

CONNECTION

Minimalism/ functionality dominate

- Tracking today's trends
- KBIS take-aways

ALSO:

- Firing bad clients
- Profile on Manstone LLC

WHAT'S AHEAD
AT POLYCON

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City Utah



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Cover: Kitchen and Bath Industry Show (KBIS) attendees saw many examples illustrating how design tastes are moving towards more modern and contemporary looks. That trend has also been recognized by several design tracking sources. The kitchen on the cover won first place in the large contemporary kitchen category for the National Kitchen & Bath Association Design + Industry Awards given out just before this year's KBIS. This issue of the magazine tracks that show and other kitchen and bath trends. Designer: Lana Zepponi Meyers, AKBD, Kitchens Unlimited, Memphis, TN.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Spring's refreshing events



SPRING IS ALREADY UPON US in many parts of the world. That means more people are thinking about building or fixing up a house (which is sometimes triggered by spring cleaning). The stats this year look good. Housing starts were at historical highs in the fourth quarter of last year, and they were up 3.2% for the year over 2018. In fact, December was a 13-year high for starts. As

CNBC stated, "Data [has] suggested the housing market recovery was back on track amid low mortgage rates and could help support the longest economic expansion on record." Growth was recorded in all regions of the country. Meanwhile, the strong market for renovations in 2018 continued throughout 2019.

This all bodes well for the cultured marble part of our world.

Spring for ICPA also means POLYCON is approaching. While politicians are busy creating annoying TV ads and promises to win our votes, the rest of us are laboring in the real world trying to squeeze out a few nickels from each job. POLYCON can help. Our industry meets each year to share knowledge and assist all sizes of companies in learning how to more efficiently and effectively operate their facilities. This year's event is April 15-17 in Park City, UT, and many of us have already made plans to be there. This is because the robust schedule and great networking interaction are a must for anyone in our business. I look forward to seeing you all there, but more importantly, I ask that you actively participate and challenge your friends and colleagues across the spectrum of our industry.

This issue of **Cast Polymer Connection** focuses on design trends. For a few of us who visited KBIS/IBS this year in Vegas, we got a

sense for those trends and also saw encouraging signs of customer activity that indicate continued growth in the marketplace. Within these pages you will see some of what we sensed, plus other stories on what today's buyers want. As you will also see, using data from a variety of sources such as HOUZZ can help focus your company's discussions with customers. The trends will be further studied in Park City, where we'll report on how our new marketing initiative can address those buyer "wants."

Since POLYCON itself is in the west this year, editor Genilee Parente chose a western company to profile for this issue. She focuses on Manstone, a business serving the Colorado

Springs, CO area for nearly 50 years.

Your association is busy preparing for POLYCON, but behind the scenes, our executive director, committees and volunteers are also working to create new programs, enhance existing services and deliver great value that will help all of us run our businesses better. I encourage you to visit our website often and Like/Follow us on Facebook to see and participate in these many programs. Your participation makes us all stronger. ■

Mark Buss

Virginia Marble Manufacturers Inc.

YOUR ASSOCIATION IS BUSY PREPARING FOR POLYCON, BUT BEHIND THE SCENES, OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMITTEES AND VOLUNTEERS ARE ALSO WORKING TO CREATE NEW PROGRAMS, ENHANCE EXISTING SERVICES AND DELIVER GREAT VALUE TO THE MEMBERSHIP.



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Manstone: Experience + reputation = success

BY GENILEE SWOPE
PARENTE

ONE OF THE MOST TALKED-ABOUT ISSUES in the industrial world today is the lack of skilled workers and the fact that young people don't realize the opportunities that plants and the manufacturing fields offer.

Manstone LLC in Colorado Springs, CO, could be held up as an example of those opportunities. This cast polymer manufacturer, which is owned by Patrick Bray, Brave World Equity, Inc., has provided a career for J.D. Sauer for more than 20 years. It now also is the career for J.D.'s wife April Sauer, who worked off and on with the company for years before joining full time in 2015. Meanwhile, the business has given Bray, who was with Ford Motor Company for years, a taste of what owning a plant can do when you choose the right company

that makes the right product.

"I picked Manstone because of its great people, great products and stellar reputation," Bray says. What he's found is that "It's extremely rewarding to watch our team at Manstone transform bags of what is essentially dust into beautiful bathroom products that customers appreciate for many years," he says.

J.D. Sauer adds that, "It is very motivating and rewarding to have customers be excited to show off the finished work our employees have created. It is even better to have them refer their friends and family to us."

That kind of job satisfaction is something that "many of today's up-and-coming young people don't know about unless someone from the industry tells them," he says.



Management at Manstone includes (from left, top): Owner Patrick Bray and April Sauer; (from left, bottom): Brian Worster and J.D. Sauer.



From yesterday to today

Manstone has been making and installing engineered marble and engineered granite bathroom products since 1972. The company was originally incorporated by E. Lavar Watts, president of Watts & William Unlimited, Inc. The name “Manstone” was created as a contraction for Manufactured Stone.

The organization’s first 11 years saw constant growth as the business focused on producing quality products that served as a durable, low-maintenance alternative to ceramic tile. Its first new facility was 8,367 square feet of plant, showroom and administrative offices built in 1983 at its current location. By 1994 the company needed more space, so management bought an 8,000-square-foot building at the same site to house a solid surface kitchen fabrication operation.

J.D. was first hired by the company in 1997 for his background. He and April, who’ve been married more than 30 years, were living in New Mexico at the time. J.D. was a senior lab technician in the Research and Development/Quality Control Department for Avonite, a solid surface manufacturer in Belen, NM, before Manstone lured him away. Sauer came on at Manstone to manage and run that company’s solid surface operations, and the couple moved to Colorado shortly after the birth of their first child.

In 2000, J.D. left Manstone for a year-long stint as production manager of Princess Marble, Burnsville, MN. He returned to Colorado a year later when an ownership opportunity arose: Lavar Watts was ready to leave the business and sold

it to his son-in-law Richard Porter, who had been an officer and part owner since 1996, and to Sauer, who saw the opportunity that the company that helped him get a solid footing in the industry offered.

“By this time our business was going strong, and under the new ownership, we continued to build on the first-class reputation we’d created to bring in even more business, almost exclusively through customer referrals,” J.D. says.

Patrick Bray, whose background at Ford was in manufacturing, picked Manstone in 2015 to purchase because he saw the opportunity of both the industry and that particular company.

“I was impressed with the quality of Manstone’s offerings, and I could see that here was a company that would provide me a challenge as far as how to get this business to grow even further,” Bray says.

