

The Artisan Group

Guerrilla Branding

Fabricator group capitalizes on relationships formed through ISFA to create its own branded line of products.

At the turn of the 21st Century the writing was on the wall. Although solid surface had enjoyed an extended run at the top of the high-end countertop heap, its appeal as a premium material was waning. Granite, on the other hand was gaining ground quickly, a fact that was heavily underscored when several of the major solid surface producers entered the market with their own lines of “branded” natural stone.

About the same time, Architectural Granite & Marble (AG&M) approached a select group of well-established and highly automated solid surface/granite fabricators with a comprehensive plan for providing granite as part of a national distribution program. Forming the group was made easy because most of these fabricators had already established relationships with each other through their membership in ISFA. The name chosen for the group was Granite Buyer’s Club.

By 2007 the concept of branded granite programs was gaining ground. Home Depot had StoneMark and Lowe’s had Granite Certified by DuPont. The Granite Buyers’ Club, which by this time numbered 20 member companies, decided to create a grassroots brand named “The Artisan Stone Collection.”

This concept of a fabricator-owned brand appealed to the group because of a history within the industry of fabricators building up brands for manufacturers, only to end up competing with a manufacturer-owned fabrication shop or a sudden influx of new competitors marketing the same brand. Because branding and marketing decisions are made by Artisan Group members themselves, group members have the confidence to build their own brands. Artisan Group is a partnership between the fabricators in the group and AG&M, including the trademarks and

intellectual property of the group.

The group first came to market with the Artisan Stone Collection in Spring of 2008, and offered the industry’s first Lifetime Warranty on granite countertops covering staining, material integrity and craftsmanship. The group then launched Heritage Wood countertops in Fall of 2008, which is a line of high-end wood countertops available exclusively through Artisan Group, and partnered with Kohler to carry a line of sinks and faucets. Artisan Group also has its own line of care products called “Firstline Care Products.”

Promoting Industry Standards

Through their association and service in ISFA, Artisan Group members had come to understand the value in creating a nationwide network of fabricators who perform to the highest standards of countertop fabrication. All member companies of the Artisan Group are required to obtain accreditation in the MIA Accredited Fabricator program. Likewise, the group is moving toward full participation in the ISFA Certified Professional program.

Currently Artisan Group membership consists of 32 fabricator companies. Evan Kruger of Solid Tops, LLC, envisions that number will grow to 50 or more businesses, depending on the needs of individual markets. “Membership in the Artisan Group is not for everyone,” he said, “but the important point is that a group of (mostly ISFA) fabricators got together, created their own brand and put together a lifetime warranty to back up their work. Maybe this will inspire even very small independent fabricators to take the bull by the horns and create a strong brand – independent of their vendors. It’s a way of differentiating themselves from the competition and building for the future.”

More information is available on the Web at www.artisan-counters.com

