Best Practices



Benchmarks



Group Purchasing

Gain valuable business intelligence, find cost-saving opportunities and collaborate with some of the best-in-class within our industry by joining our elite group of surface fabricators. We have all of the tools in one place to help you grow your business.



Rich Katzmann
Executive Director
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Migliore Award

Continued from page 13

Dan has also been instrumental in the advances made for the checkoff initiative to establish a federally approved Research and Promotional Board to generate industry funding. While legislation has yet to receive Congressional approval, recent

attempts have come close. When the natural stone industry finally does get this important strategic initiative approved, it will largely be thanks to Dan—no volunteer leader has dedicated more time and effort to this initiative than he has.

Today, Dan leads the Coldspring team along with President and COO Greg Flint and CFO George Schnepf.

What they say is impressive about Dan's record of accomplishments is that he has done it all, from stone layout, drafting, project management, and cemetery construction to building and memorial sales.

George and Greg agree that one of their biggest challenges these days is to recruit future employees who possess Dan's skills, values, and leadership qualities.

His leadership style has helped guide the Coldspring organization and the industry for decades and his teachings will help guide both well into the future.

Nominations for the 2023 Migliore Award are being accepted until May 20. To learn more, visit www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/migliore.



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Stone Restoration and Maintenance Corner

What Type of Stone is It?

Bob Murrell

M3 Technologies

Photos by Bob Murrell

When I get a call from a restoration contractor regarding a particular type of stone, I ask them to help me determine a course of treatment by determining exactly what type of stone they are dealing with. There are well over 9,000 varieties of stone used in the worldwide dimensional building industry. As you can imagine, each of these

limestones & travertines, gneisses, quartzites, dolomitic marbles & limestones, serpentines, basalts, sandstones, onyx, alabaster, slate, and... well, you get the point. Just think of it, some translucent (ability to pass light) stones are onyx, alabaster, and obsidian. You would think they would



Marble, a stone containing calcium, reacts to application of an acid.

stones have their own characteristics. Of course, many stones are similar and can be grouped together.

I have been in this business for well over 40 years now and I come across a stone that's new to me fairly routinely. I am continually learning new tricks, implementing new technology, and learning from my clients of many years. This business must be a continuing education process so as to keep up with the countless varieties of natural stone one will encounter.

The number of types of tones in the world is great. They are composed of many different minerals, all of which have a hardness factor and other physical properties of concern. We must be able to determine some of these material properties, in order to prescribe the correct procedure for whatever issue ails the install.

So out of all of the granites, marbles,

have other similar characteristics too, right? Onyx and alabaster do share many common characteristics, however, obsidian does not.

The characteristics we are most concerned with are the type of minerals the stone contains and the hardness level associated with the stone. There are many metamorphic and some sedimentary stones that are mainly comprised of calcium carbonate, such as marbles, limestones, travertines, onyx, and alabaster. Igneous stones that contain quartz are many as well, such as granite, quartzite, gneiss, basalt, obsidian, and others.

We need the ability to test for these minerals and we have some easy methods for doing so. Calcium carbonate, being a metal salt, will react violently when subjected to a strong acid. When a small amount of acid is applied to the surface of a stone containing calcium, the acid will effervesce on the surface. This reaction results in the release of CO₂ to the atmosphere and also leaves an etched and new deteriorated surface

MOH's Hardness Scale

1 Talc		Soapstone
2 Gypsum	Fingernail (2.5)	Drywall plaster
3 Calcite	Copper coin (3.25)	Marble
4 Fluorite		Crystallized marble
5 Apatite	Knife blade (5.5)	Human bone
6 Feldspar	Tool steel (6.5)	Black granite
7 Quartz		Granite
8 Topaz		
9 Corundum		Porcelain
10 Diamond		



area where the action took place. This etch can be felt, if it is severe. The etch sticks out like a sore thumb on a glass-like finish polished surface. This is typical of many marble countertops, vanities, and floors.

So: all of the stones, natural and man-made, that contain calcium carbonate will etch. This includes marble, limestone, terrazzo, engineered marble, onyx and similar stones. To confirm this, simply put a small drop of acid on the material (in an inconspicuous area!) and observe the reaction. If it effervesces and leaves a subsequent etch, it is a calcium-based stone. Etching must be either re-polished or honed and re-polished to remove the etch and restore the surface.

If you apply the same acid test on a granite or similar material, guess what happens? Basically, nothing happens, at least to the stone itself. The acid could clean off any surface soiling but other than that, it doesn't have any detrimental effects on the surface of the granite. Keep in mind that the acid would normally not affect a quality porcelain material, either. So an acid reaction means the material contains calcium and no reaction generally means it does not.

You should start to notice there is a pattern here. We are starting to reduce the thousands of stones into two groups. Those stones that contain calcium and those that do not. So how many types of stone in the world are there? Two.

But what if you don't have any acid to test with? Wrong answer, you should always have some with you! There is,

Common objects can be used to test a stone for its hardness on the Mohs scale. Below: Marble is easily scratched by a steel knife point.

however, another test that can be applied to a stone material to help determine if it contains calcium or does not: a scratch or hardness test.

The Mohs Hardness Scale lists the hardness of materials from talc at 1, to diamond at 10. Mohs says that it takes a higher number to scratch a lower number. This means a Mohs scale reading of 6 can scratch any material 5.9 and below, but can't scratch any number above 6. Make sense?