Into the modern age

Shortly after J.D. and Porter bought the company in 2001, April began to help part-time with some of the marketing. She started where many companies have in recent times: by creating the first company website. In later years, she helped bring Manstone up-to-speed on marketing by creating specific campaigns, redesigning the logo and creating some of the other marketing efforts. By February 2015, she was working full-time as the company’s marketing guru, among other tasks.

“As with many companies in the cast polymer industry, Manstone realized we needed to build on the word-of-mouth referrals that had gotten us so far over the years. We needed to expand our presence, increase our online image, modernize our website and other points of contact, and build a social media community,” April explains.

Manstone also turned to an untapped source for capturing the attention of new audiences: television advertising.

“We were striving to create a greater presence—a reach beyond our immediate area where we are well-known, so we began advertising on three major networks. This not only introduced us to a wider array of potential customers in the Colorado Springs area, it also helped us to fulfill another need greatly felt by this industry: the need to educate people,” she says.

That meant getting the word out on how these non-porous, non-staining surfaces are easy to maintain and long-wearing, and how the product can be custom-sized.

“Customers who have had negative experiences in the past with tile, such as grout failure that leads to leakage, mold issues, structural damage and other issues, are looking for something better,” April explains.

The advertising helped to show them “they will find it at Manstone,” she says.

Today’s business

Manstone’s current business is about half residential consumers, 30% residential contracting and 20% commercial contracting. About 85% of the business resides in the Greater Colorado Springs area.

“We have partnerships with many contractors and businesses in the building industry who either display our products in their showrooms or have color sample boxes to show clients that are mobile. Contractor referrals remain a top lead for our sales efforts,” J.D. Sauer says.

Those strong relationships and the company’s solid reputation “have led to Manstone getting spec’d by name by architects for many commercial projects in Colorado, which is a big advantage to have,” he adds.

The company also has its own showroom, which is the first point of contact for residential customers in the early stages of construction/renovation projects. The showroom is equipped to provide design ideas, display upwards of 60 standard colors and patterns. and help customers understand how the products are made and installed.

Manstone itself offers 36 standard engineered marble colors and patterns and six in-house engineered granite colors. It also offers granite products through The Onyx Collection, Bellevue, KS (see **Cast Polymer Connection**, Summer 2019),



Taking a few minutes from their busy schedule in the shop are (from left): Neto Flores, production manager, and David Martinez, finisher.

which has been a partner since 2018.

“This agreement with The Onyx Collection has allowed us to efficiently manage raw material inventory and still maintain an extensive selection of colors. It allowed us to expand our product line so that our customers have the broad array of choices and options that many of today’s consumers demand,” Bray says.

“Customers can mix and match products between Manstone’s engineered marble colors and The Onyx Collection’s engineered granite colors to create the distinctive look for their bathrooms that homeowners want,” J.D. Sauer adds.

The company accomplishes all this with seven employees trained to produce and install the products and the management team of J.D. (general manager), April (marketing and sales manager) and Brian Worster (field estimator).

Worster, who helps customers in the showroom with project planning and provides advice, and travels to customers’ homes and contractor and commercial job sites for field measurements, has worked in the stone-kitchen-bathroom industry for more than 35 years.

“His expansive knowledge has played an important role in establishing us as experts in this industry,” J.D. says.

J.D. runs daily operations and executes the business strategies of the company while April has been the primary driver of growing the residential customer base, as well as managing the showroom and other daily tasks.

Although the company’s growth has been constant and has been pushed along by marketing efforts, Manstone rests solidly on its foundation: its own reputation.

“Being a smaller company, we pride ourselves on our customer service, attention to detail and superior quality of materials and workmanship,” J.D. says.

The sales team does not work on commission or conduct “hard sell” tactics, and April says the approach works.

“Customers respond very well to our softer sell. We are

there to help them with their bath projects and to make their visions a reality," April adds.

Keeping up to date

With the ever-changing world of bath options, one challenge for anyone in the industry is to keep up with what consumers demand.

"We update our product mixes annually to stay current with color and preference trends," J.D. explains. The company also offers its colors and products at the same price point, which allows customers to mix and match colors or materials as much or as little as they want with no additional charges.

"Engineered marble products remain our most popular selections with most customers leaning toward more neutral earth tones," J.D. reports.

"We've also seen an increase in the popularity of matte finish versus glossy finish for products in the last few years," April adds. "Commercial projects almost always steer toward the white, beige and almond ranges while residential is seeing some unique customization, such as solid purple, for more adventurous customers."

These choices are especially necessary in today's marketplace, the Sauers and Bray agree.

"One of the greatest changes I've seen in this business over the years is that the internet and Do-It-Yourself television show people the broad array of possibilities there are for making bathrooms beautiful and functional," J.D. says.

"Customers often bring in samples of what they want—paint swatches or cabinet finishes," April adds. "We have to keep up what's out there but we also need to find a way to work with these customers to create a custom-finished look so they can have the bathroom of their dreams."

The competition; the challenges

The Sauers say they consider the competition for bathroom surfaces in their area to be tile companies.

"We get many customers armed with a tile sample from a competitor shop that come into our shop and are pleasantly surprised to find they can get a far superior material around the same price point in engineered surfaces," she says.

"Having a lifestyle that doesn't include scrubbing your shower for hours on end appeals to homeowners on a deep level," she says.

When asked what the greatest challenge to their business is today, the Sauers point to the shortage of skilled labor.

"The biggest hurdle Manstone and many other industrial businesses face today is the work ethic of new employees," J.D. points out. "With the increases in the minimum wage,



Unloading a slab from the Manstone truck are (from left): Joseph Vialpando, install helper, and Julio Lanzas, installation supervisor and lead installer.

we have had to adjust our incoming wages. But let's face it: for around the same rate, young employees can stand at a register selling burgers or video games. They are not looking toward their future," he adds.

He says the skilled labor shortage is prevalent today not just in plants, but in the construction industry, plumbing, electrical and HVAC companies, to name a few.

"I think in part this is because high schools advocate so hard for all students to attend 'college.' Not many options exist for kids to be exposed to vocational-type jobs at the high school level," J.D. says.

Pushing students to only consider university degrees without showing them what other options there are "is doing them a disservice," he says.

"Whenever there is demand, there needs to be supply," April adds. "This is true not just for services and materials, but for labor. The construction and trades industries are feeling the pinch of not having the up-and-coming labor to take over when older employees retire or leave. We need to try new approaches," she says. She points to the efforts of GE Johnson, a major commercial contractor in their area that funds a program of training and scholarships through the state's community colleges.

"It's a fantastic idea, a little late in coming. But hopefully, such programs will lead to a larger crop of viable employees who desire a career in the trades," she says.

Once those employees get into the field, they'll find out—just as the Sauers, Bray and Worster have—what a good career choice industry and construction can be.

