

CAST POLYMER CONNECTION

Spring 2023



Coni Marble: Three generations of dedication

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- What styrene testing will do for the industry

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ON THE COVER:

The Huizenga family is in its third generation of dedicated employees. The company, founded by Nick, is now run by his sons Derrick and Craig and employs several other family members. Pictured on the cover in the new showroom are (from left): Nick Jr. (Craig's son); Craig; founder Nick Sr.; Lucy (Derrick's wife); Derrick; and Aaron (Derrick's son). Story on page 4.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Opening new channels



I recently returned from an experience that emphasized to me the importance of reaching out to our elected and regulatory agency officials. In February, a group of five ICPA representatives traveled to the nation's capital for a fly-in meeting planned by the American Composites Manufacturers Association (ACMA). The meetings are scheduled with the offices of each attendee's U.S. representatives and senators. It's an amazing opportunity to meet face-to-face

with the people who are elected to represent our businesses and manufacturing facilities.

ACMA hasn't been able to have one since before the pandemic. ICPA was glad to partner with ACMA for this trip because by combining our two organizations, we create a stronger, more powerful voice.

Collectively, we felt our experience was well worth the time spent away from our businesses because it allowed us to make new connections and educated us on critical issues our industry needs to act upon while we still have the chance.

The two most significant points I took away were:

1) We need to be actively involved in what's happening in our industry regarding regulatory issues. It doesn't matter what size our individual companies are. Collectively, we have a big impact on pending regulations and requirements that will be imposed on our daily operations. We should not allow others to decide our futures.

2) Our representatives in D.C. (as well as those closer to home) should be educated about what we do, how safe our plants are and how vital we are to the our communities. After meeting with staff members face-to-face, I feel confident in just picking up the phone and calling the offices of those in government that have the power to affect our businesses.

Another goal of this fly-in was to encourage companies to invite regulators and officials to come to our plants and see our oper-

ations. Tower Industries fully intends to do this, and I hope many of you will do the same.

I want to emphasize a second important point: all of us need to be diligent about safety. The point was brought home to Tower recently because, even though

we won last year's Safe Plant of the Year award, in the last few months, we've had more workplace incidents than in the previous entire year. Thank goodness none of them have been serious,

but it has shown us that safety is an ongoing effort that none of us can afford to let slip.

Finally, I want to thank the companies that are participating in the styrene testing program. Board member Kelly DeBusk explains what's happening with that program on page 20 of this issue. Having been to D.C. and met with regulators, I can't stress enough the fact the agencies that watch over us need current data upon which to base their decisions.

Enjoy this issue of **Cast Polymer Connection**. It's always fun to read about design tastes. It's also important, however, to recognize what products will be vital going forward, especially when we're headed into economically challenged times. As we learned during the housing crunch in the late 2000s, we need to see where we can look for areas of additional market opportunity, cost-reductions and operating efficiencies. When we combine these tactics, prosperity can still be achieved.

Kerry Klodt

ICPA President

General Manager, Tower Industries

"WE NEED TO BE
ACTIVELY INVOLVED
IN WHAT'S
HAPPENING IN OUR
INDUSTRY REGARDING
REGULATORY ISSUES"



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Coni Marble:

A family operation with 50-plus years of accumulated wisdom

BY GENILEE SWOPE
PARENTE

Back in 1969, young carpenter Nick Huizenga and his brother-in-law Jack Hemstra were working on a bathroom addition for a client and came across a newer material they thought was beautiful and durable: cultured marble. The material was being used in a tub surround and the homeowner sent the two gentlemen down the street to a local factory to see how it was made. They were so impressed with what they saw, they bought a franchise and began a company that would become Coni Marble Manufacturing Inc., a thriving regional operation now headquartered in Thorndale, Ontario, CA.

Little did Nick and Jack know they were starting a business that would succeed for the next 54 years, a company still making cultured marble but also fabricating quartz and sintered stone and making solid surface for a wide range of products. Today those products range from vanity tops, bowls, shower bases, tubs and walls in the bath to counter-tops for the kitchen and miscellaneous products such as fireplace surrounds. Nick and Jack also could not have foreseen that the company would eventually be passed down to two generations of family.

“Working with family presents unique challenges,” says Derrick Huizenga, the son of Nick and one of today’s leaders. “You’re dealing with different personalities and dynamics.”

“However, family members tend to have your back during tough times and in tough situations. You can count on them, which is a huge advantage when running a business,” he adds.

A small operation becomes a local institution

Jack got out of the business after a couple of years, preferring to take another career path. The business, which started as H & H Contracting, then became Coni Marble (the first two letters of “Coas,” Nick’s wife’s name, and the first two letters of “Nick”). Nick stayed with the company for the next five decades, watching as this new material the two men saw so long ago gained in popularity. Nick is now 88 and finally retired, while two of his sons are running the company: Derrick, who supervises the cultured marble operation and Craig, who runs the quartz fabrication and installation side.

They tip their hat to their father for recognizing a good business prospect and a good product and then overseeing



Coni's facility, which has gone through five major expansions, now spans 36,000 square feet.



Mike Bedard and Sam Deverell working on casting vanity tops.

the company as it became a major operation.

“The company that began when Dad and my uncle bought that franchise consisted of a mixer, some raw materials and a few molds,” Derrick says. “They were working from a two-car garage.” Back in those days, there was a very limited number of cultured marble products—the company was offering panels, vanity tops and a few accessories in a limited number of colors.

As cultured marble began to catch on, the business took off and the operation moved into a small industrial strip mall. By 1974, Coni’s business had grown so much the company needed its own factory. Nick bought some property in Thorndale, a small town north of the big city of London, Ontario. The first building was constructed at the company’s current location of 99 Harrison Street, Thorndale. Today, that facility has grown to 36,000 square feet of space including a new showroom and administration space constructed in 2020.

Meanwhile, the staff grew from six in the early production days to 26 during the industry’s peak in the late 1990s/early 2000s. Today, 14 employees are the backbone of the company.

Derrick’s son Aaron and Craig’s son Nicholas are part of the crew as well as Derrick’s wife Lucy. Aaron is the chief marble installer, Nicholas is in charge of setup and pouring production, and Lucy oversees showroom operations.

Milestones along the way

When asked what the major milestones in Coni’s history have been, Derrick says one of them was inventing a new kind of solid surface product called Avian in the late 1980s, a product he says is a direct result of Nick’s innovative brain.

“He was always a pioneer in regards to automation and new products in this industry,” Derrick says. “For example,

we were one of the first to have a Venus casting machine in the early 1980s, and he worked with raw material suppliers to create Avian,” he adds.

“Working with family presents unique challenges... You’re dealing with different personalities and dynamics.”

