

Expanding from cabinets to stone fabrication

After being in the cabinet business, including solid surface countertops, for approximately 30 years, Dave's Cabinets of Chesapeake, VA, made the switch to stone countertop production

by Jennifer Adams



Three years ago, David Boone of Dave's Cabinets decided to make the transition into stone countertop production. The shop — located in Chesapeake, VA — includes two waterjets from Flow International, which are used for all custom work.

Although Dave's Cabinets of Chesapeake, VA, has been in operation for about 30 years, it has only been in the practice of fabricating stone countertops for the past three years. The company originally began as a woodworking

business, but after thoroughly researching the stone industry, its owner decided it was time to make the move to stone fabrication.

"Like many companies doing cabinets and the like, we also did solid surface countertops," said David Boone,

owner of Dave's Cabinets. "We prided ourselves on being relatively cutting edge. At one time, we had eight CNCs."

Boone went on to say that it was his company's background in technology that pushed it to the next level. "We have a lot of experience in countertops,"

he said. "We were doing solid surface for years. We were using CNCs and digital templating. That technology represented such a significant advance to the industry. It gave us the courage to start [the stone] facility."

According to Boone, he first began researching the industry back in 1998. "We actually went to a stone 'school,' and we were going to go into the business then, but I thought it was difficult not having the right geometry, and the CNC aspect made me decide to wait to proceed further," he said.

But when Boone decided three years ago that the time was right to begin stone fabrication, he did quite a bit of research. "I went to different manufacturers around the country," he said. "I went to Cambria and set up to buy truckloads of quartz products. I then asked, 'Who sells lots of stone?' So, then I jumped on a plane to Texas. I

did the same with Technistone.

"Blue Sky Design built our overhead facility and then we bought equipment to put in it," continued Boone. "This was based on our analysis of how to do things. We definitely take a unique approach to doing business."

Boone said that two-thirds of the company's work is quartz surfacing. It maintains a stock of 15 colors of Cambria, eight colors of Technistone and eight colors of CaesarStone.

Equipment at the shop

Machinery at the facility includes a Park Yukon saw for cutting backsplashes or jobs that are rectangles only, including many pieces for commercial work. Cutting is also done with two waterjets from Flow International of Kent, WA — a single-table 100-hp twin intensifier machine

108 April 2007 | Stone World



Hand tools from Regent Stone Products are used for finishing work.

and a twin-table machine.

"We have two waterjets, but three beds, anything custom goes on the waterjet," said Boone. "[A total of] 80 to 90% is cut on the waterjet," said Boone. "We do a lot of custom work."

The shop is also equipped with two CNC machines from CNT Motion of Pittsburgh, PA, for complex work. Meanwhile, straight edge profiling and processing is completed using an RCM multi-head machine from U.S.

Granite Machinery of Carpentersville, IL. The machine is designed to profile and polish edges on marble, granite and engineered stone between 2 and 6 cm thick. Using this machine, a variety of radius as well as flat edges can be created and programmed. The RCM has six inline shaping/polishing heads that work in a hydraulically powered carriage, along with two beveling heads (one upper and one lower) and one thickness-calibrating head.

Granite Machinery of Carpentersville, IL. The machine is designed to profile and polish edges on marble, granite and engineered stone between 2 and 6 cm thick. Using this machine, a variety of radius as well as flat edges can be created and programmed. The RCM has six inline shaping/polishing heads that work in a hydraulically powered carriage, along with two beveling heads (one upper and one lower) and one thickness-calibrating head.

Backsplashes are processed on a Piranha edging machine, which was also supplied by U.S. Granite Machinery.

"Most people in the industry have been very good to work with," said Boone. "Park is great to work with. They have been phenomenal. [And], Flow stood behind their product, which was nice to see." Boone explained that after having some initial difficulties with the waterjet, Flow stepped in and rectified the situation.

When looking ahead to future purchases, Boone said that he would most likely buy another CNC machine. "I don't know from whom yet," he said.

In total, the countertop division of Dave's Cabinets consists of 24 workers, including the installers. "We have a two-shift operation — one full and one split shift," said Boone. "The second shift is three guys that do fill-in work. They make sure that anything that needs to get done is covered."