"There are many facets to the cast polymer business and myriad opportunities here," April says. "We just have to show young people what they are. The cast polymer industry is a great place to make a career." ■

GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. Write her at gsparente@verizon.net.



KBIS 2020: The horizon is bright ... and colorful

BY GENILEE SWOPE
PARENTE

THE MOOD AT THE KITCHEN AND BATH INDUSTRY SHOW (KBIS), as well as the International Builders Show (IBS), has been upbeat and positive in the last few years as attendance creeps upwards in response to an ever-stronger housing market. Exact numbers of who attended the week-long combined show this year (Design and Construction Week—Jan. 21-23, Las Vegas) differed by news reports, but the National Association of Home Builders, which puts on IBS, estimated about 65,000 people roamed the exhibit halls at the Las Vegas Convention Center and about 90,000 attended the conference in some form during the week. That's still a bit below numbers before the housing crash, when attendance was running close to 100,000, but it's getting close.

“It certainly appeared from the size of the crowds that the building industry is bullish on business in 2020,” said ICPA President Mark Buss, general manager, Virginia Marble Industries, Inc.

“It was good to see another year of excellent turnout, which indicates the economy is strong across the country,” added Larry Pulliam, president of Agco, Inc.

Dirk DeVuyst, owner of International Marble Industries, added that, “Attendance on opening day was as good or better than last year, and I felt a buzz and energy similar to other years.”

The vendor booth space took up all three exhibit halls at the convention center with about 1,400 exhibitors for IBS and another 600 for KBIS.

As far as cultured marble, DeVuyst said he didn’t see much at the show, aside from modular tops. But there was plenty of quartz, stone, tile, porcelain and other types of materials in stunning new designs and choices that served as examples of trends in what people want.

Buss said that, “The 2019 upheaval in the Chinese quartz market from U.S. tariffs brought in an overabundance of smaller quartz exhibitors this year, who seemed to be focused on high-end design, rather than a range of products.”

Attendees of KBIS came away with many ideas on how they can take advantage of what’s happening.

“I think that certain market trends are good for the cast polymer industry,” said Matt Pulliam, vice president of Manufacturing, Agco. For example, “the aging population is seeking barrier-free, lower profile shower pan options, which I saw at several exhibits.”



ABOVE: Kohler’s booth showed how much the range of choices has broadened with rooms full of product choices.

BELOW: Clarke showed off its beautifully crafted tubs with displays that featured nature themes, appealing to today’s consumer desire to embrace the environment and personal well-being.



He also said that “the onslaught of quartz/porcelain can be capitalized upon as consumers search for the same style at a more competitive price point.”

ReBecca Erdmann, owner of Sand & Swirl, said she saw examples of surface materials that reaffirmed how good a job the industry is currently doing on providing those alternative materials.

“We saw more veining in slabs this year, which shows how successful we are at mimicking the marble and quartz slabs coming out.” At the same time, “We brought back pictures to show our shop how we can improve our veining even more,” she added.

The trends

Some of what ICPA members and others walking the show saw this year included:

Customization

The desire homeowners have today to make areas of their home look the way they want was visible throughout product areas via customized finishes, colorful kitchen and bath appliances with different types of styles, cabinetry and

sinks/tubs in new colors and a broad array of different options for handles, faucets and more.

“The home market today is trending towards customization options for color and for texture,” Larry Pulliam says. “It was everywhere on the floor.”

For example, Dacor touted a color customization program called DacorMatch: The company’s booth showed off vibrant displays of unique color-matched appliances and cabinetry and introduced “Personalize with Dacor,” an accessory kit that allows consumers to choose unique finishes for handles and knobs on select appliance styles. Dacor realigned its entire product offering this year to show visitors a choice of three styles: contemporary, professional and transitional. Different rooms in their booth showed off features that appealed to each taste.

Kohler had entire rooms within its huge exhibit that were just choices in different types of faucets, showerheads, towel bars, sinks and other accessories and features, as well as rooms set up as kitchen and bath scenarios.

Well-being and convenience

Many of the appliances and fixtures at KBIS were touted as

COLOR CREATES THE MOOD

Everywhere you looked on the KBIS floor you saw color, and one color stood out in frequency: blue.

That’s because shades of blue were the chosen colors of the year for two major design sources: Pantone and PPG.

Pantone called its selection “Classic Blue,” and said the color was selected for its elegant simplicity (“suggestive of the sky at dusk”) while at the same time, its ability to suggest stability and peace.

“We are living in a time that requires trust and faith. It is this kind of constancy and confidence that is expressed by Pantone 19-4052 Classic Blue, a solid and dependable blue hue we can always rely on,” said Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute, which has been picking a color annually for 20 years.

That’s quite a contrast from last year’s Pantone choice of “Living Coral,” a bright peachy pink the company said was “animating and life-affirming” in reaction to “the onslaught of digital technology and social media.”

Meanwhile, Pennsylvania-based paint company PPG, which has a team of style experts that takes a year to study current design trends before getting together to select a color, picked “Chinese Porcelain,” a slightly darker shade that blends cobalt

and ink blue. Ruthanne Hanlon, national color and design manager for PPG, said at a KBIS session that the color was chosen because it conjures up “infinity, naturalness, the color of trust, stability.”

She said it was a sign that color, in general, is entering the world of design in full force.

“Blue is the best possible entry point from the world of neutrals to the world of nature,” she said. In other words, it serves as a good backdrop for some of the more vivacious colors now entering the world of design such as the bolder brighter colors of the Spanish and Asian cultures.

Hanlon affirmed what many people at the conference were saying, which is that one of the major trends of today is “color is back.” She also said, however, that acceptance of darker colors, in particular black, is also a huge influence partly because of its ability to serve as a backdrop for more vibrancy, that a major trend in all types of design is mixed materials and more playful patterns, and that minimalism is a major part of any design factor today.

The generally accepted reason for the popularity of minimalism is that today’s generations of product buyers believe “more is more, but it’s not more things,” she said. As the world moves ever faster, people are looking for more balance, she said.

meeting consumer demand for products and home areas that keep stress low and relaxation maximum or that offer convenience designed to make their lives less complicated.

For example, Moen featured several showers designed to provide aromatherapy: small capsules of oil slide into the dial on the showerhead to release soothing fragrance during bathing.

A Best of KBIS 2020 product award winner (from Houzz) was the Plum refrigeration system, which preserves a bottle or two of wine so that the label can be seen, preserves the bottle's contents at the exact proper temperature for months, then dispenses a glass at a time. The company is banking on the recognition that alcohol in moderation is an accepted health benefit and that homeowners are increasingly single career people, who want just a glass at the end of the long day.

For those that want more than one glass or that want other beverages easily accessible, Bosch was touting the Bosch Refreshment Center Refrigerator, which offered a center drawer that has five settings for ideal temperatures for beer, champagne, red or white wine or simply sodas or cooled water.