“Avian was invented at a time when the only real solid surface available was Corian,” he adds. Avian was less expensive but had the same performance level as Corian, and it could be offered by Coni in custom sizes. The product was largely responsible for seeing the company through the prosperous 1990s and is still offered today, though it’s not as popular. At one point, the Avian division had its own fabrication facility and showroom in London (1998 to 2020).

Once quartz and granite entered the market at lower price points than in the past, solid surface lost some ground. Coni entered the quartz market and brought the solid surface offering back to the main plant.

Other noteworthy milestones in the company’s history that Derrick said helped make the company profitable were a job from 1994 to 2004 for R.J. Marshall producing 80,000 pounds per week in white ingots and purchasing machines in 2005 to allow the company to begin fabricating quartz countertops.

The company also has gone through five expansions of its facility as products changed and offerings grew.

Today’s business

At one point, most of the business for Coni was in new home construction—80% of business came into the company through contractors and kitchen and bath showrooms.



A new showroom allows the company to show off the beauty of quartz and Neolith.

Today the business model looks more like this: 85% of the business is done through renovation work, a lucrative market that has allowed the company to flourish even in tough times.

“Many of our customers are older (40 to 55 and up), and they have the money to renovate versus having to rely on borrowing. Being in the reno markets has helped us when new house markets slow down because of high-interest rates,” Derrick says.

The company also has always conducted its business through both wholesale and retail operations.

“Contractors, builders, kitchen and bath stores and lumber stores receive discounted wholesale prices while retail customers pay market prices,” Derrick explains.

Two-thirds of the business today is cultured marble and most of the rest is quartz, while solid surface makes up about 5%.

“A big advantage of solid surface years ago was that it was a seamless product. With improvements in quartz equipment, quartz seams are almost inconspicuous now,” Derrick explains.

But cultured marble remains the company’s backbone, he points out.

Most recently, the company has been dealing in sintered stone, a product mentioned as a consumer choice for the first time this year in the Kitchen and Bath Industry’s annual trends report (see page 13).

Coni Marble has dabbled in sintered stone since 2008, and Derrick says it presents some new challenges as far as production. The material is similar to porcelain, but is subjected to much higher pressures and heat during manufacturing. The result is a product that binds natural material without using resins or binders.

According to Derrick, Coni considered it after coming

across a thin, large format porcelain tile backed by fiberglass at the Chicago KBIS show in 2008 and wanting to offer that product to its customers.

“We had the idea of making countertops out of it and tried different backings, but realized it was going to be more difficult than anticipated,” Derrick says. The surface product was acceptable for making fireplaces and floors, but did not suit the countertop idea.

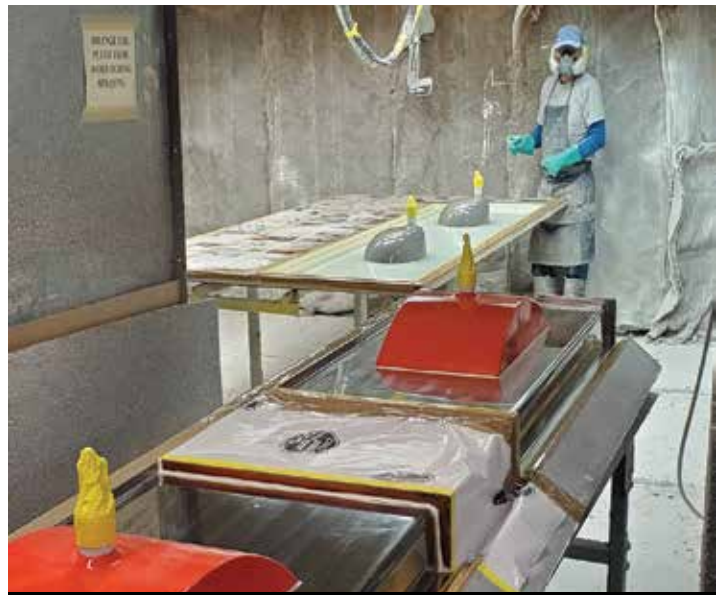
“Then in 2013, we came across Neolith from a company that sold granite to the countertop market and was starting to produce porcelain slabs in thicker materials through an extensive manufacturing process that requires a production line the size of a football field, as well as a long heating process along that line. The company was coming out with colors that looked like real marble and granite,” so Coni decided to add sintered stone to what it fabricates.

The resulting material is very hard and heat resistant. Because it’s both strong and brittle, it’s difficult to fabricate, requiring special blades and tools to cut the porcelain.

“Many quartz fabricators have tried it and given up,” Derrick says. While sintered stone is not a major portion of the business, the company is offering it as part of its line of durable materials for countertops, vanities, backsplashes, table tops, fireplace surrounds and more.

“Coni Marble’s strength as a company is our ability to offer quality and to offer what the customer wants and needs today,” Derrick explains. “Everything we do is custom, made for a specific job; and Coni prides itself on offering no-maintenance products,” he adds.

Derrick says that the company’s main competition today, especially for cultured marble, may well be tile companies, but that changes over the years as consumer tastes change.



In the spray booth is James Currie.

“For example, many installers today are putting in terrazzo-looking tile. But tile, if not installed properly, will fail over time, with grout lines and water leakage. People will be back for the one-piece walls,” he says.

Marketing and tracking trends

The 2020 showroom addition/expansion was a big step for Coni, a place where customers can see, feel and touch all the products. It has become even more critical now that people conduct so much of their initial shopping online, Derrick says.

“Before COVID hit, we attended many local home shows, which were date night for some consumers, a source of entertainment. But we’ve seen the trend change as people are staying home more and going to Pinterest and other social media sites for ideas,” Derrick says.

As a result, the website is more important than ever, but so is the showroom.

“We depend heavily on our website now as a source of information and references,” Derrick says. “But it’s very hard to see real colors on a screen,” he adds.

As far as what’s trending, he’s seeing a return to color schemes from the 1980s and requests for square bowls that were popular in the 1970s. Still, for the last five years, colors have been mostly whites and white with grays.

He also noted that Canadian tastes align more with European than U.S. choices.

“When we travel to different U.S. shows, we often see colors that would not sell in our area of the world,” he says. “I would say we are more influenced by European trends,” he said.

Founder Nick, who was originally from Holland, has been a big style influencer over the years as he has traveled back across the seas tracking what’s happening. Tastes on this side of the ocean tend to run about five years behind what’s happening in Europe, Derrick adds. He also says Coni sells very few tubs these days, not because tubs are unpopular but because acrylic tubs are so much cheaper.

As far as the challenges the company has faced and continues to face for the near future, he says a main one is finding new employees. “Today’s workforce is a different generation...they expect a lot more money for less work,” he says.

