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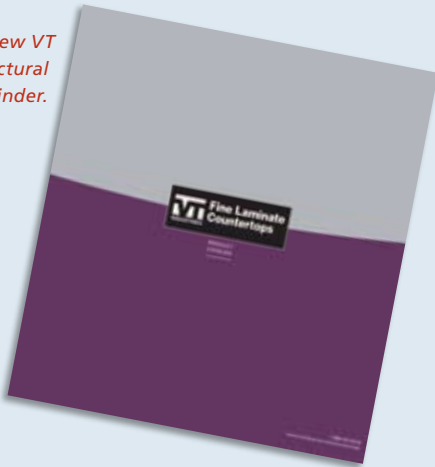
PERSPECTIVES



By Amanda Paulsen
Communications Coordinator

During 2007, VT fine laminate countertops will be making their way into the commercial market in assisted living and multi-family home units, the hospitality industry, the medical industry and education applications, to name a few. As shared in our last issue, some of our advertising this year will be focused on these markets.

The new VT
architectural
binder.



In addition to our advertising, we have a couple of other tools available to assist with our entry into this market. We have developed a *Commercial Grade Countertop* brochure and an architectural binder.

The *Commercial Grade Countertop* brochure features information on the benefits of postformed laminate countertops, the quality construction of VT countertops and EQcountertops. This brochure also features

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VT Introduces Commercial Grade Postformed Laminate Countertops

Long recognized as a leading manufacturer of the finest architectural wood doors, VT Industries is now promoting the first commercial grade postformed countertop in the industry.

"At VT, we're taking the lead in defining the commercial grade countertop category for the specifier, because there aren't really any guidelines out there right now," according to Chris Schlabach, national sales manager. "We are extremely excited to be the first postformed countertop manufacturer with a commercial specification and commercial countertop specification plan."

The VT commercial grade countertop will make its debut at the AIA National Convention and Design Exposition in San Antonio, Texas, May 3-5. "VT has had a wonderful reputation within the architectural specifier community for our architectural doors and we believe that we're going to be able to draw off of that brand awareness to generate business for our commercial countertops," Schlabach reported.

PRODUCT FEATURES

Commercial grade countertops provide specific features, such as high wear laminate, static resistance, a .020" phenolic backer on the underside of the substrate, a coved backsplash, rolled front edges and different core materials, to name a few.



Hotel Bathroom featuring the Tempo edge.

"Postformed countertops are an excellent choice for commercial applications, such as schools, the hospitality industry, and many types of multi-family applications, since there are no seams in the cove or on the front edge to collect dirt or that water can infiltrate," Schlabach said.

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VT's 'Edgy' New Valencia Wins Builder's Approval 'We've taken the postformed countertop industry to the next level'

Countertop edging styles have remained largely unchanged for nearly two decades, so the construction world was ready when VT Industries introduced the innovative *Valencia* postformed countertop profile earlier this year. *Valencia*, presenting a full-wrap edge with graceful contours, has been playing to rave trade show reviews and turning the heads of multi-unit contractors.

Valencia's premium edge profile, which is easily mistaken for stone or granite when matched with deep-sheen, light-reflecting laminate, has won attention, inquiries and trial by multi-unit commercial builders who have quickly recognized the quality and value of the new postformed countertop.

CASE IN POINT

In January, the director of multi-family construction with Pardee Homes saw an advertisement for *Valencia* in *Professional Builder* magazine and responded by contacting VT Southern California Territory Manager, Robert Roark. The builder requested a demo kitchen installation incorporating *Valencia* at one of 250 units in a multi-family complex.



VT print ad featuring the Valencia premium edge.