Delta featured a faucet-type feature that can be easily installed in the sink area called the Glass Rinser that takes an everyday task homeowners do multiple times in the day and plops it next to the regular sink, making it much easier to access. The rinser uses high-pressure water jets to get rid of all residue from glasses, cups, baby bottles and other dishes.

Induction cooking and air frying were options in many of the displayed kitchen appliances. Induction cooktops can boil water in less than a minute, but yet are cool to the touch. One company, Fisher & Paykel, featured a range that offered both induction and regular gas burners: the 48-inch professional range has four gas burners but also a 24-inch induction cooking surface.

Undercounter drawers were prevalent throughout the KBIS show. For example, the Signature Kitchen Suite offered an array of drawers that allow different settings for different uses throughout the kitchen as well as other rooms in the home that may want refrigeration such as exercise rooms or entertainment centers. The drawers offer temperatures that range from pantry room to freezer storage settings.

Hands-free faucets also were prevalent throughout the exhibit hall, touted as both a convenience for consumers and a health benefit. Best of KBIS award winner "U by Moen" Smart Faucet, for example, was featured not only for its ability for consumers to turn faucets on and off by talking to them, but also for a new feature added this year that lets them control the temperature of the water by voice activation.



Why shouldn't Rover get his own area of the home, especially when that area offers convenience to the homeowner? This laundry room not only has a shower but plenty of storage and a sleeping area for the dogs.

Also frequently seen on the floor were tubs, which Larry Pulliam said could be beneficial to the industry. "The modernization of freestanding tubs with clean design and a matte finish is an area where many cast polymer manufacturers could create significant value," he said.

Flexibility and personalization

At a press conference on what consumers want in homes today, NAHB stressed that a flex room is a top requirement today among home shoppers: home buyers want a room that can be an office, an exercise space, a nursery, depending on changing needs. This desire for flexibility was also seen on both the KBIS and IBS exhibit floors.

Thermador touted what it calls a "cloffice," a closet/office combination area that the company said serves as a relaxation area and place to exercise or do yoga. These areas offer features such as the refrigeration or freezer drawers popular today as well as areas that hold self-care items such as towels and lotion or office conveniences such as built-in coffee makers.

Another flex feature that several booths showed off were pet areas, which were often shown in the same room as the laundry, but were designed to keep furry friends clean and organized by providing shower areas, relaxation cubbies and more.

Buss said he saw a new concept offered by several Chinese manufacturers called “modular bathrooms”—bathrooms that were prefabricated and offered in a box, with walls and areas that slide into place or get put up by cranes. Builders or home buyers then just hook up utilities, complete the common areas, then have a ready-made bathroom.

Connecting to our stuff

Consumers today spend hours on their phones or tablets and this realization has now been built into how appliances are controlled, homes are protected and what features must be part of certain rooms. For example, many of the kitchen displays showed off different types of charging stations and home assistant capabilities that connected parts of the kitchen or bath to Alexa or Google Assistant so that everything from the oven to the faucets can be run by voice.

Miele won a Best of KBIS design award winner for a dishwasher that automates detergent dispensing and also has a wi-fi feature that can let homeowners “connected” to the dishwasher know when they are low on dish soap and give them the ability to stop or start a load remotely.

LG smart products offered the ability to receive alerts and keep track of maintenance schedules for appliances. Users can remotely power on and off, adjust oven or refrigerator temperatures and monitor usage status. Many of the appliances also are connected to Alexa and Google Assistant.

In the bathroom, mirrors are beginning to serve as an interface for consumers. At KBIS, the Savvy Home Smart Mirror showed voice-activated features that allow viewers connected to the internet to look up the weather and traffic, get social media updates or play music.

Samsung’s booth had an entire room devoted to its Family Hub offerings, which are appliances and applications that allow homeowners to keep track of their daily life and kitchen needs at different levels. For example, a person can answer a video call or show who is at the front door from the touchscreen of the family refrigerator, look up a recipes on a range or fridge or keep on top of grocery needs through a refrigerator that checks inside the frig remotely for contents, then automatically catalogs what’s needed.

At the Kohler booth this year, a bathroom scenario was set up with voice-activated features so that a person could walk into the room, tell the voice-activated device to “set to morning routine” then get certain music channels or radio shows playing within the mirror or sound system, check the weather or social media from the mirror or a display, turn on the shower to a certain temperature and provide other routine tasks preset by the homeowner.

Even toilets have entered the convenience world with



A group of ICPA members got together for a reception and social gathering during KBIS. Pictured here are (from left): Doug Tibbitts, Tyvarian; Jennifer Towner, ICPA executive director; Marcos Vital, ACS International; Kay Rehbert, ACS; Brittanie Judkins, Sand & Swirl; Mark Buss, Virginia Marble; Corey Erdmann, Sand and Swirl; and ReBecca Erdmann, Sand & Swirl.

many “intelligent” toilets that self-clean, have touch screen controls or hands-free operation, or save energy. Those included Kohler’s Avoir, a one-piece tankless toilet that runs on just four double-A batteries for a full year and has a quiet close seat.

Color color everywhere

One of the most recognized trends on both the show floor and in design sessions was that people are seeking more color and variety on walls, surfaces, appliances, cabinetry, even sinks, faucets and other common kitchen and bath equipment and areas. Many of the room scenarios showed off those colors, which range from bright pink to saffron in accents and darker colors for cabinetry as well as much blue throughout, which was PPG’s and Pantone’s color of the year (see “Color Creates the Mood.”).

“Whites and grays still dominate the color palette, but vibrant colors are inching their way into every room,” said Matt Pulliam. “This year I also noticed a trend toward black background materials, many of which have marbled patterns,” he said.

Erdmann added that, “Based on what we heard during the Next Stage presentations and classes, which is one of our favorite parts of KBIS, we are going back to the shop with a new color plan for our next displays as well as some other great ideas to add to our customer relations processes.”

It’s the reason to attend shows such as KBIS, as well as the upcoming POLYCON, she pointed out.

“We always come back with a long list of new ideas to add to our customer relations process as well as a list of new design ideas to implement in the shop,” she concluded. ■

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Blue accents and walls are increasingly common in kitchens. First place contemporary small kitchen 2020 NKBA award winner. Svetlana Tryaskina, Estée Design

“Modern” marches forward, Houzz study says

THE FARMHOUSE STYLE OF KITCHEN RENOVATION IS LOSING GROUND among those who renovate, while modern has taken a leap forward and contemporary and transitional styles continue to be the leaders, according to the 2020 U.S. Houzz Kitchen Trends Study.

The study was released in January 2020. It was preceded in November 2019 by a similar study on bathrooms.

