



Fabricator  
Case Study

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# Building a reputation for success

*Originally started as a tile installation business, Slabworks of Montana has evolved into a full-scale fabrication operation, which considers investment in technology and quality customer service key components for expansion*

by Jennifer Adams



Slabworks of Montana operates out of a 7,200-square-foot facility in Bozeman, MT.

Located just about 100 miles north of Yellowstone National Park, Slabworks of Montana in Bozeman, MT, has experienced significant growth since it first opened

its doors in 1994. What began as a two-man operation has now blossomed to a staff of 18, and the company's facility has also expanded in terms of size and equipment.

"I started the business in 1994 as a tile installation subcontractor with two employees, a few tools and a 1980 Ford Econoline van," said Dave Scott, who owns the company with his wife,



Among the most recent additions to the company's shop is a 80160 Jet Machining Center from Omax Corp. of Kent, WA.



Teri, and its employees — who own shares in the business. “Our focus was to provide the highest level of service and craftsmanship while never compromising our integrity. This focus allowed us to grow to six employees in just a few years.”

Scott went on to explain that Slabworks of Montana fabricated its first kitchen in 1999 at the request of one of its primary customers. “We used granite that the customer had scavenged from the exterior of a building being demolished,” he said. “Using a worm-drive hand saw with a diamond blade and a hand-held grinder with polishing pads, we fabricated and installed the kitchen in three days.”

### **Establishing a fabrication shop**

It was also in this year that the company set up a shop in a 2,000-square-foot warehouse space with a Track Star saw, Alpha electric polishers and pads, a Weha aluminum transport A-frame and installation equipment from Granite City Tool. “On average, we installed three kitchens a week,” said Scott. “In 2001, we purchased an Achilli MBS-CE bridge saw, and we became one of Cambria’s first fabricator partners [for engineered stone]. At that time, we were the only fabricator of quartz surfaces in Montana. We teamed

The Omax waterjet allows the company to complete many customized stone projects.



In total, Slabworks of Montana employs seven shop workers, who use vacuum lifters from Wood's Powr-Grip of Laurel, MT, to position slabs on the machines.



Two Achilli MBS-CE bridge saws, which were purchased from Braxton-Bragg of Knoxville, TN, are also used in the fabrication process.

with local cabinet and tile shops as a wholesale fabricator, providing them with Cambria quartz and natural stone countertops."

In 2005, Slabworks of Montana moved to its current 7,200-square-foot facility, and it added a second Achilli bridge saw, which it purchased from Braxton-Bragg of Knoxville, TN; a Pro Edge III and a Wizard Deluxe radial arm workstation — both from Park Industries of St. Cloud, MN; a Kaeser twin-powered air compressor and air polishing tools from Braxton-Bragg. Additionally, the company purchased an EnviroSystem from Water Treatment Technologies of Hampton, NH — making it Montana's first 100% water-recycling stone shop, according to Scott. Among the most recent addi-

tions to the shop is the Omax 80160 JetMachining Center from Omax Corp. of Kent, WA, which was purchased in 2006.

With the additional space and equipment, the company now produces between 12 to 15 kitchens per week. The countertops are fabricated from materials such as granite, Cambria quartz, marble, limestone, slate, onyx, travertine, locally quarried sandstone and porcelain slabs.

The shop is managed by Chris Anderson, who Scott hired as shop foreman in 2005. In total, there are seven workers in the shop, five installers, three management employees, two sales representatives and one administrative assistant. Currently, Slabworks of Montana runs one shift. "We expect

to add a second overlapping shift in the shop by the spring," said Scott, adding that this will be after a new CNC machine is purchased and installed. "This should increase our capacity to 17 to 20 kitchens per week."

For templating, Slabworks of Montana continues to use ¼-inch plywood templates, although the company is exploring digital options, according to Scott. Slabs are held in a 3,500-square-foot space of inside storage, which was added last year. Also, an overhead bridge crane was installed for increased employee safety and productivity, according to Scott.

### A diverse market

Slabworks of Montana's market comprises both commercial and resi-



The shop is also equipped with a Pro-Edge III automatic edge polishing and shaping machine from Park Industries of St. Cloud, MN.

dential work. "We recently completed two large commercial projects — countertops for the new homes of the Heart of the Valley Humane Society and the Bozeman Public Library," said Scott. "Designated a 'green' building for its environmentally friendly design features and construction practices, the library is the first municipal project in Montana to earn Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification."

Current residential work includes a contract with the Yellowstone Club to provide countertops for the 30-unit Warren Miller Lodge luxury condominium project. "New, medium- to upper-priced residential homes comprise the bulk of our business, although lately, we have seen a gradual increase in remodel work," said Scott.

The owner went on to explain that the company has retail outlets throughout Montana, including Helena, Butte, Dillon, Livingston, Big Timber and Ennis. "[Also], we service Big Sky, Moonlight Basin and the Yellowstone Club resort areas," he said. "We draw 55% of our business from the Bozeman and Big Sky areas, and we have been capturing an increasing amount of business in the surrounding areas. We have found that more than 50% of our growth has come from areas outside of Bozeman."

In addition to its stone fabrication shop, Slabworks of Montana also operates a tile division — Bozeman Tile and Stone — which was started in 2006. "It



Currently, the company produces between 12 to 15 kitchens per week.



With the purchase of an EnviroSystem from Water Treatment Technologies of Hampton, NH, Slabworks of Montana became Montana's first 100% water-recycling stone shop, according to company owner Dave Scott.



The company also operates a showroom where it presents its customers with its full collection of materials, which include granite, Cambria quartz, marble, limestone, slate, onyx, travertine, locally quarried sandstone and porcelain slabs.

A large portion of the company's work consists of customized stonework for residential homes.



An overhead crane is used to maneuver slabs around the fabrication shop.



generates 12% of our volume," said Scott. "We specialize in sales of large-format glazed porcelain, glass, handmade tile and dimensional stone in unique formats and finishes. We also stock a complete line of tile-setting materials and sun-

dries. It is our goal to grow this sector of our business 15% each year."

### Offering quality service

While Slabworks of Montana works hard for its success, its employees do

not take their prosperous business for granted. The company as a whole realizes that quality customer service is a key factor in good business practice.

"I pride myself in customer support," said Chris Anderson, General

Slabworks of Montana completed this memorial for a local National Guard unit. The memorial was processed on the Omax waterjet, and the company donated the material and labor.



Manager. "In our line of work, a lot of things have the potential to go wrong. If something does go wrong, we are going to stand up and raise our hand and say that we did something wrong and that we are going to fix it."

According to Anderson, it is very important to build a solid reputation. "People trust what their friends tell them," he said. "If they say that they had a bad experience with a company, their friends will probably go somewhere else." □

### Slabworks of Montana Bozeman, MT

*Type of work:* primarily new residential work, with an increasing amount of remodels; some commercial projects

*Machinery:* five Weha aluminum transport A-frames; two Achilli MBS-CE bridge saws from Braxton-Bragg of Knoxville, TN; a Pro-Edge III and a Wizard Deluxe radial arm workstation — both from Park Industries of St. Cloud, MN; a Kaeser twin-powered air compressor from Kaeser Compressors, Inc. of Fredericksburg, VA; an EnviroSystem from Water Treatment Technologies of Hampton, NH; an Omax 80160 JetMachining Center from Omax Corp. of Kent, WA; air polishing tools from Braxton-Bragg; vacuum lifters from Wood's Powr-Grip of Laurel, MT; installation equipment from Granite City Tool Co. of Waite Park, MN

*Number of Employees:* 18

*Production Rate:* 15 to 17 kitchens per week



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