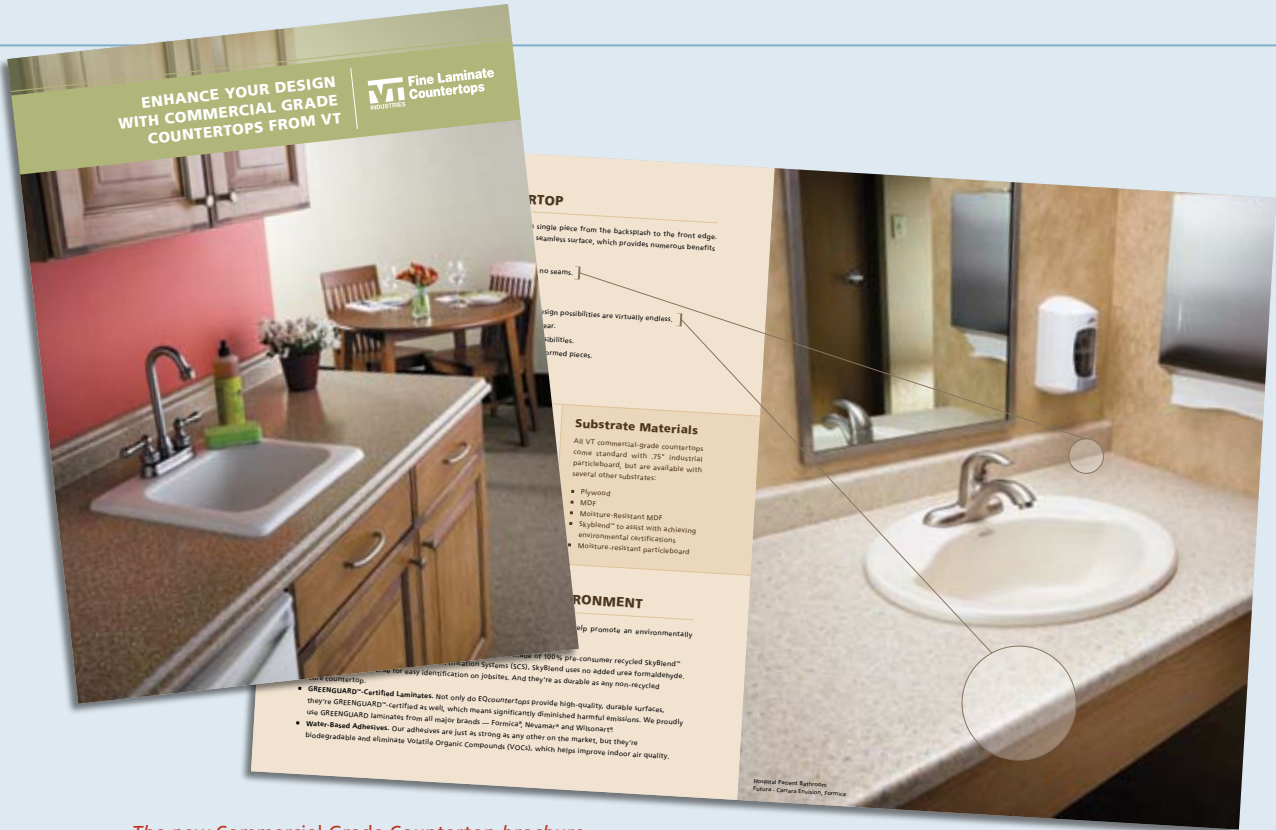
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Perspectives continued from page 1

details on some of our profiles that fit in commercial settings, including *Futura*, *Nova*, *Tempo*, *Caprice*, *Classic*, *Valencia*, *Barcelona* and *Geneva*. This brochure also talks about some of the aesthetics available with laminate options from the leading laminate manufacturers.

- The countertop product catalog is targeted toward the architect and includes:
- The *Commercial Grade Countertop* brochure
 - The *Product Offering* brochure
 - Information on our *EQcountertops*
 - Spec sheets for each profile
 - A sample warranty
 - Residential and commercial architectural specifications
 - A listing of our PRO Team fabricators
 - A copy of our postformed countertop DVD

These new marketing materials are available to assist in introducing VT commercial grade countertops. ➡➡



The new Commercial Grade Countertop brochure.

VT’s ‘Edgy’ New Valencia Wins Builder’s Approval ‘We’ve taken the postformed countertop industry to the next level’ continued from page 1

The pre-existing design had incorporated Chinese granite countertops, but the builder said high cost and product delivery delays led him to seek other alternatives. The VT Industries trade ad featuring the new *Valencia* contoured edge profile, along with new laminate design options, made him eager to see the new product in place.

Roark called Matt Lysiak, a PRO Team fabricator at WCC Temecula, and the two went to the site in Lake Elsinore, California, to meet with the developer. Formica Buttermum granite was chosen as the laminate design for the postformed countertop and Lysiak performed the installation.

Valencia’s classic sophistication won enthusiastic acclaim from the developer, who agreed to use the unit as a model where his architect and design teams could view the new edge profile and consider using it for upcoming construction.

A BRIGHT FUTURE
“The purpose was to get our product approved for future development,” Roark acknowledged. “I’m hoping to get the countertops written into the specifications.”

Valencia’s price differential yielded the best news, Roark reported. The pre-fabricated Chinese granite in use on the project costs about \$30 per square foot, installed. *Valencia*’s cost is about half the price of the granite, it compares favorably in appearance and is easier to install. Roark noted that additional cost savings are achievable for multiple unit applications where unit specifications are identical.

