

# SOLIDSURFACE

Journal of the Solid Surface & Stone Industries

## Sta-Care, Inc.

**Y**ou might expect a company located in a town with a descriptive name like Pardeeville (pronounced Party-ville) to be a little out of the ordinary. In that regard Visioneer Solid Surface, a division of Sta-Care, Inc., doesn't disappoint. Here, a handful of workers employ modified postform laminate manufacturing technology to produce a full line of solid surface veneer kitchen countertops and matching bowls.

Before you mutter something about "that derved solid surface veneer" and turn the page, consider this: Visioneer turns out 60 sets of custom fabricated, ready-to-install kitchen countertops per week.

The whole concept behind Visioneer, according to Sta-Care

president and owner Steve Aldridge, is bringing a quality product to market that exhibits many of the properties of true solid surface, yet is more economical. That is accomplished in two ways: 1. A thin layer of solid surface material (1/4 in.) is applied to a particleboard substrate, thereby reducing the overall cost of materials, and 2. Economies of scale are realized through utilization of industrialized manufacturing processes.

To fully understand Visioneer, it is helpful to understand the core business of Sta-Care, which manufactures postformed laminate countertop blanks 20 miles down the road from Pardeeville in Portage, Wis. Churning out the equivalent of roughly 150 sets of high pressure laminate kitchen countertops per day, the company markets its postform products pri-



Solid surface sheets are cast on stainless steel molds and sanded to 1/4 in. after curing.

Left to right: Joe Koch, casting mgr.; Matt Aldridge, mgr. R&D; John Aldridge, v.p./sales; Steve Aldridge, pres.; Skylar Baxter, plant super.; Travis Aldridge, v. p.



Just as with postform laminated tops, Visioneer blanks are mitered and the substrate is routed to accept mechanical fasteners.



marily to dealers, lumberyards, home centers and commercial cabinetmakers. Most of the equipment used in manufacturing the postformed laminate tops has been modified or created from scratch in the company's onsite machine shop.

### The Visioneer Process

A Visioneer countertop begins life in much the same way as a typical batch-cast solid surface countertop. Raw materials are mixed together, catalyzed, the air evacuated and the slurry is poured

onto a stainless steel mold. After the material has set up, the mold enters an oven where the solid surface is fully cured. The cured sheets are run through a Timesaver wide belt sander where they are thickened to a uniform 1/4 in. and then finish sanded in a Quick Wood Pro 1100 buffer.

This is where it gets interesting. Using a special grade of contact cement, the solid surface veneer is laminated to a particleboard substrate fitted with a balance sheet on the bottom. The sandwiched sheet then moves onto a compa-

ny-built core building machine that squares the sheet, applies build-down strips, creates an expansion joint to allow the particleboard and solid surface to move independently from each other, and applies hinge tape for v-grooving.

The slab then moves to the v-grooving machine, which is also company-built and resembles nothing you have seen in any traditional solid surface fabrication shop. Here the edge undergoes v-grooving, glue-up and clamping as part of the same process. Total elapsed time from entering the v-groover to fin-



The core building machine combines into one process squaring the sheet, applying build-down strips, cutting an expansion joint and applying hinge tape for v-grooving.



This company-built machine v-grooves, glues and clamps edges, producing a finished edge in as little as 12 minutes.

The particleboard substrate is cut away so that solid surface sinks can be seamed to the countertop deck. Mechanical fasteners are also used to increase strength.



The possible variations for a Visioneer top include everything from inlaid or wood accent edges, to mechanically undermounted matching sinks.



ished edge: 12 minutes.

At this point the Visioneer blanks are ready for fabrication using slightly modified traditional postform laminate techniques. L and U-shape tops are mitered in the corners for joining in the field utilizing mechanical fasteners and joint adhesive. Specially cast solid surface sinks, available in 31 colors (Visioneer offers 52 total colors), may also be undermounted in the countertop using a combination mechanical fastening system.

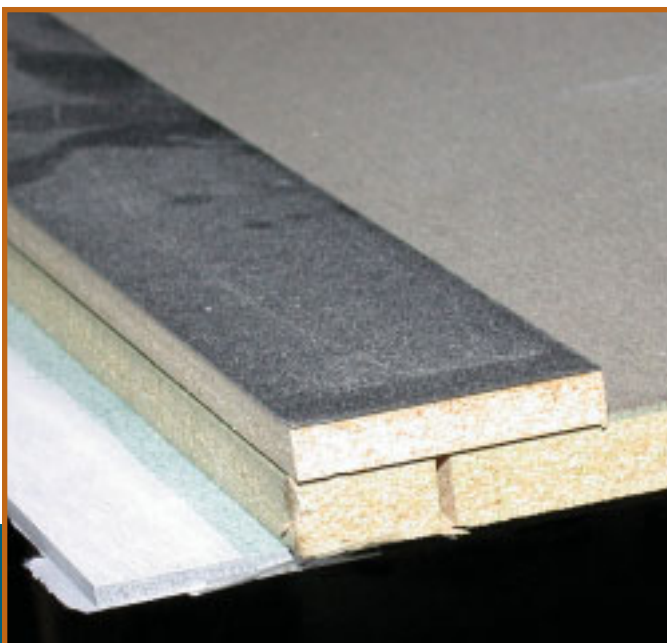
According to Aldridge, the real

appeal of a Visioneer top is that anyone who is handy with tools can install a full set of kitchen countertops that looks and performs similar to solid surface using standard tools. "We've developed a midpriced product, about \$55 to \$70 per lineal ft., plus installation," he says. "In this part of the country that is about half the price of traditional solid surface."

Although Visioneer comes with a 10-year warranty, company literature specifically states that "corner seams are visible, but far less conspicuous than a lam-

inate seam." That is something Aldridge is quick to point out when comparing his product to traditional solid surface.

"We make a point of stressing to the customer that Visioneer is not a true traditional solid surface," Aldridge explains. "We tell them if they can afford 1/2-in. solid surface, then that is the better product for them. By lowering expectations for our material in advance and delivering exceptional quality, our customers are pleasantly surprised when their countertops perform better than they had anticipated." ●



Prior to v-grooving an expansion joint is cut into the substrate and buildup added as a backer for the solid surface edge.



Once the joint has been filled with adhesive, the v-grooved edge is automatically folded together in the machine.