

Growth through CNC technology

When Viking Kitchen Cabinets expanded into stone fabrication, its first move was to invest in state-of-the-art CNC equipment

by Michael Reis



After producing countertops in man-made materials for 12 years, Viking Kitchen Cabinets, LLC, began fabricating stone in New Britain, CT, last year, and equipment includes a Park Industries Destiny CNC stoneworking center.

Since entering the kitchen trade 12 years ago, Viking Kitchen Cabinets, LLC of New Britain, CT, has seen steady growth. It began in cabinets and laminate countertops, and expanded into DuPont Corian six years ago. It has also been supplying stone countertops for several years, but

decided to open its own stoneworking facility last year. And from the very beginning, company President David Trachten wanted to make sure the shop would be equipped with the latest generation of stoneworking machinery — including CNC technology.

Since most of Viking's work is for

builders, turnaround time was of the utmost importance. "They did nice work, but we weren't able to control the level of service," Trachten said of the outside fabrication work. Ultimately, this led the company to begin processing its own stonework.

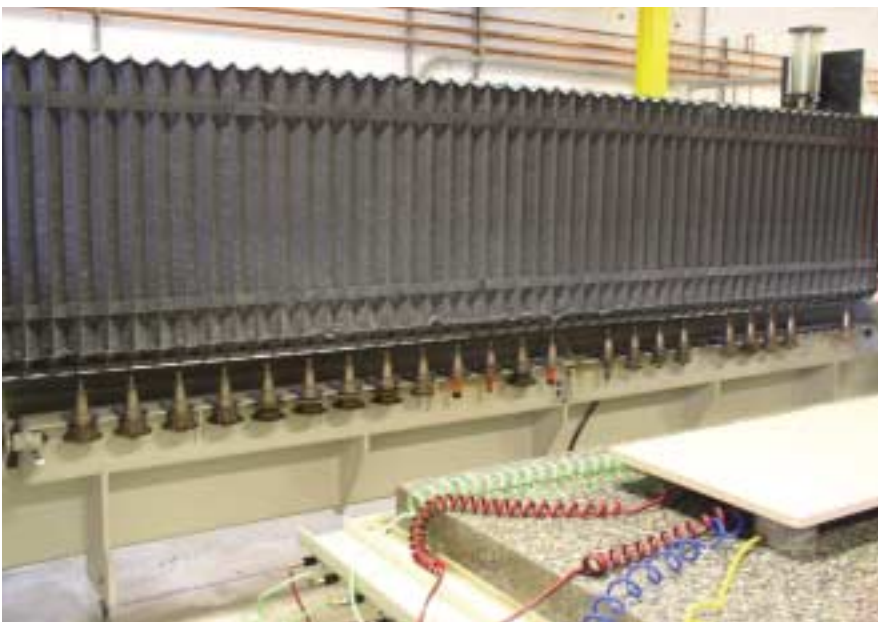
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to enter stone fabrication, finding the right personnel was a top priority. "Step one was getting Charlie Sutherland, who runs our shop," he said. "He has a lifetime of experience in the business."

The company has 7,500 square feet of space dedicated to stone production, and Sutherland was instrumental in deciding how to equip the new shop. "We knew we wanted to start with CNC, and Charlie recommended Park Industries — based on his previous experience working with them."

Viking invested in the Park Destiny CNC stoneworking center, which is suited for curved edgework and complex shapes and has a 25-position automatic tool changer.

The machine features Park's StoneCAM SFP software, and it can be programmed by making touch-screen selections. The unit can also import and convert DXF files directly, which assists the company in doing contract fabrication for other firms.

The Destiny features a built-in laser system for reading hard templates, referred to as a "connect-the-dots" digitizing system by Park. "You work with a laser site and plot point to point, and it can tell the radius," explained Trachten.

Training on the CNC unit took place at Park's facilities in St. Cloud, MN. "We sent three workers there," Trachten said. "They were there for a week, and we also worked here with Park's installer. Within the first two weeks, we were already up to three or four kitchens per week."

The greatest challenge in using the CNC was overcoming the "intimidation factor," according to Trachten. "Once we got past the first three or four days, it became natural." The tooling is a combination of original ADI pieces from Park and newer tools from Ghines, and

The other key piece of equipment is a Park Yukon bridge saw, a 20-horsepower machine that operates in manual, semi-automatic and fully automatic modes.



Water is recycled using the EnviroSystem from Water Treatment Technologies, which produces crystal clear water filtered to less than 2 microns. The system is expandable, which is particularly useful for a new shop.

The shop has four workers in-house, in addition to an installation crew.



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screen for ease of use.

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Templates are made from Luan plywood strips, and their measurements are digitized directly on the CNC bed.

Trachten said that this arrangement works when doing one or two kitchens per day, but he would consider adding a separate digitizing table when demand increases.

Prior to being processed on the CNC machine, the slabs are cut to size on the Yukon bridge saw, which is equipped with a laser guide for optimum alignment.

Since purchasing the machinery, Trachten said he has received reliable



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support from Park, which offers diagnostics online for minor problems. It also offers next-day shipping of replacement parts.

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The shop has four workers in-house, in addition to an installation crew, and stone production currently stands at eight kitchens per week. Viking's customer base includes some of the major builders in the Northeast, such as

Pulte Homes. The company purchases its stone from IGM of Windsor, CT, and Marble & Granite, Inc. of Westwood, MA, and it stocks nine colors in its builder program. A total of 25 to 30% of the shop's work is engineered stone, including DuPont Zodiaq, CaesarStone

and Technistone. Customers can view slabs directly at Viking's facility or at their distributors.

In addition to the headquarters in New Britain, Viking has locations in North Haven, CT, Uncasville, CT, and Springfield, MA. □

Viking Kitchen Cabinets, LLC New Britain, CT

Type of work: residential kitchen countertops and other residential work

Machinery: Park Industries Destiny CNC stoneworking center; Park Industries Yukon bridge saw; Water Treatment Technologies EnviroSystem; Ghines and Park tooling

Number of Employees: 4 (not including installers)

Production: eight kitchens per week