The annual kitchen report compiles answers from almost 2,600 respondents, who are homeowners that have completed a kitchen remodel or addition in the last 12 months, are currently working on one or have plans to start one in the next three months.

Twenty-one percent of those respondents have chosen the transitional kitchen, the same percentage as last year but 5% less than in 2018. Meanwhile, 16% chose contemporary, a drop of a percentage point from last year but the same as 2018, and 15% chose modern, a leap forward from last year’s 11% and 2018’s 10%.

Meanwhile, traditional is at about 11%, slightly less than last year and slightly more than the year before, and farmhouse has fallen to 11% from 14% the year before and 12% in 2018.

Other kitchen trends

Other significant and highlighted findings from the 2020 kitchen study include:

Financial investment in the kitchen continues to blossom: the average spend on major remodels was \$35,000 in mid-2019, a rise of 17% over 2018’s average of \$30,000. Minor remodels have remained level at about \$8,000. However, the scope of the remodeling has fallen. For example, spending on countertops and backsplashes, the two most common upgrades, have fallen: countertops were replaced by 89% of respondents in 2019 compared to 94% the previous year and backsplashes were replaced by 84% of 2019 respondents compared to 90% in 2018.

The island is the “crown jewel” of the kitchen, the Houzz study says: nearly two-thirds (61%) of all renovated kitchens feature or will feature an island in 2020. That compares to about 39% of homeowners who planned for or added an island in 2019.

Backsplashes are climbing upward. Homeowners who are upgrading their backsplashes are following a newer trend: embracing the wall concept: 11% are installing the backsplash from the countertop to the ceiling while 63% are installing it to the upper cabinets or the range hood. Meanwhile, engineered quartz lost a little ground as a backsplash with 6% choosing that material compared to 8% a year ago. Ceramic/porcelain tiles dominate at 57%.

Engineered quartz still dominates on other surfaces. Engineered quartz continued an uphill trend in 2020 for countertops, though the rate of growth slowed, probably helped along by increases in prices of imports from China, according to the Houzz study. Quartz accounted for more than half (51%) of countertop upgrades in 2020 compared to 48% in 2019 and 43% in 2018.

Blue has gained ground in the kitchen. Even before several shades of blue were named 2020 color of the year (see page 10), it was starting to show up in kitchens more frequently. Houzz’s 2020 reported that 7% of upgraded kitchens had blue walls, up from 5% the previous year.

In the bath

As with kitchens, people are spending more on bathroom remodels than ever before, according to Houzz’s 2019 Bathroom Trends Study. The 2019 study came out in November of that year and was based on 1,360 responses from people who have finished a bathroom remodel or addition in the last year or are planning one soon.

The average amount spent in the last year that data was gathered for actual renovations (2018) was \$8,000 compared to \$7,000 the previous year. Major remodels averaged \$12,000 up from \$10,100 in 2017 while minor remodels were \$2,300 compared to \$2,000 the previous year.

For the most part, consumers are changing major features, not overall bathroom size. Fifty-four percent of those who remodeled last year or planned to remodel were increasing the size of the shower while 45% changed the layout and 22% changed the overall size of the room.

Countertops came in at sixth in what was done or planned (80%) while showers were fourth (80%) and vanity cabinets were eighth (77%).



Even though tubs have lost some ground to showers when it comes to how to use space, many of today’s more luxurious bathrooms have both, usually with a freestanding elegant tub. 2020 NKBA contemporary bath award winner. Elma Gardner, By Design

The bathroom study also found:

The top style in the bathroom is transitional, which has grown to 21% in remodels or plans for remodeling in 2019 compared to 17% the previous year. Modern comes in at second at 20% in 2019, which grew from 15% in the previous two years. Contemporary has fallen from 23% several years ago to 16% last year while traditional has fallen from 13% several years ago to 9%.

Bathtubs continue to lose ground among those renovating: 24% of upgrades now include taking them out while 84% of renovations included an enlarged shower. Of those who added or replaced a tub (38% of homeowners), the clear favorite was flat-bottomed, freestanding tubs (50%, which grew 9 percentage points over the previous year.)

Undermount sinks continue as the clear winner in the bathroom with 64% of upgrades including those sinks. Also, 69% of those who chose them chose a double-sink setup.

Among the 83% of homeowners who tackled replacing the shower last year, the **clear leader in a material is ceramic or porcelain**: 53% put those materials on their floors while 66% used them for walls. Second was marble at 18% for flooring and 17% for walls. Engineered quartz stands at 3% for flooring, 4% for shower walls. ■



Colors are popping up everywhere. This kitchen makes use of the kitchen island to make a statement. NKBA 2020 traditional kitchen award winner Cindy Aplanalp-Yates, Principal Designer, Chairma Design Group

What's new, now and next in design trends

THE KITCHEN AND BATH INDUSTRY HAS A VERY BRIGHT FUTURE right now, according to long-time expert Sarah Reep, who has been following the industry for two decades. Reep, who is director of Designer Relations and Education for KraftMaid, spoke to a packed room at the Kitchen and Bath Industry Show.

Both the remodeling and new construction markets for the kitchen and bath are currently strong because those who influence the market are doing well economically and have been for a while.

As far as looking at what's hot in design right now, "It all starts with consumers because that's the foundation," she told the audience. Currently, the market is wide open because buyers are increasingly optimistic and the generations doing the buying are in a position to want to spend money on these two crucial areas of the home, she said.

She advised looking especially hard at younger generations for design clues.

As of this year, "baby boomers are not the largest generation. Although they will always be in the driver's seat in

many ways, we need to step back and look at other generations," she cautioned. Millennials (at more than 83 million) overtook baby boomers (at more than 72 million) as the largest generation.

Meanwhile, the boomers, who still control 70% of disposable income, are now looking to millennials and the generation between boomers and millennials (Generation X) for design cues and knowledge.

Part of the reason is that younger people are more equipped with knowledge about what's available from sources such as the internet and YouTube.

"Overall, consumers [even boomers] are more empowered and confident because they see so much" before they come in to shop, she explained. "As designers, we've moved from leading design decisions to serving as consultants," she said.

Millennials and Generation X think differently than boomers, she pointed out. Many millennials, for example, came into the buying age without jobs because of the recession. Generation X, meanwhile, lost some of their wealth during those recession years.

Both those generations “want less [than previous generations]. They also seek easy care and clean. They want minimalism,” she said.

Meanwhile, the next generation of big buyers, Generation Z is “an awesome generation” as far as buying power. While most are currently renting, they are already looking at buying and remodeling—they are entering the workforce after seeing the hard knocks of the recession, but they are entering at a time when positions are plentiful and employers are hungry to fill them.

“When you put millennials and Generation Z together, you get plenty of buying opportunities,” Reep said.