“One thing that evolves with these kinds of projects is that down the road, we will all work together with the design applications,” Roark said.

Valencia and VT’s new *Barcelona* edge profiles have attracted positive contractor and fabricator interest, continuing through the International Builders Show in Orlando. “Our feedback at the International Builders Show in Orlando in February was tremendous,” Roark reported.

“In the past, we have had lighter traffic and less interest at the VT show booth, but with our new edge profiles and the new laminate colors and finishes from Formica and Wilsonart, we’ve really taken the postformed countertop industry to the next level,” Roark added.

Headquartered in Los Angeles, Pardee Homes has regional offices in San Diego, Orange County, Corona, Sacramento and Las Vegas. The company is currently developing new home neighborhoods and communities throughout Southern California and Southern Nevada. ➡➡

IN THE NEWS

VT Countertops Are Featured On *Designing Spaces* TV Series

VT Industries National Sales Manager Chris Schlabach was a featured guest on *Designing Spaces*, a half hour nationally syndicated TV series dedicated to home remodeling, do-it-yourself projects and interior design. In his interview, Schlabach discussed the variety of edge profiles and the competitive pricing of VT postformed laminate countertops.

“We’ve teamed up with some of the world’s leading manufacturers of high pressure laminate to offer the look and feel of stone and granite at a high pressure laminate price,” Schlabach reported. “We offer a variety of edge profiles for the consumer if they would like a square edge, rounded, a no-drip, a waterfall and even some contoured edges that mimic stone and granite edges to a tee.”

Citing the benefits of high pressure decorative laminate countertops, Schlabach noted their durability, affordability and non-porous surface. “It’s very durable, and with a rounded edge, it’s a little safer for kids around the house. It’s a wonderful look,” Schlabach added. ➡➡



COUNTERTOPICS TRIVIA QUESTION

Congratulations to Michelle Shannon of A-1 Laminates Inc. for the correct answer to the question: “What product did VT Industries feature at the Greenbuild Show in Denver?” Michelle won a VT prize for coming up with the correct answer, which was *EQcountertops*.

QUESTION: True or False? All VT commercial grade countertops come with a .020" phenolic backer on the underside of the substrate.

Answer this question based on this issue of *CounterTopics* for a chance to win a VT prize. Place your answer on an index card with your complete contact information, or the back of your business card, and mail to the address listed. Entries must be postmarked by May 15, 2007. Limit one entry per person, and one winning per year.

CounterTopics Trivia
Attn: Amanda Paulsen
VT Industries Inc.
P.O. Box 490
Holstein, IA 51025

VT employees and sales representatives are excluded from this promotion.

VT Introduces Commercial Grade Postformed Laminate Countertops

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Patient Room Workstation featuring the Futura edge.

VT commercial grade countertops come standard with a 45-lb. industrial particleboard substrate which is approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and meets all government specifications. Commercial grade countertops are also available with other substrates, including plywood, medium density fiberboard (MDF), moisture-resistant MDF, Skyblend™ recycled wood fiber cores and moisture-resistant particleboard.

The phenolic backer acts as a board stabilizer to prevent warping and cupping, and acts as a barrier to moisture absorption. “It’s a balanced substrate because you don’t have any exposed particle-board,” Schlabach noted.

ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE

“EQcountertops is another example of a specifiable trait for commercial grade laminate countertops,” Schlabach said. “This core material is made from 100 percent pre-consumer recycled SkyBlend™ wood fiber that uses no added urea formaldehyde resins during manufacturing. With the growing desire for ‘green’ commercially, EQcountertops is a perfect example of VT’s leadership in the green movement.”

EQcountertops can assist in achieving Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification in two categories:

- **Materials and Resources**, which encourage the use of products that incorporate the recycled content material. Many EQcountertop shipments will also qualify for credit, resulting from being manufactured regionally.
- **Indoor Environmental Quality**, which is intended to reduce the quantity of air contaminants that are odorous or potentially irritating to the comfort and health of fabricators, installers and occupants.

All VT commercial grade countertops are manufactured with water-based adhesive that eliminates volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and other hazardous air pollutants. In addition, Formica and Wilsonart® laminate is GREENGUARD®-certified, which means significantly diminished harmful emissions.

LEADING-EDGE DESIGNS

Specifiers can choose from thousands of laminate designs from major manufacturers, along with

multiple edge profiles available either with or without a backsplash. “We’re using both premium and standard grades of laminate that are available from the major manufacturers, such as Formica, Wilsonart, Nevamar and Pionite,” Schlabach acknowledged. Both chemical-resistant and high wear laminates are also available.