Digital technology

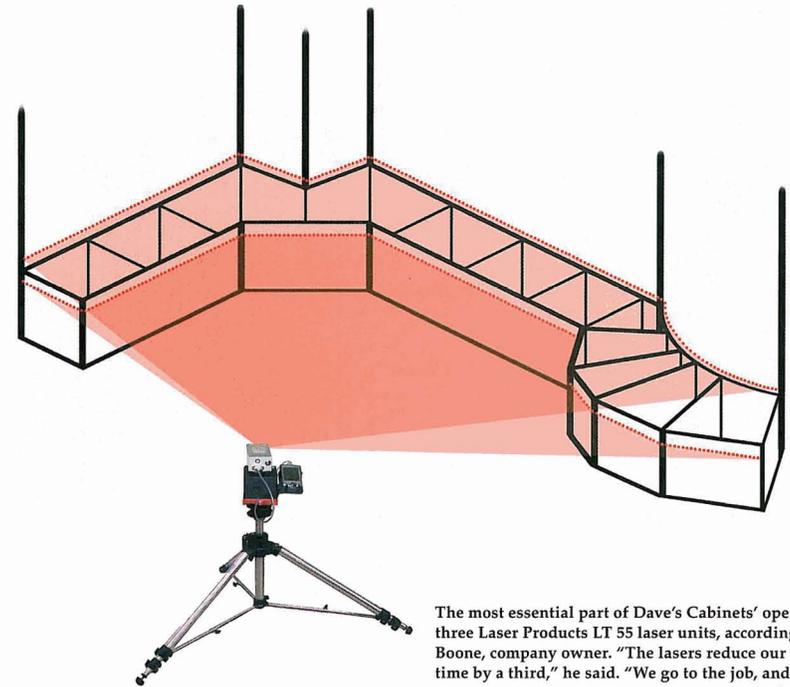
According to Boone, the most essential part of his operation is three LT 55 laser units from Laser Products Industries Inc. of Romeoville, IL. "The lasers reduce our installation time by a third," he said. "We go to the job, and it fits."

Boone explained that he tested several different digital templating systems before deciding on the LT 55. "We have tried a bunch of different approaches," he said. "We went to various one-day schools. We bought everything, but the LT 55 was by far the best. We were using a different system, and it was hard and complicated and not successful for us."

110 April 2007 | Stone World



Water is recycled using the EnviroSystem from Water Treatment Technologies of Hampton, NH.



The most essential part of Dave's Cabinets' operation is three Laser Products LT 55 laser units, according to David Boone, company owner. "The lasers reduce our installation time by a third," he said. "We go to the job, and it fits."

It wasn't until we really discovered the accuracy of the LT 55 laser that we had good field technology. It is easy to train people to use. The others were extremely time intensive."

With the LT 55, one of the company's templaters, who lives about 80 miles from the facility, only stops in the shop once a week or every other week. Boone explained that the templater goes to the jobsite, uses the laser to get the measurements, drops the information

into AutoCAD and then e-mails the cut files to the shop. Workers at the shop take the cut files and drop them on the waterjet.

"We are truly installing stuff and not being field mechanics,"

said Boone. "It doesn't mean that we don't make a mistake, but to me the key to us putting out expenditure of moving forward is having good digital geometry out in the field. Our templater not only templates, but he does overhangs and delivers files that are cut-ready — and it fits. That is huge for us. We have done thousands of jobs with those machines. They have never ever delivered me any bad information. The only mistakes have been my mistakes. They are accurate within 1/32 of an inch for countertops. I would get out of the business before I give up my lasers."

Planning for the future

At this time, Dave's Cabinets primarily services the Chesapeake area, and the residential market comprises 80% of its business. The other 20% is commercial projects.

"Currently, we only have one salesperson," said Boone. "We have a lot more capacity, but purposely have not sold our capacity so that we can deliver in a two-week time period. I've seen people open shop and [sell

to capacity] and get backlogged. We've been cautious and never sold more than two-thirds of our capacity."

But gradually, Boone is planning to expand Dave's Cabinets business. "We have come in and recently started a second shift to up capacity," he said. "We bought the second CNC and are getting ready to add another sales person. Our approach to selling

products has really been about service, and not to go out and aggressively market ourselves."

According to Boone, it is anticipated that 2007 will see a downturn of new construction by about 30% in southeast Virginia and northeast North Carolina. "We budgeted 50% growth in sales, so we will have to make up for it by trying to give better service." □

Dave's Cabinets Chesapeake, VA

Type of work: primarily custom countertops in natural stone and quartz surfacing, including Cambria, Technistone and CaesarStone quartz surfacing

Machinery: a Park Yukon saw from Park Industries of St. Cloud, MN; a single-table 100-hp twin intensifier waterjet machine and a twin-table waterjet machine from Flow International of Kent, WA; two CNC machines from CNT Motion of Pittsburgh, PA; a RCM in-line multihead edge processor and a Piranha backplash polisher — both from U.S. Granite Machinery of Carpentersville, IL; three LT 55 laser templating systems from Laser Products Industries Inc. of Romeoville, IL; an EnviroSystem from Water Treatment Technologies of Hampton, NH; hand tools from Regent Stone Products of Virginia Beach, VA; and CNC bits from Braxton-Bragg Corp. of Knoxville, TN

Number of Employees: 24, including installers



Compact plant complete with filterpress



Treatment of waste water and dehydration of the mud
Filter Presses

FRACCAROLI & BALZAN
www.fraccarolibalzan.it



1 800 234-1982
BERGMAN-BLAIR MACHINE CORPORATION
The Machinery Division Of SALEM stone

