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Artisan Group Members Are first in California to Achieve the Coveted Marble Institute of America Accreditation

Duracite in Fairfield and Block Tops in Anaheim have just become California's First Stone Fabrication Shops to be Accredited Through the (MIA). Block Tops also is one of the first woman-owned companies ever to earn this designation

AUSTIN- (August 2009) — Duracite Owner Fadi Halabi and Block Tops owner Vanessa Bates, both Artisan Group members, are the first stone fabricators in California to be Marble Institute of America Accredited. Bates also is one of the first women to earn this coveted designation. Accredited Natural Stone Fabricators represent the best companies that work on residential and commercial stone projects.

Currently, only 27 Natural Stone Fabricators in the country have achieved accreditation, 10 of which are Artisan Group members: Blume's Solid Surface Products (Freeport, PA), Creative Countertops (Las Vegas, NV), Innovative Surfaces (Hastings, MN), NBC Solid Surfaces (Springfield, VT), Rocky Mountain Stone (Albuquerque, NM), Solid Tops (Easton, MD), Surface Products (Cornelius, NC), Rocksolid (Cleveland, OH), Block Tops, Inc. (Anaheim, CA) and Duracite in Fairfield, CA.

"Block Tops and Duracite are now able to proudly display the accreditation logo, which symbolizes that they both are among the finest in the natural stone industry with respect to craftsmanship, safety, and business practices," says Garen Distelhorst, the Accreditation Manager at the MIA. "This is an extra special achievement since both shops are bringing this new level of accreditation to the state of California, as well as the fact that Vanessa Bates, owner of Block Tops, is one of the first women to earn this designation."

"Success today depends not only on the expertise of your company, but also on the company you keep," says Fadi Halabi, owner of Duracite. "Achieving accreditation from the MIA makes Duracite a member of a very fine company of fabricators. We are proud of this achievement because it is a reflection of the pride and dedication our employees have to the Artisan Group of premier countertop fabricators."

With numerous fabrication facilities and expert staff, Duracite has been meeting the needs of contractors, developers and designers throughout Northern California and Nevada for more than 35 years. Duracite specializes in natural stone, solid surface and wood countertops products.

"To me and most people in the stone business, the MIA is the gold standard," says Bates. "The fact that we are MIA Accredited shows our customers and their customers that we hold ourselves to a higher standard. This is a fine achievement and we are particularly proud to be one of the first stone fabrication shops in the state to receive this prestigious designation."

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Block Tops has more than 30 years of experience servicing Northern & Southern California with solid surface products as well as natural stone. They manufacture and install these surfacing products at their own facilities. This control assures the finest quality and service at competitive pricing, as well as offering a one-stop countertop shop.

To become an Accredited Natural Stone Fabricator by the MIA, a company must have successfully completed three phases of application. Phase one was the completion of a lengthy application that required the applicant company to provide various documents and references which ensure that the company is in compliance with the 10 standards of accreditation as laid out by the MIA Accreditation Commission. Phase two required the company's qualifying agent (the designated company representative responsible for filing and maintaining accreditation records for the applicant company) to pass a 200 question multiple-choice test. The exam tested the applicant's knowledge and application of material usage, installation, fabrication, restoration, care and maintenance, administration, legal/contracts, and jobsite and shop safety. The third phase was a comprehensive site visit, which included a facility review, document review, and one or more installation site visits.

Artisan Group™

Artisan Group is the premier network of stone fabricators in North America. All Artisan Group members have achieved, or have begun the process to achieve full accreditation with the Marble Institute of America. The group is among the first granite fabricators in the world to be working towards this distinction. The Artisan Group's extensive network allows the organization to offer the world's best granite from the best sources around the globe. Utilizing the most technically advanced, automated shops in the industry, highly skilled craftsmen ensure that each and every installation meets exacting standards. From classic to exotic, it offers the most extensive array of color choices in the industry, and with short lead times and competitive pricing, Artisan Group granite countertops are closer than one might expect. For more information, visit www.artisan-collection.com.

About Duracite

Duracite was founded in the early 1970's and started in San Rafael, California, specializing in cultured marble. In the late 1970's, Duracite took on the Corian® product line. The Company moved its headquarters in 1984 to Benicia, California, and subsequently in December 2000 to its present location here in Fairfield, California. In 1987 Duracite added fabrication and Installation of Natural Stone to its product line. Today, Duracite is the one of largest fabricators of solid surface, natural stone and engineered stone in Northern California, and also one of the largest in the U.S. Duracite today consists of approximately 130 employees operating out of 10 shops and 5 showrooms from Sparks, Nevada to Arroyo Grande, California and along the Central Coast of California. Our customer base consists of sub-Division homebuilders, large commercial projects, remodel and custom builders, home centers and retail customers.

About Block Tops

Damien Bates founded the company in July 1977. The initial product line for Block Tops, Inc. was Butcher Block furniture and countertops – hence the name and logo. Over a period of time, the sales of solid surface overtook the sales of Butcher Block and became the company's primary product line. That offering has expanded to high-end stone and wood. Block Tops is involved in kitchen and bath remodeling, residential construction and commercial construction with the main office in Anaheim and branch offices in Sacramento and Vista, CA. For more information, visit www.blocktops.com.

About the MIA

For over 60 years the Marble Institute of America has been the worlds leading information resource and advocate for the natural dimension stone industry. MIA members include marble, granite, limestone, sandstone, and other natural stone producers and quarriers, fabricators, installers, distributors, and contractors around the world. The purpose of the MIA's accreditation program is to provide excellence in the natural stone industry and recognize companies demonstrating compliance with quality standards, so that the public values, has access to, and benefits from consistent, competent, and safe fabrication, installation and maintenance of natural stone.