If you take a simple pocketknife and apply the point to the material and gently pull it across, if it is below the hardness of the knife blade (about 6 to 6.5), it will scratch any softer material below that. Marble and limestone are typically around 3-4 and will easily scratch. Obviously, as with the acid test, this should be performed in an inconspicuous area. So most stones that contain calcium, will easily scratch.

Granite and other similar stones are a 7 on the Mohs scale, therefore the knife point will not easily scratch it. So which type of surface do you want for kitchen countertops? Despite being both chemically sensitive and easier to scratch, soft marble is being used more and more commonly for work surfaces in kitchens. Hopefully, most of these marble kitchen countertops are honed and therefore do not show the etching and scratching as badly.

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On the Mohs scale, most granite is harder than a knife blade, so the typical granite will not be scratched by a knife point.

Stone Restoration and Maintenance Corner

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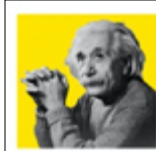
So how many types of stone in the world are there? Two. Those that contain calcium and those that do not. Knowing this, the stones that contain calcium are polished with rouges and oxides that contain a special acid. This process actually uses the etch to aid in polishing, and excellent production rates can be achieved. The acid does not work on granite materials so they are strictly mechanically polished with rouges and oxides, and because they are so hard, this process is typically much slower paced.

So the processes and tooling that work on calcium-based stones are different from those that are used for the harder materials like granite. If you can determine which group material— calcium or no calcium – you're dealing with, you will be ahead of the game!

As always and before beginning any new project, I recommend submitting a test area to confirm the results and the procedure, prior to general application of a stone or hard surface restoration/maintenance project. Also, the best way to help ensure success is by partnering with a good distributor, like BB Industries, that knows the business. They can help with technical support, product purchase decisions, logistics, and other pertinent project information.

Bob Murrell has worked in the natural stone industry for over 40 years and is well known for his expertise in natural stone, tile, and decorative concrete restoration and maintenance. He helped develop some of the main products and processes which revolutionized the industry, and is currently the Director of Operations for M3 Technologies.

Send your comments and questions to Bob at attn: publisher@slipperyrockgazette.net.



Most people say that it is the intellect which makes a great scientist. They are wrong: it is character.

– *Albert Einstein*



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Architect

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Grande Pinnacle Award Utopia

Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is home to a new and immersive experience. “Utopia” features the unique and diverse ethnic faces of women from around the world in Jaume Plensa’s signature style. The expansive floor-to-ceiling walls are 20 feet tall x 90 feet wide and made from Blanc Absolute marble. No single piece is identical to the next. Grounded and permanent, the art installations’ challenges and execution were only surpassed by its ultimate presence and natural beauty.

Efforts required early engagement at the project’s most critical time and helped the artist appreciate the limits and opportunities of the pristine white marble. Working closely with the entire project team and sculptor, PICCO’s considerations for

material extraction and handling, cubic geometry studies, stone engineering, installation methodology, fabrication approach, and logistics proved intrinsic to meeting the delicate project requirements and high standards. This included items such as custom lifting engineering for onsite stone handling, custom frame design and engineering, and coordination with 3D point cloud scans of the cast-in-place concrete structure.

The sculpture’s exacting design required precision engineering and innovation with every solution. With stone panels ranging from 176 pounds to 9,260 pounds and thicknesses exceeding 27 inches, a robust but simple steel frame system was designed as primary lateral support for the stone. The sheer mass and organic shape of the panels mandated center of gravity analysis and an eccentricity review. Additionally,

disc-shaped lateral connections proved efficient and saved installation time. The natural character of marble blocks was transformed physically and spiritually by the artist’s vision and skill. The essence of this prominent sculpture will endure as a testament to Women & Humanity and Art & Architecture for generations to enjoy.

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Judges Comments:

A very exciting and challenging project with a tremendous amount of artistic appeal. The texture and fabric of the material reminds one of fossils, for which the color matching seems quite good. Challenging details with the cubic pieces and lifting mechanisms. These were not 2cm slabs. It was all cubic material. The sheer scope and sculptural quality as an interior wall are really something we don’t see much. The subtlety in the shaping and how it goes across the stones is absolutely, stunning. Impressed by the technology used to install and support the stones. The stones are front heavy in many cases and would want to topple forward. When you stand back and look at it, it’s pretty amazing.



Not Exactly Taking a Bite Out of Crime

MY definition of “food fight” has changed.

I always thought it was akin to the cafeteria scene in the hit movie “Animal House.”

In fact, assuming (a) the statute of limitations has expired and (b) my grandchildren are gaming on social media and not reading this drivel, I might even confess to occasionally flinging a morsel or three at the Sigma Chi fraternity house during the mid-1960s.

But after hearing about a culinary altercation in Alabama, I realized my perspective on this issue was older than a Pontiac GTO.

In the first place, the word “fight” is now literal.

In the second place, the armament has escalated from a handful of mashed potatoes to potentially lethal weapons.

This incident occurred at the Meteor Buffet in Huntsville. According to police and media reports, hostilities broke out when some patrons cut line.

It seems a number of customers had been waiting 15 minutes for the arrival of crab legs, the eatery’s signature dish, along with fish, shrimp and other seafood.

When the pièce de résistance did show up, apparently a disagreement quickly ensued over whose turn it was to serve their plate, or how much to take, or both. And before you could say, “please pass the tartar sauce,” a full-fledged melee erupted.

Huntsville police officer Gerald Johnson was eating at the restaurant when the brawl began. He heard metal clashing and glass breaking and turned around to discover “there’s a woman who’s beating a man, people are moving around, plates are shattering everywhere.”

