

## PRESTON WOODWORKING: FAMILY OWNED CAN BE STATE-OF-THE-ART

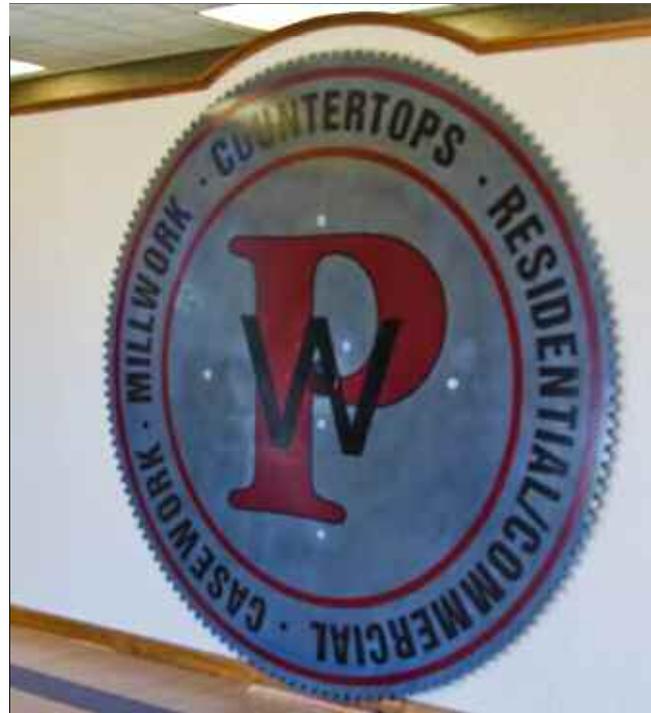


TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES, MANY INDEPENDENT STONE SHOPS ARE FEELING THE PINCH OF FEWER NEW HOME CONSTRUCTIONS AND REMODELING PROJECTS. PRESTON WOODWORKING IN JOHNSON CITY, TENNESSEE, HOWEVER, HAS MET THE CHALLENGES OF THE CURRENT MARKET BY EXPANDING ITS SERVICES WHILE STAYING TRUE TO ITS HERITAGE AS A FAMILY OWNED, "HOMETOWN" BUSINESS. THE COMPANY RECENTLY CELEBRATED FIFTY YEARS OF OPERATION, AND HARD SURFACE TOPS MANAGER CHARLIE COGBURN CREDITS PRESTON'S SUCCESS TO ITS DIVERSITY AND ITS CREW OF EXPERIENCED, KNOWLEDGEABLE, AND COMMITTED EMPLOYEES.

Preston Woodworking, Cogburn notes, "is broken down into four main divisions: Commercial Casework, Hard Surface, Retail Builder Sales, and Wholesale, including home center businesses." Having these four divisions, and "great people in all departments," means that Preston Woodworking "can offer customers a turn-key job from cabinetry to tops of various materials to wood moldings." As Cogburn states proudly, such variety "makes us a one-stop shopping experience that customers find appealing."

The company's expansion into stone fabrication occurred in 2007. Prior to this, he says, "we had been installing stone which was fabricated elsewhere and shipped to us for installation." Preston Woodworking had the foresight to realize that offering on-site fabrication would mean greater efficiency, cost effectiveness, and higher quality control, and that these benefits would be worth investing in extensive renovations to the company's facilities, along with state of the art stone fabrication machinery.

The renovation began, Cogburn says, with the "cutting and installing of water trench drains, adding a 480 power supply, water supply lines, and a larger air system," as well as the purchase of "two jib cranes for material handling." Deciding on the fabrication machinery meant that the company had to take "an extensive look at what we want to accomplish from a finished product standpoint" and "optimizing our output of quality materials." The end result is "a 21,000 square foot facility,



ty, with a separate 3,400 square foot building to house quartz and solid surface products."

At present, the hard surface division utilizes an AIM CNC Master 2400 Bridge Saw with a submerging tank for cutting full slabs, a CNC Intermac Master 4300 Router, a Comandulli Omega 100 Edge Machine, and a Commandulli Penta. While Charlie Cogburn clearly knows his way around all of these machines, noting for instance that the edge machine offers both "speed and beauty," he hasn't abandoned the more traditional, hands-on methods: "Our solid surface fabrication is still old school, primarily a manual process, but we do operate an auto V grooving machine for cove backsplash tops. This machine makes cove splash faster and easier, and it adds a great look to any kitchen."