Coni, while it has the production capacity to grow much larger, has currently decided to focus on keeping its loyal employees and customers.

“We have had many workers who have stayed a long time with us over the years. We have a chief pourer who has been with us 42 years and some people are close to 25 to 30 years,” Derrick explains. “We treat our people fairly and pay them



Molds cure in the heat tunnel.

well,” he adds.

Coni has also decided to focus on its reputation for quality and its ability to customize instead of creating huge new avenues of opportunity.

“By getting too big, quality can suffer and wait times get longer,” Derrick says. The company prefers to stay a more manageable size and continue to provide customization while keeping ahead of kitchen and bath trends. But he hasn’t ruled out growth when new roads open up.

“We will leave that possibility for the next new generation of owners, whenever that may be,” he says. ■

Genilee Swope Parente is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. She encourages readers to send her ideas on companies to profile in the magazine. Reach her at gsparente@verizon.net.

Getting back to ICPA

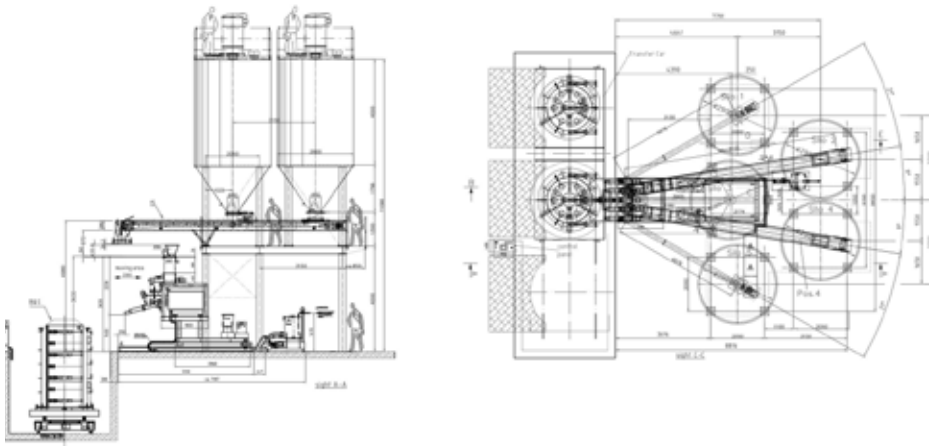
Coni Marble, which has belonged to many local and national associations over its 50-year existence, recently rejoined ICPA. Company leaders say it’s currently a good time for associations and their events—a time of growth following the industry crash that began in 2008.

“These associations, including ICPA, are becoming more vital as we see that we have similar struggles in business,” Derrick says.

“You are never too old to learn or to give advice to someone just starting out. Sometimes what you take back from the association events can be the smallest thing, but these meetings give you the inspiration you need to try something new,” he says.

“Our industry used to be very secretive, but today we are open to sharing ideas. We need to help each other to better the industry and our own operations, whether that’s learning new color techniques or production innovations.” ■

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One of the trends many Kitchen and Bath Industry Show attendees noted this year is that black is catching on in the kitchen. Photo courtesy NKBA.



Design trends: *Sliding away from the pandemic*

BY GENILEE SWOPE
PARENTE

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 was credited with creating new trends in design, and its wind-down is now influencing what people want in their homes. Still, some lingering effects of what happened during that period of seclusion remain.

When people were working, schooling and playing in their homes isolated from the general public, designers saw a leap in designs that made homes easier and more comfortable to be in 24 hours a day. For example, incorporating homework areas into kitchens took off. However, the most recent National Kitchen and Bath Association/Kitchen and Bath Industry Show's (NKBA/KBIS) 2023 Design Trends report, in discussing emerging kitchen design for the next three years, found that study spaces for children have dropped in priority from 34% in 2022 to 17% for 2023.

The pandemic also brought the first move in recent times away from the more open layout concept, replaced by the popular term "zoning," a trend that rose in importance because of the need for areas of privacy for work, for zoom calls and for quiet.

Zoning, especially in the kitchen, is still a popular concept because people want specialty areas for cooking such

as coffee bars and a second kitchen island. But according to the NKBA/KBIS report as well as most other trends followers, openness in 2023 is again sought by most people in the kitchen and living areas.

Still, one trend frequently discussed during the pandemic—the desire to make the home a warmer, more relaxing, more functional place is sticking around, probably for the foreseeable future. Most trends surveys and reports point to a desire for spa-like features in the bathroom, and ways to hide clutter in the kitchen, along with choices of materials and base materials that soothe.

Here's what **Cast Polymer Connection** took away from its annual hunt for trends in home design:

General trends

One frequently discussed trend that saw much coverage in the news this year is that people are demanding more bang for their buck, especially in remodeling. Feathr, a marketing firm that studies social media and reports on what people are discussing, says that in the interior design world, a 320% increase has occurred in the desire for "micro-luxury." The term refers to going all out when it comes to making an impression, but doing so in a smaller format because of

tighter budgets. For example, a homeowner who is remodeling might put their money into fancy marble in a guest bathroom or powder room, a luxury tub or huge shower in the master bath or touches of gold in kitchen wallpaper or fixtures.

Design firm Luxe named micro-luxury among its choices for top interior design trends for the year and said it translates into either going “all in” in one area or room or spending on one luxury item in conjunction with budget-friendly moves. One example the firm gave was using high-quality materials on bathroom counters mixed with cheaper materials elsewhere in the same room. Furniture World magazine, meanwhile, said one of the general trends for homes is smaller projects within the home that have a bigger impact such as alcoves, nooks and corners. The magazine reported that homeowners today with fixed-rate mortgages but tighter budgets also are considering home remodeling as opposed to major new build projects.

Another movement, while it isn’t new, picked up a lot of steam during the pandemic and became a major topic of conversation among people talking about 2023 and beyond: sustainability. House Beautiful and other publications and websites mention “inclusive home design” in their trends articles, which translates into designing homes that work for anyone, of any age or ability, that live there now and will do so in the future. That requires materials that last a very long time and are conducive to good health as well as designing spaces for flexibility and different stages of aging.

Sustainability has also taken on new meaning as homeowners become more sophisticated about what goes into building their homes. Better Homes & Gardens says homeowners are checking labels for products and materials that are free of harmful chemicals but also energy efficient and durable.

The need for warmth in the home was mentioned in most trends articles and research reports this year. Many designers today say they are using materials that feel more nature-inspired to people such as natural wood versus painted wood. They also are asking for better ways to bring in more light from the outside whether that’s bigger windows, designing indoor and outdoor rooms that connect to each other or using multiple layers of lighting fixtures to highlight features of individual rooms.