Some customers were fiercely dueling with metal tongs — “like a fencing match,” Johnson told a Huntsville television station.

Two diners were arrested: one for disorderly conduct, the other for third-degree assault.

Sam Venable
Department of Irony



Wow! Think how this could revolutionize menu selection! Instead of considering taste or caloric intake, it might be safer to make your choice based on its potential for self-defense.

Imagine this waiter-customer exchange:

“Our roast beef is particularly good today. It’s tender and juicy.”

“Nah, too wimpy. I need something with more substance.”

“Then how about our clam chowder? It’s Chef Pierre’s personal recipe, made with only the freshest ingredients.”

“How hot is it? And I don’t mean seasoning.”

“Chef insists it be served right off the stove, in a heated bowl.”

“Hmm, maybe. Then again, that bowl might be too hot to handle and throw effectively. Besides, it just gives me one shot. What if I need backup?”

“Then may I suggest beef kabobs with a side of grilled shrimp?”

“Perfect! Just be sure they’re served on sharp, strong metal skewers.”

Sam Venable is an author, comedic entertainer, and humor columnist for the Knoxville (TN) News Sentinel. His latest book is “The Joke’s on YOU! (All I Did Was Clean Out My Files).” He may be reached at sam.venable@outlook.com.

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Calacatta Macchia Vecchia
marble

Cedar marble



Judges Comments:

This kitchen entry immediately impressed due to how the veining of the stone was treated, not only on the island, but specifically in the backsplash. That is the first thing you are going to see, and they did a really good job with a wild material choice. It isn’t necessarily matched as much as blended and not distracting. The sink is a really nice element. You can see it is consecutive slabs of the same material that they glued together and hollowed out. That was a big effort and a beautifully executed feature.

Kitchen/Bath Boyce Residence Kitchen

Huntsville, Alabama

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This project is a private residence for a chef/restaurant owner in Huntsville, Alabama. The couple values the quality and beauty of materials that this earth provides. The goal for this kitchen was to feature the unique characteristics of natural stone. In this case, it was Calacatta Macchia Vecchia imported from Italy. It was also important to the clients to create a high-end timeless design with handcrafted features.

The scope of the work involved an island that necessitated two slabs which meant that a book matched seam was needed.

sink was fabricated by laminating several layers of the waterjet cut marble and then hand working it to achieve a seamless finish. Moreover, the backsplash features curved moldings to give the high-end finish and detail that the project required.

A challenge presented by this project was the pattern and flow of the material. With a material as vibrant as Calacatta Macchia Vecchia, seams that flow well visually can be a challenge.

The client was very meticulous in her wishes for how the material was laid out. Using a digital layout program with 3D options proved to be a crucial part of the process.

The Pinnacle Awards will be continued in the May SRG.



Buddy Ontra Named 2022 Natural Stone Institute Person of the Year

The Natural Stone Institute's **Person of the Year** award is presented annually to an individual who has provided extensive support to the association's executive team. As a dedicated leader and tireless volunteer, Buddy Ontra of Ontra Stone Concepts is recognized as the 2022 Person of the Year.

Buddy served as the 2022 Natural Stone Institute board president and was a member of the Natural Stone Foundation fundraising committee. However, these roles were only a portion of how Buddy contributed during the year.

CEO Jim Hieb explains why Buddy was this year's choice. "Coming out of COVID Buddy understood how important in-person events were to the industry and that it was vitally important that key volunteers be seen by the membership. Buddy not only attended the events expected of a board member, but so many others as well. In short, Buddy was everywhere!" Ontra attended three times the number of events expected of him, as well as helping with several key initiatives.

Ontra truly understands the value in giving back. When asked about why he spends so much time contributing to the industry Ontra shared: "I can't keep what I have unless I give it away. I don't think about it as what I'm going to get out of it. There is a bigger picture."

An avid baseball fan, Ontra would often explain complex industry topics using baseball analogies. He applied that same principle to his involvement with the association's philanthropic arm, the Natural Stone Foundation. Similar to how a company might make a donation for each homerun hit during a ball game, he applied that principle to select stone projects, making a donation to the Foundation for each project completed. That simple strategy now has Ontra outpacing other companies his size and serves as an inspiration for what can be accomplished over time with small contributions.

His long list of 2022 industry involvement also includes participating in the new Environmental Product Declaration for natural stone countertops, advocating



BuddY Ontra (right) of Ontra Stone was named NSI's Person of the Year at the recent 2023 TISE Show.

stone at both StonExpo and Hardscape NA tradeshows should yield dividends for the future. While I'm proud of this and so many industry initiatives undertaken, the true reward has been the friends you make along the way."

for NSI involvement with the natural stone hardscape industry, leading several conversations with fabricator associations/buying groups to discuss common goals, and helping guide the key relationship between the Natural Stone Institute and the Natural Stone Foundation.

Hieb described Buddy's leadership style as open, inclusive, and always ready to listen.

When asked to reflect on his year of volunteer leadership and involvement, Ontra responded, "I've enjoyed giving back to the industry which has put food on my family's table for so many years. The efforts to expand the presence of natural

The Natural Stone Institute is a trade association representing every aspect of the natural stone industry. The current membership exceeds 2,000 members in over 50 nations. The association offers a wide array of technical and training resources, professional development opportunities, regulatory advocacy, and networking events. Two prominent publications—the Dimension Stone Design Manual and Building Stone Magazine—raise awareness within the natural stone industry and in the design community for best practices and uses of natural stone. Visit www.naturalstoneinstitute.org to learn more.