Schlabach expects contemporary, full-wrap edge profiles, such as VT’s *Nova* and *Futura*, to be popular choices for educational and health care facilities, along with offices, retail and church applications. Premium profiles such as VT’s *Valencia* and *Barcelona* are ideal for hospitality, multi-family or assisted living projects, he reported.

‘WE SEE COMMERCIAL GRADE COUNTERTOPS AS A GROWTH OPPORTUNITY FOR OUR FABRICATORS.’

— SCHLABACH

“Architects, designers and specifiers can now offer their commercial customers countertops that have the rich, deep-sheen appearance of stone or granite that are in the laminate price category,” Schlabach said. “Unlike stone countertops, however, our commercial grade laminate surfaces never require polishing or resealing.”

Introduction of the commercial grade laminate countertops is intended to support VT’s fabricator network, Schlabach added. “We see commercial grade countertops as a growth opportunity for our fabricators to generate additional volume.” ➡➡

DESIGNS AND TRENDS

Wilsonart HD Laminate Emerges in the Commercial Market

Less than two years after Wilsonart® HD™ High Definition™ Laminate took the residential market-place by storm, the product’s manufacturer is beginning to see a sprinkle of acceptance on the commercial side of the business.



Hotel Breakfast Bar with the Barcelona edge featuring Wilsonart HD.

“Slowly, but surely, we’re seeing acceptance in the commercial markets,” according to Gwen Petter, manager of Surface Design for Wilsonart International. “Specifically, we’re starting to see the acceptance in multi-family housing, retail store fixtures and the hospitality market.”

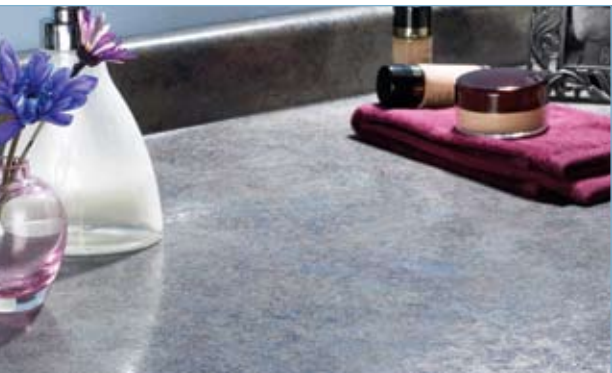
COMMERCIALLY VIABLE

“The commercial building process can take two years from start to finish,” Petter explained. “In a commercial application, for any product launch it will typically take anywhere from 12 to 24 months because of the specification process and construction schedules. So we don’t see the volumes right now in our Wilsonart HD product that we do on the residential side of the market.”

Petter cited one example of a Phoenix, Arizona, condo developer who switched from granite countertops to Wilsonart HD after seeing a magazine advertisement for the product. “A lot of it had to do with the ease and availability of the HD laminate and its visual quality,” Petter recalled. “They did not feel they were sacrificing anything from an aesthetic standpoint, plus there was a cost savings.”

The hospitality, tabletop and restaurant industries are also using Wilsonart HD, Petter noted. “It’s a great application for tabletops because it’s so easily maintained, and with Wilsonart HD you have three times the industry standard for laminate wear.”

In commercial markets such as health care, education or the office industry, sales of premium and standard laminate designs continue to be strong, Petter reported. “In those markets, applications typically require a more subtle surface texture and a more conservative pattern,” she acknowledged. “Understanding the types of laminate patterns that work in those market categories will differentiate how HD laminate is accepted in commercial segments.”



Hotel Vanity featuring Wilsonart HD.

A POSITIVE REACTION

Overall, the reaction to Wilsonart HD designs has been excellent. “In our first 18 months, we have outsold our forecasted volume,” Petter reported. “We are getting great responses and feedback directly from customers themselves, both in the residential and commercial specification side of the business. They look at HD as adding value to the end product.”

“In the case of a consumer who’s purchasing HD laminate for her countertop, she feels that she’s getting a great bang for her buck in the final installation,” Petter said.

Based on the product’s success, Wilsonart will be introducing 16 new HD laminate designs this summer, along with several new premium and standard laminate patterns.

“We believe strongly in what HD laminate has provided,” Petter added. “It’s a successful product not only for Wilsonart, but an accepted product in the market and we want to provide the largest and best assortment of high definition products that we can to the end user.” ➡➡

Concern for the Environment Drives Color Trends for 2007

According to the leading international association of color design professionals, the most powerful color trends for 2007 are being driven by concern for the environment.