At the same time, many people are labeling this year as one that is bringing out bolder design features including brighter spot color. Many experts quoted in trends articles brought out the fact that, now that people can leave their homes (and breathe a little easier), they are sharpening their tastes for wilder colors, and asking for new shapes and patterns in materials, furniture and decorations. A recent Houzz trends report on the top home design trends for 2023 said that using neutrals and whites calmed people during the pandemic, but “these days, homeowners seem more adventurous and willing to take a chance on creating bright, more vibrant spaces.”

A phrase that has come up again and again in Houzz

Bold and subdued go hand in hand



While last year’s picks for color of the year centered around shades of green to reflect the back-to-nature interior design trend, this year’s range of colors covers a broad expanse. Some designers say this range reflects the current trend toward self-expression.

One factor generally accepted for 2023 is that people are venturing into bolder hues—a reaction to the desire to break out of the bonds that the pandemic put on us. At the same time, many color experts say that tranquility plays a major role in many basic color trends—the need for calm after a tumultuous few years. The challenge will be in contrasting those two trends.

Leading the pack of color forecasters each year is the Pantone Color Institute, which this year picked

Viva Magenta as Color of the Year. The institute, which tends to influence everything from clothes to furniture to cell phones to building materials, chose the shade of red because it reflects “a new signal of strength. Viva Magenta is brave and fearless and a pulsating color whose exuberance promotes a joyous and optimistic celebration...”

The “Magentaverse” (a phrase Pantone coined this year) of colors that it lists as complementary to the Viva Magenta includes soft browns, pinks, a gray and a soft blue.

Meanwhile, various paint companies have announced a broad range of Colors of the Year.

Like with Pantone, several companies went with shades of red. Benjamin Moore picked a bold choice: a red-orange shade (Raspberry Blush), which it says is “the definition of charismatic.” The company calls the color “unapologetic.”

Dunn-Edwards named its choice Terra Rosa, a color

stories this year is “layered textures” in décor, wallpaper, materials and accessories to create a more tactile feel to a room. Designers say that the reason for these layers, as well as bolder colors and deeper veining patterns in surfaces, is that people seek personalization. Marketing experts say the reason is that people are increasingly aware of what’s out there (partly because they spent so much time online during the pandemic) and demanding that products focus on their individual needs. According to McKinsey & Company, which tracks general consumer taste trends, the companies today that grow faster derive 40% more of their revenue from personalization than the average company.

In the kitchen

The NKBA/KBIS design report breaks down general trends into emerging kitchen and bathroom designs. In the kitchen, the report says that in the next three years, we can expect:

- Large islands with flexible functionality
- Food storage, small appliance work areas and coffee stations in pantries
- Concealing small appliances and minor food preparation areas behind walls and doors
- Using mudrooms to control incoming clutter
- Connecting the indoor kitchen to the outdoors.

As far as that first trend, of the specific features the report tracks for kitchens, islands used as dining tables

topped the list (76% of designers listed it as a trend compared to 63% in the 2022 report). Also mentioned by many trends trackers is that people now are demanding double islands, instead of just one. Double islands were mentioned by 39% of designers tracked by the NKBA/KBIS report this year, which has grown from 35% in 2022 when it was first identified as a feature trend. The other trend in islands is that more and more are waterfall in style: 52% of designers mentioned that type of edge in 2023 compared to 45% in 2022.

The second most popular kitchen request designers mention in the 2023 report is taking down walls to open the kitchen (74% of designers mentioned it this year, which has risen from 62% in 2022).

Meanwhile, this year saw a rise in who is demanding cleaner materials, a trend that became more prominent during the pandemic. Sanitary counter surfaces, for example, which last year was four categories down from outdoor living areas as a required feature, was at the same level this year (60% of designers listed both as a top choice).

Also losing ground from last year, most likely because of the current status of the pandemic, was the category of “secure areas to leave deliveries”: 26% of designers mentioned that as a priority in 2022 compared to 18% in 2023.

When it comes to sustainability in the kitchen, the features most often mentioned were LED lighting, storage for recycling, and increased natural light via low-E windows

that blends brown and burgundy for a “rosy pink that works as both a grounding neutral and delicate accent,” according to Better Homes & Gardens.

Valspar picked a list of colors it called “stunning,” and said this year’s colors were chosen because they are “beautiful, livable, ready-to-go shades” that evoke certain moods. The color range includes soft blues and greens (Rising Tide, which reflects “health”, Green Trelis, which says “calm”), as well as a white (Cozy White to reflect comfort) and colors that will likely compete with white for basic wall coverings (Gentle Violet, which reflects “connection”; Rising Tide, a very light blue that indicates “health”). Sue Kim, director of color marketing at that company, says the colors that were chosen “encourage self-expression and anyone can envision them in their space.”

Among companies picking shades to reflect calm was Sherwin-Williams, which named Redend Point

its pick. The color is a brown shade (“a blend of blush and beige”) it calls “minimal, calming, intriguing” and designed to go with other warm, earthy hues.

Behr announced a brand-new creation of a color it said has a “true neutral” hue. The company named it Blank Canvas and said its off-white shade has complex undertones of brown and gray. It is designed for the current wellness movement. According to Behr, 92% of homeowners currently “use their home as a space to unwind and want their surroundings to reflect that.” Behr stressed that, unlike other neutral shades, it has no yellow.

Nods to nature also continued into 2023 from last year’s choices with several paint companies. Krylon paint company picked a dark green Spanish Moss to reflect dense forests and moss terrains, and Glidden picked Vining Ivy, a blend of blue and green it says goes “with both contemporary and classic styles.” ■



Wood finishes and cabinets, which were popular in the 1980s, seem to be making a comeback. Especially popular now is natural wood. Photo courtesy NKBA

and doors. Losing some ground was countertops made from recycled materials, which was mentioned by 45% of designers in 2022's report but only 38% this year. Also, about 64% of designers in the 2023 report said they consider manufacturers' sustainability practices when making recommendations for products.

One trend that is on the rise in kitchens is the amount of money people are willing to pay. Typical spending for a medium kitchen rose to \$66,000 in 2023 from \$50,000 in 2022 and typical spending in larger kitchens went to \$130,000 from \$93,000. Just over one-third of designers (38%) say they are doing larger, more involved kitchen projects this year than last year.

Along with more islands in the kitchen, people also seem to be requesting more sinks. Multiple sinks in islands for food preparation/cleanup went from 41% in 2022 to 53% in 2023.