Epoxy Vs. Polyester: Are You Using the Right Adhesive?

I was sitting in my office when I received a call from a hotel manager about a swimming pool coping that was falling apart. I asked him what was falling apart and he told me that the stone was falling into the pool. I got in my truck and made my way over to the hotel and discovered that the swimming pool had a travertine coping and all the laminations were failing and falling off. I examined the laminations closely and discovered that Polyester was used in the laminations.

Several weeks later I got a similar call from a home owner who had a similar problem but this time the laminations were failing on her new granite countertop. Again, upon inspection, the adhesive used was polyester.

How many of you use polyester for your laminations and other applications where you are bonding two pieces of stone

Frederick M. Hueston, PhD
Stone Forensics

together? If you do, your laminations are prone to failure.

There are many choices when it comes to the selection of adhesives and it can get very confusing. The following is a brief explanation of the two most popular adhesives in the stone industry and a guide as to where to use what type: **Epoxy or Polyester?**

Polyester

Polyesters use a hardening agent to catalyze the curing reaction. Most polyesters use a peroxide hardening agent.

Of all the adhesives available, polyester is the least expensive but also has the weakest bond strength. It also has a very high shrinkage rate and the highest water

absorption amongst all the adhesives. It is also very prone to UV degradation and will crack and become brittle.

For this reason polyester should never be used for laminations or for repairs in wet area or used outdoors.

Polyesters are good for small repairs for indoor stone applications such as filling and seams or in applications where bond strength is of no concern. The bond strength of polyesters is less than 500 PSI.

Epoxy

Epoxies are two parts labeled part A and Part B. Most epoxies are mixed at a ratio of 2/1 but some are 1/1.

Of all the adhesives used in the stone industry epoxies have the strongest bond. Bond strengths can exceed 2,000 PSI. It has a lower shrinkage rate than polyester and is more UV stable with a lower water absorption rate.

It is clear that if you want great adhesion, epoxy is the stronger adhesive. I always recommend using epoxy for laminations and rodding, and anywhere else you want the stone to stick and not fall apart.

Here's little experiment.

This is a crude test that I perform when testing adhesives for bond strength. Take two pieces of stone with the polished sides facing each other. Place some adhesive on the polish faces and clamp them together. Let the clamped pieces set overnight. The next morning take a hammer and try to break them apart. A weak glue, such as polyester will break clean, leaving the face of the stone intact. A strong adhesive such as an epoxy will be so strong that the face of the stone will spall off. This indicates that the adhesive bond is stronger than the natural bond of the stone.

Adhesive Grades:

All adhesives are available in various viscosities ranging from low to high. The following are the most popular choices:

Knife Grade- Consistency is similar to spackling putty or creamy peanut butter.

Flowing Grade- Viscous and flowing –the consistency of motor oil

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Epoxy Vs. Polyester:

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Penetrating Grade- Consistency of water

Super Penetrating Grade- Consistency of a solvent such as mineral spirits or paint thinner

Generally knife grades are used for repairs for fills that are over 1/16 of an inch wide. Flowing grades are used for repairs smaller than 1/16th and for laminations and rodding.

Penetrating and super penetrating grades are rarely used by fabricators but are used for resining stone and for applications where an adhesive is need to penetrate very small pores.

Adhesive Colors

Today's adhesives are available in a number of colors however there may times when you need to add coloring. Many of the adhesive manufacturers have tints that you can use. If you in a pinch I have found

that artist oil colors work well for most polyesters, however for epoxies you will need to use tints designed specifically for them.

Adhesives, General Properties:

Temperature

All adhesives are sensitive to temperature and humidity. This means that cure times will vary. Adhesives will cure faster with increasing temperatures and slower at cooler temperatures. Temperature will also affect the viscosity. Higher temperature will thin the adhesive. Tip: There are several heated dispensers for epoxies that work very well for faster cure times and easier flowing.

Cure Time

The general rule of thumb for most adhesives is the slower the cure time the stronger the bond. Epoxies with a 7 hour cure time are going to be much stronger than an epoxy with a five minute cure time.

If too much hardener is added to polyester

you will increase the cure time but you will reduce the bond strength.

UV Exposure

Nothing is completely UV proof; however epoxies are more UV resistant than polyesters and are the adhesive of choice for outdoor exposure.

Moisture

Polyester is very sensitive to moisture and for that reason it should be avoided in wet areas such as showers. Epoxy has a much higher tolerance for moisture and is the adhesive of choice in wet areas.

When using polyester you must make sure that the stone is completely dry. Epoxies can tolerate some moisture.

Polyester

- The stone must be completely dry
- If you do not thoroughly mix the resin and hardener it will probably cure anyway
- You can use most colors to tint
- Many varieties available
- Good adhesion when prepared properly
- Can easily be used for patching
- Stone surface must be abraded before

sticking

- Should NOT be used for exterior or in moist locations
- Quick curing time (normally 10 minutes to 1 hour depending on the product and the weather)

Epoxy

- Stone can be a little moist
- Resin and hardener must be thoroughly mixed to cure
- You should use only colors made for epoxy
- Not as many varieties available
- Great adhesions when prepared properly
- Not as easily used for patching
- Stone surface should be abraded, but it will stick to a smooth surface also
- CAN be used for exterior and moist locations
- Slow curing time (normally 7 hours depending on the product and the weather)

Visit the Stone Forensics website for more information on various stone industry topics, <https://stoneforensics.blogspot.com/>.