Translation: more spice, faster taste changes

Reep said that all of this means that a good portion of today’s buyers are willing to consider a wider design palette, but that they demand more from what they get.

Being able to visualize before buying “speeds up the design trends,” she explained.

Add to that a recovering economy and you get a scenario where people are looking at colors and designs further and further from traditional. The color palettes and choices in finishes are broader today to meet a growing demand for personalization. Also, today’s generations are more global in their perspective, which means they want colors and design that is more cross-cultural.

Meanwhile, the younger generations are not as dependent on resale value: they were not raised with the idea that the home is first and foremost an investment, and that they should buy or remodel with that in mind. They care more about having a home that reflects their own ideas.

Younger buyers also were raised with technology, and Reep said that the strongest driver in that area right now is the acceptance of artificial intelligence (AI) tools as helpers in running everyday life.

“From Alexa to Google, we are being trained with convenience in mind,” she said.

From the designer’s perspective, AI means it can take less time to place an order, which frees up time for those selling to the buyers to be creative in what they present to buyers.

From the buyer’s perspective, it means tools to give them more time to spend in their homes, which is adding more fuel to the demands for customization and fulfillment of personal tastes.

Some specific design trends she noted were:

- Acceptance of the two-toned look and horizontal arrangement of colors
- Brighter colors and a cultural mix. One of the biggest news in palettes lately is that the colors traditionally



Color, contrast and mixes of materials make for an outstanding kitchen in this modern home. NKBA 2020 contemporary kitchen award winner Nyla Free, Nyla Free Designs Inc.

thought of as Latin or warm weather colors are moving north in the U.S., Reep said.

- White is giving way to variety, including warmer colors. Gray is complemented with pops of color; gold is increasingly found in fixtures and finishes; white is contrasted with blacks; and neutral color themes are increasingly infused with wood, fabric and texture.
- Industrial is evolving and growing with commercial-looking kitchens, touches of black and many metal touches.
- Warm and cool colors are being mixed.
- Different patterns are being combined in one room: floors with one look, backsplashes with another look.
- Consumers are demanding thoughtfulness and practicality: storage that optimizes space, places to plug in smartphones, setups that make sense (e.g., waste-can storage close to where liners are stored).

Conclusion

What all of this means for designers of kitchens and baths [and those who supply to the industry] is opportunity.

“Just because a consumer comes in and shows you white doesn’t mean they want that look. They just are so used to seeing it,” she said. Today, they are looking for more guidance and they know the choices are out there. “You can show them other suggestions,” she said. ■

GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. Write to her about what stories you’d like to see in this magazine: gsparente@verizon.net.

POLYCON 2020: ICPA is heading west with a packed agenda



ICPA IS PLANNING FOR ANOTHER RECORD-BREAKING POLYCON as the association heads to an area of the country that hasn't yet hosted the annual event: Utah.

POLYCON 2020 Park City Utah is April 15-17 at the Grand Summit Hotel Resort. Planners chose the location to allow easy access for members and potential members on the west coast.

"We are hoping to see some new faces this year at POLYCON as well as the familiar faces of those that have allowed this event to grow bigger and better each year over the six years it's been in existence," says Jennifer Towner, ICPA's executive director.

The location was also chosen because ICPA has two members with outstanding facilities that have agreed to host many of the activities.

"We have Sand & Swirl in Ogden, which has a new showroom and also a new and expanded plant, and we have Whitewater/Tyvarian in Lindon, a company known for having developed its own process, which is now a popular technique many cast polymer companies use," Towner says.

Those two companies will play key roles in making this year's agenda the best yet.

A special technical program

One of the key changes to the agenda this year is a broadening of the technical program, now called the PolyTech Training. The program has been expanded out over two days and will be held at both hosting companies' facilities. Those two days also will include educational sessions, as well as hands-on demonstrations of techniques and equipment.

On Wednesday, attendees will travel to Sand & Swirl, where they will learn about:

- New and unique cultured granite veining techniques
- How to properly install tubs and showers
- The challenges and solutions of spraying granite
- How to build a production tile mold
- Repairing and patching gel coats
- The Sandler technique of showroom selling
- What's at stake to make the move to robotics

Because Sand & Swirl just installed a new ventilation system, that system will be reviewed and explained by compliance expert Kelly DeBusk.

On Friday, attendees go to Tyvarian to learn about:

- How to properly spray gel coats
- Operation, maintenance and repair of autocasting machinery
- How to prepare and maintain molds
- What's new and coming in automation

While they are at Tyvarian, they'll also get tips on and explanation of the Tyvarian Process, which incorporates high definition images into cultured marble.

A day of education

On Thursday, attendees remain at the resort's conference center to spend a day learning new lessons, networking and visiting with the industry's vendors.

Returning to the agenda this year is a discussion among the next generation of leaders. Many companies in the cast polymer industry have second- or third-generation managers and leaders, who will gather to exchange ideas on the challenges and solutions they use in their plants and companies.

New this year to roundtable discussions is a session de-

signed for those women involved in the daily operations of the business who want to meet, talk and establish professional ties with their peers.

Some of what else is on the agenda includes:

- A presentation on using social media programs such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube as part of a marketing program
- Tips and tricks for the plant floor: a favorite session where companies swap information on what works and doesn't work in the plant
- An update from John Schweitzer on the latest styrene issues

The full program is posted on the POLYCON website: www.polyconevent.com.

Throughout the day Thursday, as well as Wednesday night, attendees will have an opportunity to learn about the products and services offered by exhibitor companies.



ABOVE: Thursday is education day.

BELOW: Crowds gather to watch demonstrations of techniques and equipment.



Thanks to our sponsors:

Much of what happens, including the events designed for fun and networking, are made possible by the companies that serve as sponsors. This year, ICPA sponsors include:

- **Composites One** will host the Wednesday evening Welcome Cocktail Reception to be held in the Grand Summit Hotel Grand Ballroom pre-function area outside of the Exhibit Hall.
- **The R.J. Marshall Company** will host a networking luncheon in The Cabin—a unique event space within the Grand Summit Hotel.
- **Interplastic** will host the Thursday evening cocktail reception before the association dinner. The reception also will be held in The Cabin.

Two hours have been added this year to exhibit times on Wednesday evening, April 15, so that attendees can get a fuller picture of the help available from those companies.

On Thursday evening, attendees will gather for a grand event at the resort during which people who have been outstanding contributors to the industry and the association will be honored for their efforts. New this year is an award for SAFE PLANT of the Year (see page 25).

CCT training and testing

Training for the CCT-CP certification will take place again during POLYCON (April 16 for most classes, April 17 for a review of Module 2). This year, the association is also offering testing for those who completed last year's training and those who feel ready for the test this year.