In the bathroom

Top trends in the bathroom discussed in the NKBA/KBIS trends study were:

- Removing bathtubs to make room for larger showers (mentioned by 77%)
- Taking down walls to increase the overall bathroom footprint (63%)

- Connecting the bathroom to the dressing area (58%)

All three of those trends remained about the same as in 2022 as far as how important designers think they are. However, replacing tubs with showers hit most trends reports this year as one of the most noticeable and prevalent developments in bathrooms. Pinterest, which does a general trends study on everything consumers are posting and inquiring about for the year, listed "elevated shower routines" as one of the top trends in homes: inquiries went up on "aesthetics for showers" by 450% in the last year and "amazing showers with walk ins" went up 395% for the year. Home "spa bathrooms" went up 190% while doorless shower ideas went up 110%.

The company says, "Gen X and Boomers will turn rinsing into a ritual in the year ahead," and both NKBA and Houzz trends trackers also say upgrading the shower through increased size and zero-entry for accessibility are major trends.

What's more, two-person showers are on the rise, mentioned in the last three NKBA/KBIS reports by more than 80% of designers as a key trend.

As far as sustainability in the bathroom, radiant flooring joined LED lighting and sustainable faucets/shower heads/toilets as the top products. As with kitchens, countertops made from recycled material seemed to lose some ground (33% in 2023 compared to 38% in 2022). About 61% of de-



The debate over tubs versus showers continues—some say tubs are giving way to bigger showers and others say tubs are the ultimate in luxury for the bath. Photo courtesy NKBA.

signers report they consider manufacturers' sustainability practices when making recommendations.

As with kitchens, spending is on the rise in bathrooms with typical spends for primary bathrooms at \$38,000 in this report compared to \$31,000 in 2022. Spending in a guest or second bathroom was at \$24,000 compared to \$18,000 in 2022. However, powder room spending appears to be falling (\$15,000 this year compared to \$31,000 in 2022). Again, about one-third of designers (32%) reported larger, more involved projects this year.

The 2023 NKBA/KBIS study also asked designers what types of innovations they'd like to see coming from manufacturers. Showers and shower surrounds topped the list (19%) followed closely by vanities/cabinetry and technology solutions. About 5% of designers mentioned wanting innovations in countertops.

Many design experts say that a main bathroom trend for 2023 is warmer hues in materials but highlighted by bolder touches: Living Etc. website said designers are using more "honeyed" tones such as warm amber, but layering those hues with dark colors such as dark blue cabinets or black walls. The site also said that designers are using symmetry in layout to create a feeling of organization, and more rounded features such as arched doorways and curved showers for drama.

A Better Homes & Gardens bath trends for 2023 article said that the demand for spa-like bathrooms is part of an underlying current of the world shifting from thinking of their bathrooms in terms of functionality to thinking of them as rooms for seeking comfort.

On the counter

The NKBA/KBIS study says that when it comes to countertops, easy care and a desire for more sanitary surfaces will be the top influencers when selecting a material for the next three years. Quartz remains the most popular (81% in kitchens and 82% in bathrooms, about the same as in 2022) while quartzite is second most popular and gaining ground. For kitchens, quartzite was mentioned by 55% of designers in 2023 (compared to 31% in 2022) and in bathrooms, 46% mentioned it (compared to 30% in 2022). Although many news reports have said granite is losing ground in popularity because of its maintenance requirements, the NKBA/KBIS study didn't back that up: Granite as a choice of material was mentioned by 32% of designers working on kitchens in 2023 (compared to 19% in 2022) and in bathrooms 27% of designers in 2023 compared to 15% in 2022.

A new category that NKBA reports is joining the ranks of most popular material is sintered stone (mentioned by 19% of designers for kitchens and 23% of designers for baths in



The trend towards turning our bathrooms into spas and incorporating them with dressing areas marches forth into 2023 and beyond. Photo courtesy NKBA.

Trends that may be exiting

When it comes to discussing design trends, it's almost as interesting talking about what is losing favor as it is what's winning over consumer and designer tastes. Some of what designers say in this year's trends articles, blogs and reports are losing ground include:

Everything is white. While shades of white and subtler grays and beiges remain the most popular choice for walls, most trend trackers say the days of the all-white rooms (fixtures, cabinets, floors) are over. MarthaStewart.com says all-white used to say clean, but now comes across as harsh and cold. Color is creeping in everywhere.

Sea views. Designers say a few years ago, many homes took on a beachy atmosphere. That atmosphere is losing ground. Nature is very much in, but the influence of the sea is waning, giving way to general designs that incorporate greenery and natural wood as well as more exotic nature themes such as jungles for bathrooms.

Hardwood ceiling? Not a great idea. A few years ago, designers discovered the beauty of using wood in ceilings. However, they've discovered that wasn't such a good idea in rooms such as bathrooms where moisture is a part of daily use.

Plain subway tiles. Realtor.com recently said that using the same sized tiles in the subway pattern has gotten old—being replaced by mixing of sizes and shapes as well as using textures on subway tiles.

Floating sinks. While people like the looks of a sink floating in a small powder or bathroom, many have discovered that they take away from something they want more: storage. Sinks that are installed in vanities that have doors and drawers are becoming a top choice. At the same time, a Fixr survey recently reported that the top cabinet styles are floating vanities (62%) as opposed to furniture-style vanities (16%).

Oversize soaking tubs. Although once considered the pinnacle of luxury, soaking tubs in primary baths have lost ground. Too many homeowners find they take up room, collect dust from non-use or cost money to use.

Large tiling. Some designers say that while large tiles once felt trendy (1990s and 2000s), using such tiles now tends to make people think "model home." People are looking for customization and that includes in how their floors and surfaces are tiled.

Carpet in the bathroom. While many designers say the 1970s looks are back in vogue, the rumor that bathroom wall-to-wall carpeting could be one of those trends is falling flat. Too many designers/architects/builders are stressing the fact that wall-to-wall just isn't hygienic. ■

2023.) Solid surface appears to also be gaining ground as the next most popular choice.

Overall styles

Although styles were a little harder to track from this year's NKBA/KBIS design report because of new categories, several factors are clear: transitional is the top style chosen followed by contemporary and modern styles. In the kitchen, transitional was mentioned by 65% of designers in 2023 (compared to 59% in 2022) while contemporary was pinpointed by 47% (compared to 54% in 2022) and a new category "modern" was third in popularity in 2023 at 33%. (Gone from this year's kitchen list was "organic/natural," which was listed at 57% in 2022.) In the bathroom, transitional was listed by 60% in 2023, while contemporary was 59%, organic/natural tied with contemporary at 59% and modern was at 57%.

The NKBA/KBIS 2023 study pointed out that designers are using new descriptions or combinations of styles when listing what's popular. For example, "farmhouse/modern" is a now a popular kitchen style named by 7% in 2023's report and "simple/minimalist" was listed by 5%. ■

Genilee Swope Parente is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. She can be reached at gsparente@verizon.net.