Such attention to detail and commitment to genuine craftsmanship, in both countertops and cabinetry, set Preston Woodworking apart from other so-called one-stop venues. Another hallmark of the company is the extensive variety of surfaces offered for countertop fabrication. In addition to natural stone such as granite, customers can choose from a range of engineered stone such as Zodiaq, Silestone, Cambria, and Caesarstone. Charlie Cogburn has observed that today clients "are better educated on the characteristics of natural stone

and that one of a kind look they are trying to achieve." One of his and the company's primary goals is to "make the customer's selection a dream come true," so to achieve that end, he has "fifty colors on hand and access to an endless number of others."

To insure that this extensive selection is readily available and that the materials are always top-quality, Preston Woodworking works only with leading vendors such as Carapace, Triton Stone, G&L Marble, SMDS, A&M Supply, Carolina, and the Wurthwood Group.

The company, which has been designated a Certified Corian Fabricator, also recognizes that natural or engineered stone is not always the right choice for each client and has offered solid surface fabrication since 1984. Charlie Cogburn studied at the Corian Training Center in Wilmington, Delaware, and is obviously excited by solid surfaces' "seemingly endless possibilities in design and usage." He also notes that such materials offer the fabricator another very practical advantage because they are so much lighter than natural stone: "simply carrying or maneuvering a piece of stone can have its challenges."

In addition to Corian, Preston Woodworking offers Formica Solid Surface, LG Hi-Macs, Gibraltar, and Staron, and is even looking into

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Photos by Larry Hood & William Brown



Above, at left: Tim Lonan, CADD/CNC Manager and Charlie Cogburn, Hard Surfaces Division Manager are part of a dedicated core of knowledgeable craftsmen that operate everything from high-tech automated machines to hand-finishing tools, to get the job done. The giant saw blade in the Preston showroom, emblazoned with the four Preston divisions, was obtained from a StonExpo East vendor, a few years ago.

expansion into natural and synthetic marble. Just as the company is constantly exploring new materials, its employees are "regularly attending seminars and shows such as Stone Expo to get new ideas and methods as well as seeing the latest and the greatest."

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The hard surfaces division is housed in a 21,000 sq. foot fabrication facility that routinely handles everything from granite to laminated tops. "Most of our shop craftsmen, like Ken Ayres, Aaron McKinney and Phil Mauk, (inset, above) are cross-trained to operate most of the equipment we have in here," says Cogburn.

As Charlie Cogburn puts it, "Education is a must in any business. If you don't stay current with change and at least explore your options, it will quickly take a toll on your bottom line."

At the end of the day, though, what matters at Preston Woodworking isn't its state-of-the-art facilities, extensive inventory, or the amount of constant training its employees receive; instead, what matters is that everyone there is considered family. When asked how he would account for the company's continued growth and success, Cogburn notes that while "the owners are energetic and driven to be the

best in the business, with today's economy, it takes a total team effort to succeed, and this is exactly what we are – a team from top to bottom."

Preston Woodworking is located close to the campus of East Tennessee State University at 620 West Walnut Street in Johnson City, and clients are invited to visit the showroom to browse the numerous countertop displays and to meet with consultants. Further information, including employee biographies, may be found at the company's website <http://www.prestonwoodworking.com>



Aaron McKinney operates the automated cutting process of the AIM Master Cut 2400. "We're lucky that we made the investment on a lot of our automated machinery a couple of years ago," explained Cogburn. "The way the market is right now, machines might be very affordable, but getting financing for capital investments is much more difficult."



One feature that epitomizes Preston jobs is the blending of superb stone finishing and installation with gorgeous cabinetry and millwork. Jobs range from commercial installations like the Bristol, TN public library (bottom, right) to private residences in Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina and Virginia. Preston's location in the tri-cities area (northeast triangle of Tennessee) makes it easy to reach jobsites in north-eastern North Carolina and southern Virginia.



Above: Commandulli Omega 100 Line Polisher applies an edge treatment to a vanity tops using SuperEdge Wheels. Preston also uses Toro wheels on this machine for flat edge polishing



Right: Aaron McKinney sets up a backsplash to run on their Commandulli Penta machine.

