

Fine-tuning a state-of-the-art operation

When expanding into stone fabrication, the owner of Down East Fabrication in Mechanicsburg, PA, invested in high-quality equipment and has taken measures to improve upon production efficiency

by Jennifer Adams



Photos by Michael Reis

In 2002, Down East Fabrication opened its stone fabrication division in a 44,000-square-foot facility located in Mechanicsburg, PA.

Safety and efficiency were top priorities when Gary Smith of Down East Fabrication opened his stoneworking facility in 2002. As an experienced solid surface fabricator/

installer and an Authorized Zodiac® Installer (AZI), Smith made the decision to branch out into natural stone fabrication when he built his current shop in Mechanicsburg, PA.

And when considering machinery, tools and accessories, the fabricator chose equipment that would prove cost-effective as well as those that ensured a safe work environment.



The stone shop is equipped with three Intermac Master Stone 4000 CNC machines from AGM.



“One thing that I wanted to make sure of when we set this shop up was to make it as safe as possible,” said Smith. As a result, the company strictly enforces that the workers wear protective gear and follow safety guidelines, and the shop is equipped with state-of-the-art technology for safe handling and cutting of stone slabs. Moreover, the recent addition of a water treatment system from Water Treatment Technologies in Hampton, NH, allows for a clean workspace with maximum water recycling efficiency.

“The system is awesome,” said Smith. “It’s just great. [Water Treatment Technologies] was very helpful when they set the new system up. They are one of the most professional equipment companies that we have dealt with.”

Smith explained that he first started a solid surface business in 1989 in Dillsburg, PA. “It was just me,” he said. “I was a kitchen and bath remodeler. I moved to this current building in 2002, and that’s when I got involved with stone.”

According to the fabricator, becoming an AZI has proven fruitful for his company. “Zodiaq has taken over right now,” he said. “Granite is about 29%, and quartz is 38% of our business.”

The stone shop

Today, Down East Fabrication is comprised of 38 employees. The 44,000-square-foot facility consists of the stoneworking area as well as an area for fabricating Corian. The stone shop runs two eight-hour shifts — 4 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. — with four workers on each. “We do that so each crew can interact with the other group, and both have four hours of supervised

According to owner Gary Smith, the CNC machines were purchased for their efficiency. “We have one worker out there running all three CNCs and two programmers for the stone shop. We bought these CNCs because one man can do all of it.”



Additional machinery in the shop includes a Camma Master Saw.



An Elephant crane from AGM, which features a vacuum lifter, is positioned at each of the three CNC machines and at the bridge saw to move stone slabs around the workspace safe and efficiently.



One of the most recent additions to Down East Fabrication's stone shop is a water treatment facility from Water Treatment Technologies in Hampton, NH.



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time," said Smith, adding that the shop primarily runs five days a week with the possibility of some overtime.

Additionally, the company employs four installation crews, which each install about two kitchens a day. "We have a fairly large AZI following," said Smith. "We do about 10 [of those] a week."

Templates are made with a Stealth Digitizer from BVH Gregg and a Pro Liner from Blick Industries. "There's a whole bunch of technique involved with any digital templater," said Smith. "They all do a good job, but you have to use them a lot to make them efficient."

The stone shop is equipped with three AGM Intermac Master Stone 4000 CNC machines, which were purchased over a span of three years. "We bought our first Intermac in 2002, a second in August 2004 and a third in June 2005," said the fabricator, explaining that running the machines is not as difficult as programming them. "We have a really strong crew right now. We have one worker on each shift out there running all three CNCs and two programmers for the stone shop. I like the efficiency. We bought these CNCs because one man can do all of it."

Other pieces of equipment in the shop include a Camma Master Saw and four Elephant cranes from AGM of Pineville, NC. The cranes, which feature a vacuum lifter, are stationed at each of the CNC machines as well as the bridge saw to make loading and unloading of slabs as easy and safe as possible.

Most of the diamond tooling for the CNC machines are supplied by



Within the interior of Down East Fabrication's facility is an area for customers to view slabs. The name and country of origin of each slab is clearly marked on each.



Salem Stone of Winston Salem, NC. Additional tools and accessories are purchased through Regent Stone Products of Virginia Beach, VA, and GranQuartz of Tucker, GA.

With the interest of customers in mind, Down East Fabrication has designed an indoor area where slabs can be viewed. "We pull one slab off from each of the current bundles so that our customers can look and see the veining," said Smith, explaining that he has one inventory manager on staff to pull the slabs. "We also try to include the country of origin."

According to Smith, the company acquires its material from local stone suppliers. Among the primary distributors are Dente Trading Co. Inc. in Cedar Grove, NJ, and Bramati Marble & Granite Inc. in Frederick, MD.

The company's market spans within 100 miles of the facility, said Smith. "Our territory is really vertical -- north and south," he said. Approximately 19% of Down East Fabrication's market is commercial work, and it does some retail jobs as well. The company's primary market, however, is selling to builders and kitchen and bath dealers.

Improving production

Taking its efficiency goal a step further, Smith has been working with the South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) to further enhance his operation. "They work specifically with fabricators to improve their system," he said. "A growing shop demands organization — especially when combining a Corian shop with a granite shop."

According to the fabricator,

The company has been working with the South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) to further improve upon the efficiency of its operation. Since working with the association, Down East Fabrication has cut its lead time from 15 to 20 days to seven days.



A showroom is attached to the fabricating facility to prominently display the company's fabricating capabilities.



Photos courtesy of Down East Fabrication

A custom-built truck — complete with a crane system — has become an essential part of the company's delivery process.

MEP has assisted his business tremendously. "MEP is a lot of work to get started, but then takes out the stress and reduces lead time," said Smith. "We are at a seven-day lead time right now, and we were at a 15- to 20-day lead time."

Smith also holds in high regard a custom-made truck complete with a built-in crane system, which he recently purchased. According to the fabricator, this truck has significantly aided the delivery process — making it safe and efficient. □

Down East Fabrication Mechanicsburg, PA

Type of work: residential, commercial and retail countertops

Machinery: three Intermac Master Stone 4000 CNC machines from AGM of Pineville, NC; diamond tooling for CNC machines from Salem Stone of Winston Salem, NC; tooling and accessories from Regent Stone Products of Virginia Beach, VA, and GranQuartz of Tucker, GA; water treatment system from Water Treatment Technologies of Hampton, NH; Camma Master Saw; Stealth Digitizer, BVH Gregg of Missouri City, TX; Pro Liner, Blick Industries of Laguna Beach, CA

Number of Employees: 38

Production Rate: install eight to 10 kitchens a day and eight to 10 AZI jobs per week

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