Designers say one of the most recent trends has been focusing on microluxury: using touches of elegance and eye-catching features to set off smaller portions of the home. Photo courtesy NKBA.

A large advertisement for the Atlanta Polycon 2023 event. The background is a photograph of the Atlanta skyline with tall skyscrapers. The text is overlaid on a dark, diagonal gradient. At the top right, it says "September 18-20, 2023". Below that, "Atlanta" is written in a cursive font next to a red apple icon. The word "POLYCON" is in large, bold, white letters with a green outline. Underneath, it says "BUILDING A SOLID FUTURE TOGETHER". The largest text, "SAVE THE DATE", is in a very large, bold, green font. At the bottom left, it says "REGISTRATION OPENS IN MAY" and "www.TheICPA.com". At the bottom right, there is a logo for "THE ICPA" (International Cast Polymer Association) with a green grid pattern.



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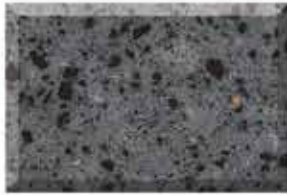


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Trends seen at a really big show

The big news from this year's Kitchen and Bath Industry Show (KBIS, which was Jan. 30-Feb. 2 in Las Vegas) was the size of that show. After suffering debilitating participation drops because of the pandemic, this year's KBIS was touted as "one of the most successful shows in its nearly 60-year history," according to the National Kitchen and Bath Association.

Design and Construction Week (the combined International Builders Show, KBIS, the National Hardware Show, the International Surfaces Event and the Las Vegas Winter Market) was attended by more than 200,000 housing and design professionals, and KBIS itself had more than 40,000 visitors. That compares to about 45,000 at IBS in 2022 and about 60,000 pre-COVID attendees and 30,000 for KBIS in 2022 (about the same in pre-COVID years).

"The show went well and was a great networking event for our company," says Trevor Urry, operations manager, Whitewater, one of 500 KBIS exhibitors.

"It seemed pretty crowded, lots of people everywhere," comments Shaunna Boothe, creative director, Tyvarian. For vendors, that meant: "It was a great success. We have many potential leads."

ICPA members note show trends

A topic at KBIS educational sessions as well as on the floor was color. Many designers currently say bold is in and white out, but attendees from ICPA companies didn't see a lot of that on the floor.

"White designs are still in trend at the moment," says Urry.

Marcos Vidal, regional sales manager, ACS International Products, adds that "there were a few cast polymer booths, and they offered mostly white and shades of gray."

Still, many people noted pops of color everywhere in the general kitchen and bath displays and a few changes in base colors.

"For showers, I saw a lot of whites and blacks," Boothe says. "But there was definitely a lot bolder colors when it came to appliances and fixtures. Lots of greens, gold and other bold colors, but more in the kitchen displays."

Karlo Fuentes, president of Modular Vanity Tops, says that with vanity bases "there was a lot of green and blue with metal legs and gold or black handles."

"The granite composites market companies were showing colors beyond black and white," Vidal says. "One



Tyvarian's van booth was a big hit at the KBIS show.

booth had quartz kitchen sinks with yellow, beet red and purple."

Overall, however, "The color we saw was more in cabinets than counters," he adds. "There were bold dark cabinets such as dark matte greens and blues."

Functionality and new ways of hiding it were noticeable in many kitchen displays. "One display had a stove top built into the marble or engineered quartz with no visible range. The range had a kind of mat that was layered on the surface and conducted the heat electrically," says Vidal. "I also saw a lot of cellphone charging stations built into the solid surface materials."

One feature that many attendees noticed was the touch of nature and the focus on well-being.

"All of the big names, Kohler, Samsung, Café, Moen, focused on greens and earth tones. Many had displays with greenery and water, which I loved," Boothe says.

"Everybody today needs serenity—calm and mellow in their lives," says ICPA Executive Director Jennifer Towner. "There were many displays that showed how a home can create an oasis feel."

The material by far that was most prevalent was quartz.

"What I saw as far as kitchen and bathroom materials was a lot of quartz. I didn't see much tile around," Boothe comments.

"We all see lots of quartz being used in kitchens," Fuente adds. "I saw many Calcutta and quartz tops as well as contemporary squared bowls in cultured marble."

"There was lots of quartz from all over the world," Stoffer says. "A company from Spain and Poland was selling cast polymer shower floors."

His biggest takeaway from the floor, however, was "textured quartz countertops. The displays showing textured countertops were busy with people feeling the different textures, which were just slight enough to still be functional. This very well might be a new trend coming," he says. ■



Breakout sessions in 2022 were packed.

The Buzz:

Chicago event will get ICPA members “buzz”ing

After a successful first meeting in 2022, ICPA is again holding a spring event for networking, getting caught up with news, exchanging operational tips with fellow attendees and meeting up with friends or making new ones: The Buzz will be April 28 and 29 at the Eaglewood Resort, Chicago, IL.

The list of breakout sessions and roundtable discussions has grown this year to include topics such as:

- *Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) and human resources (HR) compliance:* Where do you stand? Are you ready? This will be a review of the most common OSHA citations for the cast polymer industry and a discussion of how to get ready starting immediately. Discussions will also focus on important HR compliance issues including: whistle blower protection, haz-com training and employee files.
- *A business session on production costs and profits:* The session will focus on intangibles that need to be considered as well as how to figure out factors that

can zero in on actual costs. Also discussed will be digital tracking versus paper tracking and software options for the cast polymer industry.

- *Tips and tricks from the plant floor:* A plant operation strategy session with a team of knowledgeable and experienced members will discuss and share tips on efficient operations.
- *A plant operations strategy session:* A team of experienced members will share tips for more efficient operations.
- *HR compliance and insurance concerns:* A human resources expert will discuss what owners need to know about having the right HR and insurance policies to protect against litigation.

In addition, a general session will be held to discuss the recent styrene testing results and bring the industry up to date on other regulatory issues such as sustainability. There will also be an update on the Live Grout Free marketing campaign and the use of search engine optimization (SEO)



The name of the game at The Buzz is sharing time with fellow ICPA members.



Even more people are expected at 2023's event.



Networking continues into the evening. 2022 attendees stepped out to experience The Battery Atlanta.



Last year attendees went Top Golfing. Social events this year include a bowling night. The Eaglewood resort also has a top-notch golf course on site.

tracking to improve website content and traffic.

The location and entertainment



Many ICPA members are well acquainted with the resort because POLYCON was held at that location in 2018.

The resort is 20 minutes from Chicago O'Hare airport and has many onsite entertainment features including several restaurants and bars, a golf course and a bowling alley with pool tables.