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noise, NOISE, NOISE



Continued from page 14

“Noise-induced hearing loss limits your ability to hear high frequency sounds and understand speech, which seriously impairs your ability to communicate. Hearing aids may help, but they do not restore your hearing to normal.”

According to the OSHA website: The hearing conservation program tries to prevent occupational hearing loss, preserve remaining hearing, and arm employees with the knowledge they need to protect their hearing. The hearing conservation program also helps to educate employers on reducing their noise in one of three ways:

1) Engineering Controls

- Choose low-noise tools and machinery.
- Maintain and lubricate machinery and equipment (e.g., oil bearings).
- Place a barrier between the noise source and employee (e.g., sound walls or curtains).
- Enclose or isolate the noise source.

2) Administrative Controls:

- Operate noisy machines during shifts when fewer people are exposed.
- Limit the amount of time a person spends at a noise source.
- Provide quiet areas where workers can gain relief from hazardous noise sources.
- Controlling noise exposure through distance is often an effective, yet simple and inexpensive administrative control. Specifically, for every doubling of the distance between the source of noise and the worker, the noise is decreased by 6 dBA.

3) Hearing Protective Devices

You can choose to provide effective noise reduction equipment and ensure employees use it properly.

Our ability to hear is one of our most important assets. You should do all you can to protect it. Once your hearing is lost, you can't get it back. Hearing aids will help, but unfortunately, once your hearing is gone it's gone for good.

Please send your thoughts and comments on this article to Sharon Koehler at Sharonk.SRG@gmail.com.

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Writers Note: Last month we presented an article about catalytic converter theft. Approximately 2 weeks later Fox News reported that the Oscar Mayer Weinermobile had its catalytic converter stolen while parked at a hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. Ahhh, Las Vegas – home of hot slots, hot broads, hot dogs, and hot car parts.



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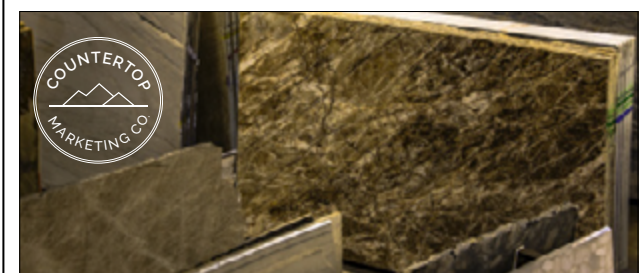
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Granite, Quartz & Cabinet Shop For Sale. Get out of the Snow and Come to Florida's West Coast where the housing marking (remodel and new construction) is booming! Established business 10+ years with excellent reputation, good mixture of General Contractor and home-owner sales 1M+ sales. Retirement sale. Beautiful showroom, all equipment owned. (Saw, forklift, trucks, trailers) Leased property; owner is willing to sell to new business owner. Please contact via email: flgranitewestcoast@gmail.com.

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Custom Stone Fabrication Business For Sale. This Central MN business has an excellent reputation for quality work. The owner has been in the business for over 44 years, started this business in 2015 and is selling for personal rea-

sons. Sale includes all the equipment, 16' Morgan Box truck, showroom displays, furniture, computers and software, etc. Owner will provide help for smooth transition. Real estate is leased and can be purchased. Phone: 320-251-9300, sdevine@warnert.com.

Turn Key Shop. Looking to get out of the business. Shop is located just outside of Buffalo, New York. I am willing to take monthly payments, with some money down. We have 2 Intermac Master 43 CNCs, a Yukon 2 bridge saw, overhead crane with vac lifters—everything you need to get started. Maybe some help, too – owner willing to stick around for the changeover. Email: stonetech45@gmail.com.

Limestone Fabrication Facility. Turnkey Limestone Fabrication business for sale in southern Indiana. We have all the equipment inside a 7200 Sq Ft Butler steel building with double girder overhead crane. Please call for more information. Contact: Michael Donham, 812-829-5663, mndonham@accentlime.com.

Delaware Marble Sculptor Retiring & Selling Business After 60 Years. Selling 40 tons of granite, marble, precious stones like onyx and jasper, and some finished sculptures! Also lapidary equipment, diamond saws, and 300+ tools are for sale. Marble man has sold over 700 stone sculptures. Please call (302) 653-4810 for more information. Located in Smyrna, DE – 30 miles from Wilmington, DE. Contact: Richard H Bailey, 302-399-9777, www.richardhbailey.com.

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STONE FORENSICS is again offering its popular Stone and Tile Troubleshooting workshop. The class will be held June 5-8, 2023 in Naples, FL, presented by Dr. Fredrick M. Hueston.

The program is designed to teach the basics of investigating stone and tile installation failures.

"The amount of failures, poor installations and other issues with stone and tile flooring are on the rise. This seminar is perfect for restoration and installation contractors as well as architects, building engineers and maintenance staff who have to deal with stone and tile installation and restoration," says Dr. Fred.

Class size is limited—register today.

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For more information, visit www.stoneforensics.com

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Help Wanted

Join Our Outside Sales Team. BB Industries, LLC is one of the largest distributors in the stone industry. We supply stone fabricators with a variety of tools to move, cut, polish, and repair stone countertops. We are currently seeking 2 qualified Outside Sales representatives to join our team. This individual should have previous sales or stone fabrication experience, be a team player, and have excellent customer service skills. BBI currently has openings in: Phoenix, AZ and the Greater Houston area. Contact: Karen Hamilton, k.hamilton@bbindustriesllc.com.

