

Countertops that come out of a bottle

Friends use crushed coloured glass to revamp kitchens and bathrooms

BY CARLA WILSON, TIMES COLONIST JULY 14, 2012



Kees Schaddelee, left, and Des Carpenter with buckets of crushed glass at their shop in Esquimalt.

Photograph by: Lyle Stafford, timescolonist.com (July 2012)

Greater Victoria residents who quench their thirst with bottled drinks are helping in the start-up of a new countertop business.

Vitrium Building Products crushes coloured recycled glass obtained from local sources to make one-inch thick Environite for countertops. It can also be used in other ways, such as on tables and desktops, reception counters and internal wall panels.

Bathroom and kitchen upgrades are popular home improvement projects and renos are big business in Canada. In 2011, close to \$23 billion was spent on renovations in 10 major cities surveyed, according to a Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. report.

Vitrium owners Kees Schaddelee and Des Carpenter have dubbed the product the "100-mile countertop," describing it as sustainably-produced.

Environite is made with 80 per cent to 90 per cent crushed glass, bound by a polymer resin. It is manufactured at the company's shop on Devonshire Road in Esquimalt. Local production means that there is no environmental cost associated with shipping heavy materials, Schaddelee said Friday.

Also, each order is made-to-order so there is "very little" waste, he said.

The product comes in 16 standard colours and can be customized by colouring the resin, Schaddelee said. The product is non-porous and does not require sealing.

At their site, buckets and containers are filled with bottles and crushed glass in various colours. Most

are from bottles, but window glass is also used. Brownamber glass comes from beer bottles, pale blue glass is made up of Bombay Sapphire gin bottles and deepblue glass is from wine and vodka bottles.

Environite was developed by John Carpenter, father of Des, who is manufacturing and selling the product on Camano Island in Washington state. Des and John are partners in that company, and Victoria's Vittrium is operating under licence to sell the product. Vittrium moved into its facility in April.

Company contact information and a list of local dealers, who sell the product to customers, can be found at environite.com. The retail price is \$95 per square foot installed, Carpenter said.

Orders have come in for multi-family projects, single-family houses and large commercial projects, Carpenter said. Demand is already prompting the pair to seek two workers to manufacture and install the product.

Like other new entrepreneurs, the pair put in long hours and share the workload, which includes scraping labels off bottles. The two have been friends for two decades since meeting while surfing near Jordan River. Their friendship includes going to Panama and back in a van for a surfing trip in the 1990s.

"Des and I figured if we survived a year together travelling in a van through Central America, we can survive a business partnership," said a smiling Schaddelee, whose experience includes sales and management. Carpenter's background includes custom cabinetry and interior finishing work.

This year, 38 per cent of homeowners in Canada's 10 largest cities are expected to spend \$1,000 or more on renos, CHMC said.

Remodelling rooms was the most popular renovation in 2011. Work was done to update, add value or prepare to sell a home, said 74 per cent of those who renovated. The average amount spent last year was \$13,709, the report said.

Ed McDonald, owner of MAC Renovations in Victoria, said orders are coming in as the weather improves. He has three crews on the job.

The majority of MAC clients are planning to continue living in their home, rather than prepare it for sale. These can be people who have owned a home for a period of time, or new owners wanting to spruce up their purchase.

"We are doing a lot of bathrooms right now," McDonald said.

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