On Saturday afternoon, ICPA has planned a special networking event: The Iron Bartender margarita challenge at which teams of attendees will compete to select ingredients that make the best, most tasty beverage. After that event, attendees will enjoy a dinner buffet and a fun bowling session and tournament in the resort's modern bowling alley.

Thank you sponsors

Two ICPA vendors have generously agreed to be platinum sponsors and host special events including a Friday evening cocktail reception (**The R.J. Marshall Company**), and a Saturday evening of fun and dinner (**Composites One**) at the resort's bowling alley. In addition, two members have signed

on as gold sponsors helping to defray the cost of the entire event: **Advanced Plastics** and **Interplastic**.

ICPA has arranged for a special discounted room rate of \$149 for attendees, and the event itself costs only \$175.

The "buzz" on The Buzz

So why attend this special event? Comments from 2022 attendees who were asked what they found valuable say it all:

- "Good networking with other members."
- "Talking to marketing managers to learn how to keep the business alive."
- "Meeting with other companies in the industry and insight on industry specifics."
- "Learning something new from each other."
- "The classes were great!"
- "Everyone's willingness to share their own experiences was invaluable."
- "We are all in the same boat so it's nice to get support and new ideas from others dealing with the same issues."
- "Extra time to spend with everyone. Buzz allowed and encouraged it."
- "Hearing about what everyone is doing for their employees and tips on things that we are currently not doing to help improve our product." ■

An update on styrene testing at ICPA members

BY KELLY DEBUSK

ICPA styrene testing at various member companies went into full swing in January 2023. The testing is being done to gather information together so that lawmakers and regulatory officials can make informed decisions in approving any actions that might be considered under a recent amendment to the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). (For more information on TSCA and this amendment, please see the Summer 2022 issue of **Cast Polymer Connection**.)

Why winter?

Under the amendment to TSCA, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a congressionally mandated deadline of 2028 to review chemicals listed on the 2014 TSCA chemical work plan (the plan for implementing the amendment). This list includes styrene. The decision was made to test

in winter to ensure all doors and windows at participating facilities would be closed during the process. This was important for two reasons.

First, winter was chosen because TSCA must consider worker exposure when reviewing a chemical. Industry members have been reviewing styrene reports published worldwide in anticipation of the TSCA review process. Of particular concern is one report that mentions that a possible and very slight hearing loss can occur after 20 years of styrene exposure at levels over 20 parts per million (ppm) time-weighted average (TWA). No outside elements were considered in that report such as general aging or lifestyle factors. We all want our employees to be safe, but we don't want to use flawed science to determine unnecessary regulation.

ICPA members needed to know what the current plant levels of styrene are so that ICPA can determine what impact

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possible legislation could have on its member companies. To do this most accurately, doors and windows needed to be shut and all the ventilation within plants used. To determine the efficiency of the current ventilation systems, winter months were necessary to give companies the best results. The assumption is that, if winter testing can meet potential new regulations, then summer levels would be lower and also meet potential new regulations since most companies can open doors and windows in summer and parts of spring and fall. Having doors and windows open lowers the styrene levels inside the plant. We needed to consider what happens when doors and windows can't be open.

“Knowing what we can realistically expect to achieve is of utmost importance to any regulatory rule-making process.”

The second reason winter testing was chosen is TSCA must also consider environmental justice. Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of people regardless of race, color, national origin or income when developing, implementing and enforcing environmental laws, regulations and policies. This means that meeting a TSCA standard may not be as simple as extra ventilation because TSCA must consider a plant's neighbors. In some areas, styrene permits already contain clauses that all doors and windows must be closed while styrene processes are in operation. Right now, this is just in individual permits, but the industry wanted numbers based on what could happen if regulation was already in place to create a baseline of where the industry is at present.

Who is participating?

At the time of this article, 17 companies signed up for testing and three companies have indicated interest. This is a great participation rate for ICPA member companies.


Participating companies filled out a short form on the number of employees at the facility; size of the building; ventilation information, including stack data and exhaust fan data; and styrene and gel coat usage for the previous year. This information will be used to group similar-sized sources to get an overall picture for the cast polymer industry. Each participating company received or will receive three styrene tools. The testing process targets the positions of sprayer, mixer and pourer/caster. If a facility has an autocast machine, that machine's operator is tested instead of the pourer/caster. It is assumed that these are the three highest

exposure rates in cast polymer plants because finishing workers are in a separate area from styrene-emitting operations. Eight-hour testing is conducted on the same day for all three positions when possible. If a company cannot test for a full eight hours, equations are used to determine the eight-hour TWA. Data collected is anonymous and individual results are shared with the company. When completed, an overall report will be published for ICPA member companies.

Preliminary results show it would be very difficult for the industry to meet a 20 ppm limit, especially during winter months. The industry can use this information to plan a course of action when styrene is reviewed by TSCA (or any other government agency). Knowing where the industry is and what we can realistically expect to achieve is of utmost importance to any regulatory rule-making process.

The testing will be completed before The Buzz (April 28 and 29, see page 18) in Chicago. Be sure to attend this event to hear the final results, discuss potential impacts TSCA regulations could have, and to join in the discussion on what ICPA and industry members can do to remain proactive. ■

Kelly DeBusk is a regulatory compliance specialist with **Composites Compliance LLC** (www.compositescompliance.com) and an ICPA board member. She can be reached at k_debusk@compositescompliance.com.



The graphic features the ICPA logo at the top, which consists of a green dotted pattern on the left and the letters 'ICPA' in a large, bold, black font on the right, with 'INTERNATIONAL CAST POLYMER ASSOCIATION' in a smaller green font below it. Below the logo is a 2x2 grid of four black and white photographs showing workers in various industrial settings, some wearing protective gear. In the bottom left corner, there is a gold circular seal with a ribbon that says 'CELEBRATING 50 YEARS' and '1973 2023'. To the right of the seal, the text 'Moving Forward with Forward Thinking Since 1973' is written in green. At the bottom right, the website 'www.TheICPA.com' is displayed in white on a black background.



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THINKING OF TOMORROW



POLYCON 2023 just six months away

It's time to start planning to attend this fall's POLYCON 2023 Atlanta, which is September 18-20 at the Hilton Atlanta/Marietta Hotel & Conference Center. The conference center is about 30 minutes from the Atlanta Hartsfield Airport, has excellent meeting space, comfortable rooms, a pub and a golf course.

The annual event is the association's largest meeting, a place where education and fun mix, where valuable connections are made with other ICPA members and with vendors, and where friendships are formed or renewed.

Speakers for general sessions and for breakout sessions are now being finalized. Those sessions cover a wide range of vital topics from the regulatory situation to operational guidance for plants to human resources and other specific concerns. In addition, several days are set aside for PolyTech sessions, which are held at ICPA member company businesses and cover more technical how-to issues.