Sunny Florida top shop looking for the right people. Southwest Florida's largest counter top manufacturer is looking for stone fabricators and installers as

well as solid surface fabricators and installers in the Fort Myers area. Top pay, guaranteed 40 hours plus OT our 20 year old company is expanding into a 63,000 sq ft building and we need to add members to our production and installation teams. All experience levels welcome to apply. Phone: 239-931-4800, customerservice@sstswfl.com.

Saw Operator & Fabricator/Installer Needed. We are looking for someone who has experience operating a GMM/KTY-350 saw. We are also looking for experienced fabricators who know how to install as well. Experience required for both positions, and pay is based on experience. Looking for motivated and positive individuals who know how to communicate, be a team player, and work hard. We are located in Kailua, HI. Phone: (808) 351-0676, qstonehawaii@gmail.com.

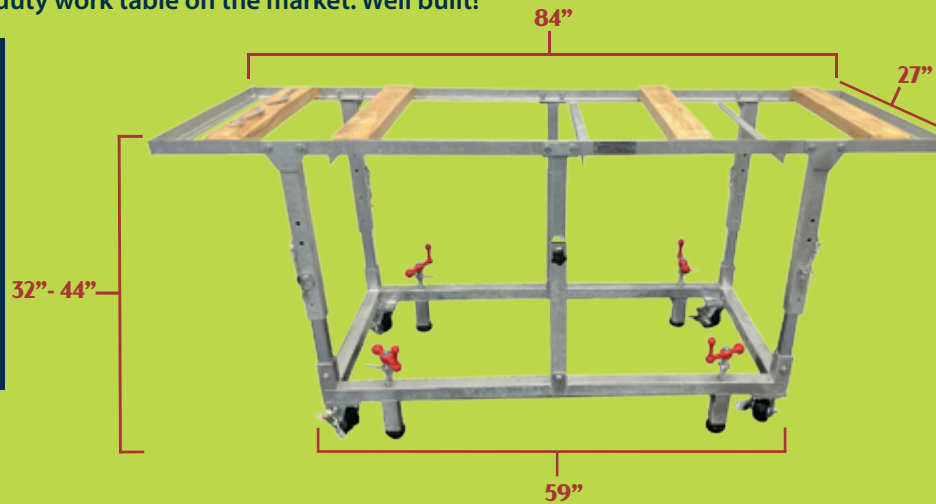
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Load Capacity: 4410 LBS
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Load Height: 60"

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Width of contact surface: 16"

Uprights: 10 (5 on each side)

Weight: 342 lbs

Continued from page 3

“Horizontal surfaces are our bread and butter, and we focus a lot in the commercial space. We also do residential, but our core competency is getting in front of the architects, telling the story of these products and the manufacturers, and getting them to buy into the idea of choosing better products, for better reasons. However, there are always trade-offs when using sustainable materials, and eventually there is a balance between the environmental story and the aesthetics. No one is going to choose the world’s ugliest countertops just because of the recycled content. So we work to balance those things in the architect’s mind. Our sales people do not do a hard sell. They’ll show you a portfolio of products, then you ask the questions, and then they’ll guide you to the right product. Maybe it’s a performance goal, a sustainability goal, a look, or concerns about silica.”

Silica-Free for Safer Fabrication

In the last two years, Lapitec, a brand and material made by Breton SPA (yes, the



Lapitec is now produced under a new process that makes it 100% crystalline silica-free.

machine manufacturer) created a new process that updated their old Lapitec, which had a small amount of silica due to its mineral content. The new Lapitec addresses both the high crystalline silica content (90 to 93%) in quartz slabs as well as the yellowing that can occur, explained McNaughton.

“Breton’s newest Lapitec has a proprietary mineral called “Biorite” that is 100% crystalline silica-free. The problem with crystalline silica is that it is kind of like ninja throwing

stars, right? When you breathe it in, it cuts your lungs, and then your lung tissue scars over. There is no cure for it, and I believe that this problem is a tidal wave coming to this industry, and Lapitec is ahead of that.”

McNaughton summed up the company’s culture: “We started out with a philosophy about doing better for the environment, and a lot of the people whom we hire and the ethos of the company are really around human health and environmental health. So

focusing on anything else diverts us from our lane, and if I’ve learned anything, it is ‘stay in your lane!’ People who try to do too much cannot be successful if they divert from what they are specializing in. We think that there are enough sustainable brands out there, and brands moving in that direction that we will always see sufficient amounts of products. We’ve had big brands come to us that would be huge bumps to our revenue, but they didn’t have the right story. And if they don’t have the right story, we are going to say no, because it is going to compromise our business model, and silica-free is one of our base criteria. We are focused on sustainability, because we always want to be forward-looking and at the forefront at what we are offering, and what’s happening in the industry today, and in the future.”

CaraGreen is a member of the U.S. Green Building Council, The American Institute of Architects, and the International Surface Fabricators Association.

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Bernie Van Etten Receives Inaugural David Fell Spirit of Service Award

A new award was unveiled at the Natural Stone Institute's annual Awards Ceremony at StonExpo. The **David Fell Spirit of Service Award** is presented to a company and/or individual who has participated in the Gary Sinise Foundation's R.I.S.E. program to recognize their efforts for demonstrating the qualities and characteristics of leadership within their company, the community, and beyond. The inaugural David Fell Spirit of Service Award was presented to Bernie Van Etten of Murphy Marble Company.

