

Launching with state-of-the art equipment

When it began fabricating kitchen countertops and commercial work last September, Counter-Fit of Willingboro, NJ, chose some of the most advanced machinery from Italy

by Michael Reis



Counter-Fit of Willingboro, NJ, was established last September as a fabricator of natural stone and quartz surface countertops. It has two Contourbreton NC 400 computer numerically controlled stoneworking machines, and it is planning to add new equipment in the near future.

On September 15, 2003, Counter-Fit of Willingboro, NJ, began fabricating natural stone and quartz surfaces for the residential and commercial market. But unlike many start-up shops, the company did not begin with a simple bridge saw and edging machine. With a goal of achieving high production levels from

the very beginning, the company began with two large-scale CNC machines as well as a range of other advanced equipment.

The company fabricates an even combination of natural stone and quartz surfacing such as Silestone, for which the company is a major national distributor. A total of 10 containers are

unloaded at the Willingboro facility every week, and the company stocks slabs as well as tiles for distribution around the country. Most recently, the firm began fabricating FormicaStone, a quartz-based product that is produced by Cosentino of Spain.

On the fabrication side, Counter-Fit is currently equipped with two



Each Contourbreton NC 400 is equipped with two large worktables.



The machine features automatic tool changing of up to 27 different tools, and it can also use one of two blades as needed.

Contourbreton NC 400 stoneworking centers from Breton of Italy. These computer numerically controlled (CNC) machines are each equipped with two large worktables and have broad axis movements of 11 ½ feet (X axis), 6 ½ feet (Y axis) and 15 ¾ inches (Z axis at 0 degrees). Each NC 400 can hold 27 tools, and tool changing is programmed in advance and executed automatically throughout the process. Additionally, each unit can be equipped with one of two saw blades — a straight blade and a concave blade.

The software for operating the machine is designed to be simple to use, and it is compatible with Microsoft Windows. It is also equipped with a 3D optical precision system that, without contact, detects the shape and dimensions of the workpiece.

A third Contourbreton NC 400 and a Contourbreton NC 260 (a smaller version of the other units) are being added shortly. In addition to the CNC units, stone is processed on one of two bridge saws from Zorzan, and the company is purchasing a third bridge saw from Breton that will be equipped with the same optical system as the CNC machines. For straight edge work, such as backsplashes, the company uses the Marmo



The company has a total of 20 employees, and it prefers to train new employees in house, rather than draw from other fabricators.



During the first step of the fabrication process, the stone is cut to size on one of two bridge saws.



A Marmo Meccanica LCV 711 M does straight edge polishing, and it is used for pieces such as backsplashes.

Meccanica LCV 711 M edging machine.

During the production process, slabs are first processed on the bridge saws, where they are cut to within $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of the final dimensions. From there, they move on to the CNC machines. For certain shapes, such as an eased edge, the edge work will bring the workpiece to its final dimensions. For others, such as an ogee edge or a triple-pencil edge,

the blades are needed.

Wooden templates are made for every project, and to enter the working parameters into the system, the company either uses a digitizing table or enters the measurements directly into the computer. It has also begun using an electronic templating system from Proliner USA.

One interesting aspect of Counter-

Fit's operation is its efficient water recycling. A total of 100% of the water used at the facility is recycled using a system from Water Treatment Technologies of North Hampton, NH, and the company does not use any municipal water. In this system, the water runs through a pool, and the larger debris is removed. Two pumps are used to feed the resulting "gray water"



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The company processes a broad range of edges, and it creates samples of its work for display in Home Depot outlets.

As a major national distributor of Silestone, the company has a large warehouse facility, where it unloads 10 containers of material each week.

to the bridge saws as well as the edging machine and the “halos” of the CNC spindles. Since the water for the “halos” only cools the working unit, gray water is acceptable. By using two pumps, the company is guaranteed not to have any down time, as it can operate with only one pump if the other breaks down.

To obtain the pristine water for other components of the CNC machinery, water also travels through a large filter that operates in the same manner as a pool filter. The filtering units are coated with a fine powder called Harborlite, which is similar to the diamataceous earth (“DE”) used in certain pool filters. The impurities in the water cling to the powder, and the resulting crystal clear

water is actually cleaner than regular drinking water, the company reports.

Counter-Fit currently has 20 employees, including the shop, office and installation crews. When bringing in new workers, the company chooses not to hire from other shops in the area. Also, any worker must eventually learn all phases of the operation, so a templater must first work on installations. Also, workers first demonstrate a proficiency in the shop before they work on the installation teams. The company currently operates one shift, and it processes 12 to 15 kitchens per day. However, it expects this amount to triple when it adds machinery and runs additional shifts.

All of the natural stone processed at

the facility — regardless of where it is quarried — comes from Italy, where the company has an agent that takes care of all quality control. In addition to Silestone, the company is also a major distributor of Brazilian soapstone.

Counter-Fit sells its fabricated work primarily to Home Depots and builders. A total of 75 to 80% of work is currently residential, but this will change, as the company is bringing in sales representatives specifically for the commercial market and for kitchen/bath dealers. In one example of commercial work, the company is currently working on the luxury suites for the Phillies new baseball stadium in Philadelphia, PA. □