People who want to take advantage of the training or sit for the test need to register ahead of time. The instructions to register with ACMA are on the POLYCON website. The training is free for members using a special code (costs are normally \$250).

Logistics

The Grand Summit Hotel is about 35 miles from the Salt Lake City airport.

Buses will be available for transportation to both the hosting companies during the Polytech Training Program, but reservations must be made for those bus seats.

Also, new this year as an added benefit to members: many of the sessions will be videotaped and available to those who attend so that the lessons learned can be passed along to other employees. ■

COMPANIES THAT SELL OR MAKE PRODUCTS usually have this mantra bouncing around in their heads: the customer is always right.

But what about those situations when this mantra is acting more like a chain than a philosophy to live by? What about those difficult clients or customers that ask the impossible, expect it yesterday and make you and your employees miserable trying to provide what is demanded.

It happens to all types of businesses that deal with the public: they find themselves in situations where too much time is being spent trying to keep one particular difficult client happy when in the end, that customer probably will never be satisfied.

The Huffington Post advised several years ago that “businesses should abandon this phrase [the customer is always right] once and for all.” The reasoning is this—keeping such a mentality can sometimes lead to worse customer service for these reasons:

- The attitude results in unhappy employees, which leads to negative attitudes, which leads to bad customer service.
- Adopting or maintaining this attitude gives abrasive customers an unfair advantage over other customers.
- Customers are sometimes just plain wrong—they don’t know what they want, they don’t know how to get it, and you’re left cleaning up the mess.

So how do you decide if, when and how to fire a client?

The following tips are based on many articles of guidance from human resources, operations, marketing and other experts.

When to let go

In deciding when the time might be ripe for letting go, ask yourself these questions:

Can what’s broken be fixed? Sometimes the problems

Cutting the Ties That Bind

BY GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE



you’re having with a company are something that can be corrected by establishing better or different procedures. For example, if they are not paying bills on time, you might be able to establish clearer deadlines for that particular client for when an invoice must be paid: a quarter upfront by this date, half by this date and the final invoice must be paid by XX days after the invoice goes out. The same policy may not be required of all customers, but if payment is the issue, outlining payment deadlines might help. Having it down on paper also helps you establish a trail should problems continue.

Sometimes a particular employee within your company is tasked with dealing with a difficult person from the client company, which is contributing to the problem. If the option exists to change either the person at your company or the person from the other company, that action might be attempted before you decide to break ties completely.

Is the client abusive to your employees? Most experts agree that one of the cases where the customer is not right is when someone within the client company is mistreating one of your employees. Your staff has to come first if the rest of your business is

to blossom and survive. If a client is verbally abusive or threatening in any way, it could very well result in either losing that employee or seeing his or her health decline as the stress mounts. Forcing your staff to continually deal with a difficult client also brings down general company morale—your employees need to feel you support them to do the best job.

Does leaving this customer get you closer or further away from your company’s goals and mission? Every client has a particular value to your company, but when dealing with one that’s causing problems, you sometimes have to weigh whether that value is worth maintaining a relationship or whether “breaking up” might actually get you closer to your own goals and mission. For example, you might be aiming for a new niche such as selling directly to local retail establishments, which could be a difficult move that re-

quires dealing with new people. On the other hand, if you've been dealing with this company for long enough to know that no matter what procedures you establish, the client is still going to pay the bills late, it might be time to stick to your resolve to establish a stronger bottom-line basis. Also, if this customer already has a bad reputation in the community because of its practices and demands, does dealing with them downgrade your company's rep as well?

Does it cost more to keep this customer happy than their business is worth to the company? This is related to the question above, but takes it a step beyond goals to specific costs. When you're dealing with someone that is making your life difficult and threatening your company's smooth operation, you have to consider:

- Time spent on this customer that could be better spent serving another customer or finding new customers.
- Extra time in the schedule to redo what's already been done when the customer is not willing to pay for that extra time.
- Extra material or labor costs when the client finds something unacceptable and demands a replacement.

Does the client suffer from "scope creep?" This is an ongoing condition you may not see coming: the customer's de-

mands keep getting broader and broader, while that company's ability or willingness to pay stays the same or diminishes. The existence of scope creep is a very good indication that this particular client is either 1) taking advantage or 2) unrealistic.

How to let go

If you've come to the conclusion it's time to tell a customer to hit the road, there are many ways to do it. As Paul Simon's famous song laments, "There must be 50 ways to leave your lover." Here are a few tips experts give:

Treat the situation like you would that "lover." One of the tips that many experts give is to treat a client like you might a girlfriend/boyfriend you're breaking up with. In other words follow the path of: "it's not you, it's me." This is a tact, not a strategy. If you truly hate doing business and feel the relationship is beyond ridiculous, you may not be able to break it off by taking the blame—you may need a specific strategy involving lawyers or graduated steps. Taking on all the blame for the bad mojo is not necessarily beneficial.

Don't leave them in a lurch. One of the worst ways to break up is to simply walk away. As hard as it may be and as satisfying as it is to make your point and storm off, such actions accomplish very little and allow the difficult client the advantage. A better approach is to find ways to direct them to alternative sources for getting the products or ser-

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vices they need, create a schedule that eases them out of the picture and leave after ensuring you owe them nothing you'd already promised.

Write a script. Sometimes when emotions may be involved, it's helpful to write down what you plan to say to ease the tension and calm your own nerves. It's never easy breaking up, and chances are good that there are tempers involved. Rehearsing how it's going to happen can create a path for a conversation you can keep under your own control.

Listen to them and look ahead at what the parting might do. Even though some terrible customers are difficult because all they can do is complain, it doesn't pay to be lacking in empathy or respect for the other company. Have your say, announce the breakup, but also give the customer an opportunity to tell the other side of the story. Even if your mind is made up, you can sometimes learn by hearing from the other party why the milk soured.

Cover your legal basis. Breaking up may need to start by reviewing any contract you've had or you have with that company to see if there are clauses that legally bind you to doing business and what exceptions allow you an out. Neither is likely to be the case unless you're in the middle of a project, but it doesn't hurt to look at your arrangements through the eyes of a lawyer, and if the client is difficult or anger-prone, there may be dangers that lurk when the disgruntled ex-client

looks for ways to hurt you. Consult your attorney if you have any doubts. Another factor to consider when thinking about the breakup is whether the client's actions as they are now can cause you any legal grief because what that customer is doing is questionable.

Find a way to ease into it. Some business consultants will tell you that one way to break up with customers is to simply raise your rates so they can't afford your product. There are many reasons you can give for charging more, such as increases in material rates or operating supplies. However, if you're looking to be honest or fair, a better approach might be to document how much the client is costing you.