Bernie believes it is important to participate in the R.I.S.E. program because he is blessed to be in such a great industry. "You want to give back to society whenever you have an opportunity to do so. The Gary Sinise Foundation's R.I.S.E. program has worked hard to put together a great program to help provide homes for severely wounded veterans. Having met a few of these veterans in person, they are tremendous people and heroes in every sense of the word. Combine that with Gary Sinise, who is one of the most incredibly generous and talented people you will ever meet. The energy and excitement the R.I.S.E. program puts forth makes you want to contribute and be a part of their incredible work. It is truly an honor to have participated with R.I.S.E. by providing smart homes for severely wounded veterans. It never felt like work while providing the stonework for the homes we helped with."

Murphy Marble also helped provide lunch at the home dedications for U.S. Marine Corps Corporal Chad Watson. Their company, along with their local deli, felt that anything they can contribute helps the Foundation put more dollars towards constructing homes.

"Working with the R.I.S.E. program gave me a chance to meet some great people, including Gary Sinise himself and Lieutenant Strickland, who was the recipient of the home built in St. Louis. The entire organization and their employees give you the motivation to participate. Gary Sinise has a saying, 'We can all do a little more.' Gary and his organization give so much of their time, talent, and finances that it's contagious. My family company and I are blessed to have participated in the R.I.S.E. program."



Ernie van Etten (left) receives the inaugural Spirit of Service Award

The Natural Stone Institute was also proud to present Gary Sinise with an honorary lifetime recognition for the David Fell Spirit of Service Award for his leadership in creating the R.I.S.E. program. Gary embodies the characteristic of being a selfless, exemplary leader who impacts everyone he encounters. It is through his passion and dedication that others are stepping up to support his noble mission. Through the R.I.S.E. program (Restoring Independence Supporting Empowerment), the Gary Sinise Foundation builds specially adapted, smart technology mortgage-free homes for severely wounded veterans and first responders. Barbara Titus, V.P. of Operations for the Gary Sinise Foundation, attended the ceremony to accept the award on Gary's behalf and thanked the membership for rallying behind the R.I.S.E. program. A video message from Gary Sinise himself was shared with those in attendance.

The Natural Stone Institute would like to thank Joey Marcella (Mario & Son), who designed and donated the award. Joey stated that the design was "inspired by the winged goddess of Samothrace. It signifies a stoneworker's intrinsic connection to their craft. Like the wing, those possessing the award have elevated above and beyond in a spirit of service to others."

Learn more about the David Fell Spirit of Service Award at www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/spiritofservice. To learn how your company can get involved in future R.I.S.E. projects, please visit www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/RISE.

Elevate Forum Scheduled for April

Synchronous Solutions Announces First Annual "Elevate Forum" in Nashville, Tennessee for Countertop Fabricators, Paired with ActionCOACH's BizX America

The event is being promoted as two conferences in one. Get your tickets for BizX from Synchronous Solutions and attend the Elevate Conference free. The event features a panel Q&A with industry-leading executives and best-selling authors and speakers.

The Elevate Forum will be held at the Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville, Tennessee on Monday, April 3, 2023. Synchronous Solutions will be hosting this first annual Elevate Forum. The Forum is geared towards countertop fabricators, but is applicable to any industry. Paired with ActionCOACH's BizX, when you purchase your ticket through Synchronous Solutions, attendees receive both conferences for the same price. The BizX portion of the conference will be held on April 4th and 5th, 2023.

The Elevate Forum includes:

- Keynote Speaker: Traci Duez - Self-leadership and Leadership Development Expert
- Panel Q&A featuring 5 Leading Industry Executives
- Roger Lipscomb: Executive Coaching Case Study - Creating Company Culture
- Planning Your Next 90 Days
- ActionCOACH Workshop led by Coach Mark Phelps

- Peer Networking
- Meet & Greet: Visit Sponsor Booths
- Exclusive Welcome Reception

ActionCOACH BizX includes:

- Robbie Baxter - Best-selling author, The Membership Economy
- Amelia Rose Earhart, Youngest female to fly solo around the world
- Scott McKain, Best-selling author, Iconic, Create Distinction, and 7 Tenets of Taxi Terry
- Brad Sugars, CEO & Founder of ActionCOACH, best-selling author and entrepreneur. Brad is a strong advocate for building a business that works without you – so you can spend more time doing what really matters to you.
- Black-tie awards gala, honoring businesses from across the Americas

For more information and to purchase your ticket, visit <https://tinyurl.com/t8rb-3jz>.

Contact: Sales@SynchronousSolutions.com or call (216) 336-6900.

"Leadership is solving problems. The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership."

— Colin Powell, U.S. General and Statesman

Timothy Johnston Named 2022 Natural Stone Craftsman

Timothy Johnston (Rugo Stone) has been named **2022 Natural Stone Craftsman of the Year.**

Brett Rugo, president of Rugo Stone, describes Timothy Johnston as a humble craftsman who stands out in a time when most people are satisfied with mediocrity. Johnston began his career in the stone industry in 1985 at Wood and Stone, Inc. in Virginia, as a stone carving apprentice working hand in hand with renowned master stone carver Harold C. Vogel, also a stone restoration master from Ansbach, Germany. Johnston earned the esteemed title of master carver by 1996 and worked another 10 years at Wood and Stone, Inc. in Virginia where he completed many restoration and carving projects.

He ventured out on his own as a master carver, chasing various carving and lettering projects completed under the company name Stone Graphix by Tim.

