

# Upright efficiency

Vertical panel saws bring production benefits to cabinet manufacturer

By Brooke Baldwin Wisdom



For more than 25 years, Norwood, Mass.-based Metropolitan Cabinet & Countertops has been a wholesale-only distributor of cabinets and countertops, supplying directly to the trade. Its showrooms in Norwood, Watertown and Natick are open to the public, however, offering a wide array of cabinetry from inexpensive stock cabinets to luxurious custom cabinets. Its 25 non-commissioned salaried designers help customers create perfect kitchens at no charge or obligation. Countertops are also a specialty, and all countertops are manufactured in a 22,000-sq.-ft. shop within the 75,000-sq.-ft.-facility.

Offering a wide selection, instant availability and free design service is a business model that has brought huge success to the 120-employee company for obvious reasons. When one of its major cabinet suppliers closed four years ago, however, owner Stuart Elfland decided to take the

Norwood, Mass.-based Metropolitan Cabinet & Countertops has found that two of the best features of vertical panel saws are safety and space savings.

plunge and manufacture frameless cabinetry himself. Many problems had been vendor related, and it made sense to become a vendor himself. Today 35 of his 120 employees work in the manufacturing division of the company. Although Elfland says the transition was not easy, particularly when it came to coordinating all the front end paper work and different components to get a kitchen out the door with no back orders, the company successfully produced 18,000 cabinets in its first full year of production. Today, an average day's production tallies up to 1,000 components.

“Along with distributing cabinetry from eight other manufactures, we ourselves now manufacture cabinetry for both the residential and commercial markets with a full-service cabinet shop,”

says Matt Gaudette, director of operations. “Our equipment arsenal includes a Gabbiani panel saw, two Morbidelli CNC machines, two Gannomat dowel insertion machines and two SCM edgebanders. We cater to remodelers and property management companies here in the Boston area. We also manufacture granite, laminate and Corian countertops.”

## Going vertical

For added efficiency, the company decided to strategically implement vertical panel saws. “I have three Striebig panel saws from Colonial Saw,” says Gaudette. “I use one Striebig in the Corian shop, one in the laminate countertop shop and one on the cabinet assembly floor. Two of the best features on the vertical panel saws are space savings and safety. When working with a regular table saw, I know a lot of woodworkers are tempted to take off safety guards. With a vertical saw,

you don't have a choice. It's very tough to injure yourself. A continually covered saw blade is traveling through a stationary panel. So from a safety end, it is a great saw to have. As far as space savings goes, we are always trying to save every inch of floor space we can. You wouldn't even know there was a saw in our cabinet assembly area. We make a stock cabinet line and stock particular parts. If a cabinet calls for a reduced width, I have the saw right there on the floor where the operator can come over, make one cut, go back to his station and assemble. It's a very convenient saw and extremely easy to use and train people on.

"Additionally, we used the Striebig at one time to do V-grooving in our Corian shop. Volume increased so much we eventually bought a V-grooving machine, but the saw was



Vertical panel saws have made material handling much easier for Metropolitan Cabinet & Countertops

capable of it and certainly suited us well when we were doing a low volume."

When it comes to material handling, Gaudette says handling a panel sheet vertically is much easier than handling it horizontally. "Vertical panel saws are easy to load because you are not lifting a whole panel horizontally and placing it on a table as you would for a sliding saw. We simply stand the sheet up and push it onto the Striebig's rollers,

which are located close to ground level. The vertical saw is stationary and the saw moves on guide ways through the material. We simply line up the saw and zing it right down. It makes for a very accurate, quality cut as well." **MW**

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*For more information, circle: #350 for SCM and #351 for Colonial Saw on the Reader Service Card.*