Conclusion

Sometimes even though you think you've been more than fair to your customer or client, you've tried to deal with them and work through problems and you've looked at ways that might help the relationship work, it just comes down to this: the customer is just a bad customer. Most people reading this magazine have been in business long enough to know when it's time to call it quits. Try what you can to fix things, but when push comes to shove, trust your own gut. ■

GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. She appreciates ideas on issues readers want the magazine to address. She can be reached at gsparente@verizon.net.

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Specific gravity	2.3	1.8	1.5	1.0	1.0	1.0
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*Resin % recommendations are based on an 800-1000 cps casting resin at 70° F.

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ICPA supports a new podcast

The cast polymer industry has a new champion and source for news and education: Cast Polymer Radio. The podcast is hosted by Jonathan Taylor. Taylor is a technical sales manager at Sanco. He's worked with the cast polymer and composites industries for more than 17 years and been the publisher and host of "Composites Weekly" for five years.



"Today's younger generation consumes information through audio podcasting and other on-the-go platforms (including social media) so we need to begin looking to the future by understanding these platforms. As an industry, we should recognize how these new media channels can get our message across to consumers," Taylor said during the first podcast, which aired in January. Jennifer Towner, executive director of ICPA, was interviewed for that first show. The second show featured Luke Haas, former ICPA president and president of Elite Marble Company. Future episodes will run every week.

The platform is designed to be a major source for finding out what's happening in the industry. The podcast show will feature industry news and interviews with manufacturers of cultured marble, culture granite and solid surfaces as well as industry suppliers. The goal is to be a regular source for education and information in the cast polymer industry for those who listen to podcasts.

For information and episodes, go to www.castpolymer.com or search for "cast polymer radio" on any podcast application. ICPA also will host a link to the podcast on the ICPA website.

New Safe Plant Award Created

One of the awards to be given at POLYCON 2020 Park City Utah this year will be the SAFE PLANT of the Year Award.

The award recognizes the company participating in the SAFE PLANT program that has had the most successful, significant safety program implementation and accomplishments during the year—a program that has positively impacted the health and safety of the company's employees. The award will be judged based on safety advocacy, improvements, consistency and sustainability, and creativity.

The winner will be chosen by the ICPA SAFE PLANT Com-



mittee and will receive recognition at POLYCON, a company trophy, a catered luncheon and t-shirts for all its employees.

Get CCT training at POLYCON 2020

Once again, ICPA will be offering the Certified Composites Technician—Cast Polymer (CCT-CP) training course during the upcoming POLYCON 2020 Park City Utah. The training takes place on April 16 and a refresher course on Module 2 takes place on April 17.

Those that are attending from member companies can get this training free, which is a savings of \$250.

New this year is that testing will also occur during the conference. Those who were trained in 2019 and those trained in 2020 can both be tested during the 2020 session to receive their certificates.

The CCT-CP program is an intense educational program on technical aspects of the industry such as how to make quality cast polymer products, what regulations cover the industry, how to work with gel coats and resins, what environmental considerations go into the manufacturing process, what filler materials do and much more.

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It was created in conjunction with the American Composites Manufacturers Association (ACMA) and updated last year with help from ICPA technical experts.

Those who complete the training become certified CCT-CPs by passing a test. They come away from the process not only with knowledge that will help improve company processes but credentials for their own career moves.

To register for the training course, go to www.polycon-event.com for instructions on signing up with ACMA.

OTHER
NEWS
OF NOTE

Multifamily market will enjoy a strong 2020

The year 2020 should be a good one for builders of multifamily dwellings and for those who provide products to that sector, according to a panel of experts at this year's International Builders Show in January.

Starts for the sector leveled off in 2018 in response to higher building material costs, the need to pay higher wages for skilled workers and regulatory costs, the experts reported. The result was higher rents and more luxury communities. However, the market is expected to rise by 1% in 2020 and 4% in 2021, experts said.

The reason for the popularity of multifamily is that young people are anxious to move out of their parents' homes and retirees are looking for more affordable, lower maintenance options.

Remodeling, single-family markets to grow steady and slow

The next two years will bring gradual growth for residential remodeling, according to remodeling experts who attended a press conference during Design and Construction Week.

Paul Emrath, assistant vice president for surveys and housing policy research for the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), forecast a .6% increase in remodeling spending for 2020 and a 1.2% increase for 2021.

Speakers at the conference said the growth is limited by the lack of skilled workers.

At a second IBS press conference, economists said the single-family market will also continue a gradual upward trajectory this year, fueled by national job growth and low mortgage rates.

Total housing starts are predicted to hit 1.3 million units in 2020, up more than 2% from last year. Of those, single-family starts will increase by 3% to 920,000. ■

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Composites One Acquires Polynt Division

Composites One announced recently that it has closed the deal on purchasing Polynt Composites Distribution in Canada from Polynt-Reichhold Group.

Polynt Composites, which is well-known throughout Canada, will continue to own and operate its resin and gel coat blending operation in Brampton, Ontario and Drummondville, Quebec.

Harold Visser, Executive Vice President Americas, said, "This divestiture reflects Polynt-Reichhold's commitment to concentrate its resources on manufacturing industry-leading resins, gel coats and other specialties, while maintaining a critical channel to market through our important distribution partner, Composites One."

U.S. Marble closes its doors

U.S. Marble, a company with 50 years of producing cultured marble products, has closed down business as of January 2020. The company was founded by John Bishop. It was sold in 2017 to Clio Holdings, which announced the shutdown by email and told employees they were no longer insured.

More than 100 people, who worked at the company's 165,000-square-foot plant, in Remus, MI, are left without jobs or insurance.

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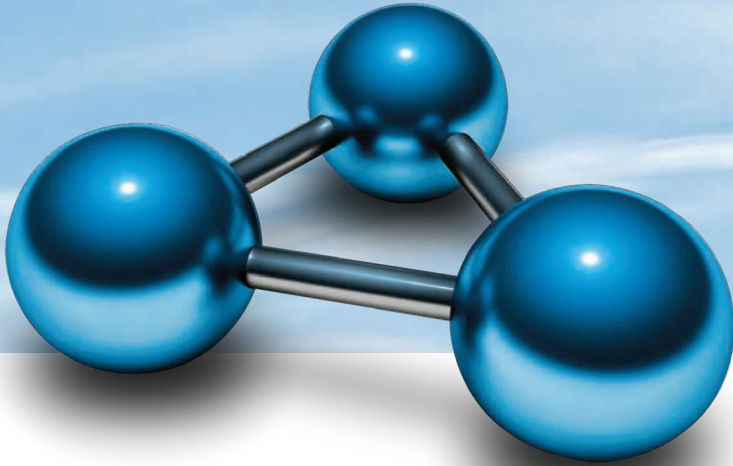
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