In 2018 he joined Rugo Stone where he remains a master carver, engraver, mason, and restoration specialist. In just 4 short years Johnston has provided expert craftsmanship on some of Rugo Stone's finest award-winning projects, including engraving and restoration on The Reach Donor Wall and hand cut lettering in the Hall of Nations, both at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in DC. He performed the meticulous Astor Altar restoration at Trinity Church in New York City, as well as carved a replica of the Oval Office marble fireplace for the New York State Historical Society.

Rugo remarks: "Tim's stone carving skill is excellent, but what separates him from so many others is his in-depth knowledge of each job, each job's stone types and their limits, and his ability to provide a constant steady onsite leadership presence." Rugo credits Tim for continuously mentoring and



Timothy Johnston (left) receives the 2022 Craftsman of the Year Award

inspiring a younger generation of stone professionals, teaching the classical art of stone carving.

Tim has amassed an impressive portfolio of restoration and carving projects ranging from ecclesiastical statues to federal monuments. He possesses an extensive knowledge of stone restoration and carving techniques and is a highly accomplished stone engraver and hand cut letterer.

Rugo has worked with Tim for over two decades. "He is a true American stone craftsman," Rugo explains, "able to take directions, perform his own layout drawings, and develop his own recommendations to meet or most often exceed the expectation of the client."

Tim's commitment to his work is exemplified by his strong work ethic. Rugo has witnessed him take work home, work countless hours at night – studying plans, checking details, talking to the project managers, all so that the next day he is fully prepared to provide his best effort and complete the project with the highest standards possible. Tim's leadership and craftsmanship for carving and engraving is evidenced by the high number of complex projects that have earned Rugo Stone so many awards.

Nominations for the 2023 Craftsman of the Year Award are being accepted until May 20. Learn more at www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/craftsman.

ISFA Mineral Surfaces Tour and Fabrication Training Draws Attendees to Tennessee

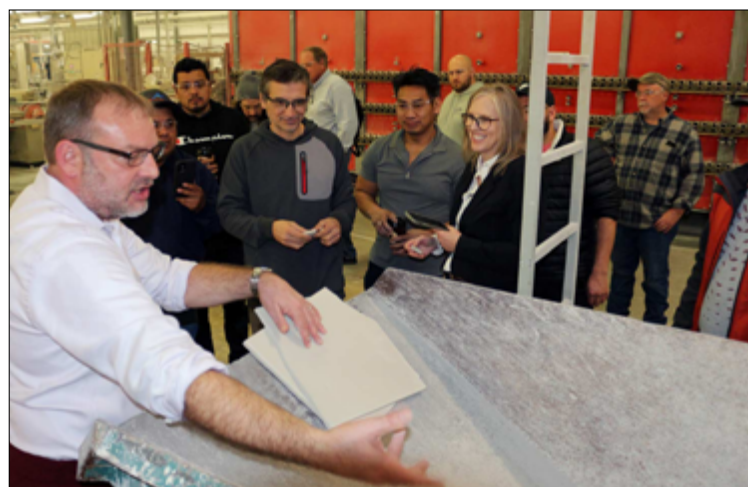
ISFA members gathered in late February for the Mineral Surfaces Training session to gain hands-on training and fabrication demonstrations with sintered stone and ultra-compact surfaces. The training focused on getting a better understanding of the challenges and benefits of working with the growing categories of porcelain, sintered stone and ultra-compact surface, and the attendees are now ISFA certified.

The group visited host BB Industries at their Knoxville, Tennessee headquarters, as well as Smokey Mountain Tops' fabrication shop, also in Knoxville, then they visited Crossville Tile's automated manufacturing center, in Crossville, Tennessee.

At BB Industries, attendees engaged in strategy and informational sessions before touring BBI's warehouse. On the visit to Smokey Mountain Tops, the group toured the fabrication facility and attended some porcelain fabricating demonstrations, with some added hands-on experience.

At the field trip to Crossville Tile, everyone was introduced to the porcelain tile manufacturing process, from combining the initial ingredients like sand and other materials, to curing the raw tiles in a long, hot kiln, to how the product is packaged and stored. The tour group also learned about Crossville's recycling process of tile that does not meet their high-quality standards.

"This hands-on learning and training opportunity was a creative way for fabricators to learn more about some of the most popular surfaces today," said BB Industries CEO Rick Stimac. "We were glad to host the group and get to see both some familiar and new faces at our offices, and partnering with Smokey Mountain Tops and Crossville offered the group an educational and fun



experience. We appreciate everyone who was involved, including trainer Alexandre Stepanov, and ISFA for including BB Industries in this great learning experience."

Since its beginning in 1994, BBI's philosophy has been to offer the best customer service in the industry and the best value stone fabrication products. We are right there for our

customers through all phases of business with education, training, and support from CNCs to blades. Our vendors and customers are valued partners. For more info, visit BBIndustriesLLC.com, and [BBIndustriesLLC](http://BBIndustriesLLC.com) on social channels LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok and [facebook.com/BBIndustriesLLC.USA](https://www.facebook.com/BBIndustriesLLC.USA).

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- Terry Bortolotti, G.M.S. Werks / Universal Terrazzo & Tile Co.



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The Artisan Group members were among the first stone fabricators in the world to achieve full accreditation with the Natural Stone Institute, with each member rigorously tested on quality, safety, and service.

Currently we are looking for new companies to join the group's partnership in the following areas:

Southern California	Jackson, WY
Las Vegas, NV	Orlando, FL
Indiana	Oklahoma
Louisville, KY	Mississippi
St. Louis, MO	

To learn more about becoming a member contact Jon Lancto:
jonl@Artisan-counters.com

The Artisan Group is facilitated by our member partner Architectural Surfaces.