Atlanta was chosen because of the international airport and the fact several member facilities are located in Georgia. The city also has a wide range of entertainment and local fare for attendees to enjoy.

Registration opens in May.

ICPA members meet with Washington, DC officials

Five ICPA representatives flew to Washington, DC February 14-16 to team up with the American Composites Manufacturers Association for the 2023 Infrastructure & Sustainability Fly-In. It was the first fly-in ACMA has had since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and those who traveled there met with both House and Senate staff.

"The goal of a fly-in is to let association members get acquainted with current legislators and to open a dialog with those members," explains ICPA board member Kelly DeBusk, Composites Compliance LLC, one of the attendees. DeBusk also serves on ACMA's regulatory steering committee.

Conducting these events allows association members an opportunity to present some perspective of what the com-

posites industry is and how it fits into the general picture of business and industry in this nation.

"We need to let Congress get to know our members and what they do for their communities," says DeBusk. "Having these relationships is very useful if and when regulatory legislation is being considered for the industry," she adds. "Eventually I would hope ICPA member companies can invite Senate and House members and staff to participate in plant tours," she concludes.

"Regulators and lawmakers want input from the small business world," adds ICPA Executive Director Jennifer Towner. "They want to be able to say to their public: we have met with these manufacturers. We understand the issues that affect the companies, how they integrate and

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contribute to surrounding areas and how what they make benefits the world.”

Fly-in participants also heard from several Biden administration officials including representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency there to discuss emissions data and how it might be collected. Planners hope to make this an annual event. ICPA members are welcome to participate and encouraged to invite their representatives to visit their facilities and to attend next year’s fly-in.

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the benefits of cast polymer products over those that have grout lines contains much useful information that makes the industry’s point, which is: living grout free offers huge benefits including a much longer shelf life.



A frequently asked questions section explains why cultured marble and solid surface products require less maintenance and remain cleaner than products such as tile and some stone materials, which require difficult cleaning methods and periodic resealing. Visit the Live Grout Free website to see what’s available to support the industry: www.livegroutfree.com.

Happy 50th for ICPA

Much of what goes into planning the rest of 2023 will include a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of ICPA.

Special events will be held during POLYCON, and a new logo has been created that highlights the anniversary.



Executive Director Jennifer Towner will be seeking input from members on how the industry can celebrate as well as historical information on the industry and association. She can be reached at jennifer@theicpa.com.

ICPA has new access channels

The association implemented a new association management software package that makes it easier for members to communicate with other members, to update their information and renew membership and to sign up for events. It also allows access to ICPA information via the My Glue Mobile phone application.

Membership Director Beth Kubinec has asked all ICPA members to ensure the association has the most up-to-date information for these new features.

New ICPA members

ICPA welcomed three new members in the last few months including:

- Magnum Venus Products (MVP), Knoxville, TN: www.mvppind.com
- Wizard Marbleworks, Fishers, IN
- Cultured Marble of Tucson, Tucson, AZ: www.culturedmarbleoftucson.com

Homeowners willing to spend more on bathrooms this year

People want their bathrooms to be a place of rejuvenation



and they're willing to put money into that desire, according to the 2023 Bathroom Trends Report by remodeling resources site Fixr. The site does an annual survey of experts.

The report found that:

- The priority upgrade in bathrooms is a better shower, according to 65% of those surveyed. Next in line is the vanity (44%), the layout (43%) and fixtures (40%).

- Owners are likely to spend more on bathroom remodels this year than in the previous year according to 71% of surveyed experts.
- Top bathroom choices for 2023 are natural materials and backlit mirrors. Incorporating wood-look and natural materials was voted the biggest bathroom trend in 2023 (50%) while 47% of experts also think that backlit mirrors will be popular. The next choice was patterned tile, textured tile and wall coverings (36%).
- Color in the bathroom is predicted to be more prevalent this year: 59% of experts think remodels will use it in the shower and tiling; 41% mentioned cabinets and wallpaper.
- On the outs is glass block and "Hollywood-style" lighting: 60% of experts said the blocks are out while 56% said a row of light bulbs across the mirror is going away.
- The drive to remodel the bath is based on the desire for more functionality (52%), improved aesthetics (52%) and improved home value (48%).

For information on the report, go to www.fixr.com.

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Trends for 2023 highlight affordability woes

The average size of a new home dropped slightly in 2022 to 2,480 square feet from 2,525 square feet (2021), according to NAHB's annual report on "What Home Buyers Really Want."

"The decrease in new home size reflects the escalation of home prices in 2022 and builders scaling back to try to meet demand," said Rose Quint, NAHB assistant vice president of survey research. However, NAHB expects both size and amenities to grow in 2023, then drop again in 2024.

"The move toward larger homes and more amenities in 2023 will reflect the preferences of those who can afford higher interest rates, and in 2024, size will fall back as affordability improves with lower mortgage rates and more buyers re-enter the market," Quint says.

Amenities no longer translate directly to the number of rooms or types of features, NAHB continued. Instead, "Home buyers are looking more and more to their homes to provide a sense of well-being," observed Donald Ruthroff, AIA, founding principal at Design Story Spaces LLC. "They want their homes to support their day-to-day health—physically, emotionally and mentally."

Builders and designers are achieving this through features such as walking paths and other outdoor spaces connected to the home, as well as natural materials and

biophilic interior design. NAHB reported a large jump in exterior amenities for the year, such as patios, decks and porches.

Meanwhile, builders and designers are also learning that "if we use less space, we can spend more on details and finishes to make rooms such as bathrooms feel more luxurious," Ruthroff added. ■

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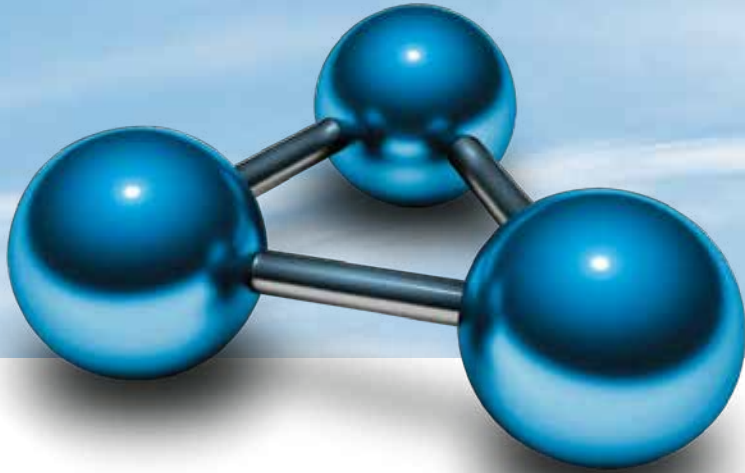
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