

SHOW HOME OF THE WEEK

Green concept growing on buyers.

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NOT 'GREAT 'DEPRESSION'

U.S. recession to be over by September, says economist.

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EYE ON THE PRIZE

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Bottle DRIVE

MARTY HOPE
CALGARY HERALD

“Come see our countertop,” says a voice over the phone. “Yeah right, I’ll be right over.”

“No, seriously — come look at it. It’s made of vodka bottles.”
Ever wonder what happens to those empty liquor, wine and beer bottles, those discarded olive and pickle jars, or the Mason jars once the preserves have been eaten up.
These days, there is a growing movement to curbside recycling where all of this glass is saved from the landfill — and in the case of a California company, it is given a new life.
A decade ago, about when the green train started to pick up more passengers interested in preserving the environment for future generations by using the three Rs (reduce, reuse recycle), Vetrazzo LLC came up with the idea of using bottles, jars,

traffic lights, stained glass and anything else made of glass to make countertops, tabletops, flooring and backsplashes for residential and commercial uses.
In the process, it added a fourth R — repurpose.
Because all of the glass is rescued for reuse, most of it from the curbside recycling programs in the United States, Vetrazzo is green.
In fact, the product has received a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) designation.
Besides that, it looks good and is a conversational piece.
“There’s a story in every surface. A story about the life of the glass, where it came from, what it was used for, and its transformation,” says Jean St-Onge,

president of Icon Stone & Tile, a stone design, fabrication and installation company that also distributes Vetrazzo in the Calgary area. “No two are the same, nobody will ever have one exactly like it.”
And to help that story along, as part of the installation process, consumers are given a Certificate of Transformation. If you look closely at some of the slabs on display in the Icon design centre, you can see partial bottle labels and other markings.
Then there are the colours — Ale-house Amber (beer bottles), Cobalt Skyy (named for the blue bottles used by Skyy Vodka), Glass House, Traffic Light Red, and Bistro Green. Every nine-foot by five-foot slab is 85 per cent glass by weight and can include pieces of at least 1,000 glass containers or objects.
Vetrazzo is durable and easy to maintain and has been compared to granite in strength, scratch and heat resistance, and durability.

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Jean St-Onge, owner of Icon Stone and Tile, with a desk made of recycled wine and beer bottles, as well as bits of things like traffic lights and stained glass. Adrian Shellard, Calgary Herald

FROM PAGE II

BOTTLE: Glass rescued

Although the slabs are sealed at installation, some acids will etch the concrete between the glass pieces if not cleaned up right away. Likewise for coffee and tea stains.

St-Onge says Vetrazzo is priced at \$175 per square foot installed, similar to premium granite which can run as high as \$260 per square foot.

"Vetrazzo buyers are mostly baby boomers and other consumers who are conscious of being green but also want something unique, something interesting they can share with friends," he says, adding that Vetrazzo is considered a niche product that is gaining attention by consumers, designers, builders and renovators in Calgary.

Icon has been distributing Vetrazzo since last fall and St-Onge has seen a growing interest in the product.



Detail of the recycled glass chips embedded within the product.

Quebec some key personnel and among the 24 people on staff, there are eight from Mexico and Chile who have experience in the stone industry.

"Business is good, but we've spread out our base to include designers, renovation contractors, and consumers who just walk in because they've heard of us," he says.

But builders remain a major source of business and Icon has worked with Lifestyle Homes, Sabal Homes, McKinley Masters, and Excel Homes.

St-Onge wanted to do more than just manufacture slabs, he wanted to set up a design centre, deal directly with consumers.

"We always try to be creative — and we want to have our customers involved in that creativity."

Vetrazzo is only one of several products being sold at Icon. The warehouse is filled with porcelain, granite and marble slabs from all over the world.



Photos, Adrian Shellard, Calgary Herald

Icon Stone and Tile features products for countertops and walls made from recycled beer and wine bottles.



Calgary Herald Archive

The company helps find a use for materials that would end up as landfill.

Calgarians are people who are receptive to new ideas and trends

JEAN ST.-ONGE, ICON STONE AND TILE

sales and marketing awards gala this April.


It was the appeal of Calgary and its people that lured the 36-year-old from his Quebec home more than two years ago, where he had been in the stone business since graduating from Laval University with a business degree more than a dozen years earlier.

Then he got the itch to get out on his own — try something different someplace else.

Eventually, he decided on Calgary, where the housing boom was in full bloom and the growth potential was impressive.

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