During last year's semi-annual conference of the Color Marketing Group (CMG) in Atlanta, approximately 400 color design professionals reached the consensus "that the mainstreaming of environmentalism is the key to next year's colors," CMG Executive Director Jaime Stephens reported.

'YOU TALK ABOUT THE BLUES OF THE SKY, OR THE GREENS OR THE BROWN TONES FOUND IN THE EARTH AROUND US.'
— PETTER

"In the laminate industry, it (the environment) is an influence that is becoming more and more top-of-mind," acknowledged Gwen Petter, manager of Surface Design for Wilsonart International and CMG member.

"It carries through to the colors," Petter explained. "You talk about the blues of the sky, the greens or the brown tones found in the earth around us. All of those colors are becoming more and more popular because we're talking more about our earth and the names that coincide with it."

ACCENTS ON COLOR

Petter cited "distinct correlations" between CMG's 2007 Contract Color Current swatch card and specific Wilsonart® HD™ High Definition™

Laminate designs. One example involved four aqua blue tones from the CMG color card (Wet Concrete, Aqueous, Mettle and Sharkskin) that are used as accents or "undertones" in the Sedona Spirit design.

"These colors would not be a volume color alone in laminate, but are important due to the influence of water, spa, glass and translucency," Petter noted. "So we used them as accents with more conservative colors as the major color carrier."

"Chocolate browns are very popular right now," Petter shared. "There are three colors on the CMG color card — Classy Chocolate, Dangerously Elegant and El Paseo — that are great tones found on the Wilsonart HD Bella Noche. If you take Bella Noche and put it on those swatches, you can definitely see the influence of those colors."

Another example Petter referenced was the use of CMG's Whistler, Buckhead and Brown Under colors in the Wilsonart HD Bella Capri. Brown Under also appears with Chipotle, Hot Sauce and Stone Mountain in the Wilsonart HD Deepstar Fossil.

OTHER INFLUENCES

The CMG Contract Color Current is one of several tools Petter uses when developing laminate designs for the market. "We also do focus studies where we study influences in material trends from a generic standpoint covering all aspects of design, then we tie that down specifically to what happens in each of our market segments," Petter said.



"When we talk about trends and materials, especially in the Wilsonart HD category, a lot of them are inspired by organic materials related to nature's products, such as stones, granites and abstractions," Petter said.

"Most of the products that we develop are not solid colors," Petter added. "Our Deepstar series, for example, provides an abstract quality that is imperative to the commercial market segment because architects and designers often like designs that are ambiguous."

Founded in 1962, the CMG is an international not-for-profit association of 1,100 color designers who forecast Color Directions one to three years in advance during the annual conference. ➡

FABRICATOR'S FORUM

When Applying Endcaps, Some Like It Hot

When applied correctly, hot melt adhesive forms a strong lasting bond between the endcap and countertop edge with minimal clean up. The laminate edge contour uniformly conforms to the countertop, and the look is highly appealing and professional.

There are some success tips to keep in mind:

- Look lively! Once the edging adhesive reaches the ideal temperature, prompt installation is critical. Hot melt adhesive sets quickly after it is applied to the substrate, which absorbs heat from the adhesive. Cold particleboard absorbs heat faster, so the adhesive "sets" more quickly.
- Once the adhesive reaches the ideal temperature range, apply the endcap immediately to the edge of the countertop using a roller or hardwood block.
- Pressure should be applied across the entire surface of the endcap while the adhesive is still hot to ensure a uniform seal. If the adhesive cools before pressure is applied to the entire endcap, the bond could fail.

- Always keep the laminate side of the endcap as cool as possible when heating pre-coated hot melt adhesive. If the laminate side of the endcap is allowed to become too hot, it will tend to curl when applied to the countertop.



Commercial heating units are used to heat the hot melt adhesive.

Hot melt adhesive preparations are equally simple, both for large and small fabricating operations. Commercial heating units used by high volume fabricators in their shops can be modified with removable sliding trays that stay cool when not in

use. The laminate side of the endcap is placed face down on the tray during heating, while the side that's pre-coated with hot melt adhesive is directly exposed to the heat source. This technique allows the laminate side to remain relatively cool to prevent curling.

Fabricators also can produce professional results preparing the adhesive with a common household iron. When using an iron with pre-coated endcaps, apply pressure along the laminate with a rag soaked in cold water to cool the laminate face. Remember that sudden temperature drops may cause the hot melt adhesive to set more quickly than normal, so avoid drafts from open doors or windows.

Hot melt adhesive sets up quickly. Once the edging is installed, go ahead and trim any excess. There's no time lost waiting for the bond to set, as with older types of adhesives. The job progresses without delay. ➡



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