

BEAVERTON VALLEYTIMES

'We're stone junkies'

That's what they say at EleMar Oregon, a Tualatin-based supplier of granite, marble and other exotic stones for use in the home

BY MIKEL KELLY

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MIKEL KELLY / TIMES NEWSPAPERS

Jessica Neilson, office manager of EleMar Oregon, shows the variety of stones on display at the business's Tualatin location. She will represent the company at the Home Improvement & Remodeling Show Sept. 27-30.

One does not take the decision to buy granite or marble lightly. It's not cheap, and it's probably going to outlive the person selecting it.

The folks at Tualatin's EleMar Oregon Granite and Marble ("world purveyors of unique stones") understand that.

"This stuff doesn't date the way manmade materials will," says Jessica Neilson, who manages the office and greets the public at EleMar's facility at 9675A S.W. Tualatin Sherwood Road. "The Italians have been quarrying the marble out of Italy for, oh, 3,000 years."

This year, for the third year in a row, EleMar Oregon will take part in the Home Improvement & Remodeling Show put on at the Oregon Convention Center by the Oregon Remodelers Association. More than 300 contractors, suppliers and manufacturers will be on hand at the show Sept. 27-30, and the visitors to the EleMar display are most likely to run into Neilson.

"I usually work the majority of the show," she says.

Neilson's dad, Darrel Boyd, and Jay Malhi are partners in the business that is also in its third year here.

"We're kind of a little secret in Tualatin here," she says, walking through the warehouse of huge slabs of stone, all different colors, propped up on edge in rows for easy viewing. "What we are is a slab supplier."

Sometimes, says Neilson, people will wander in from the main road and look around – “and they have no idea how this whole process works, so we’ll bring them in and walk them through it.”

‘We’re stone junkies’

And that process can take a little explaining. Customers won’t find prices in the warehouse, and they won’t be able to walk out with a piece of stone until they have a fabricator to represent them.

“Basically, here is not where you’re going to find out how much your kitchen is going to cost,” says Neilson. “A fabricator does that,” and that depends on several factors, including what kind of stone you like, how much you need, the style of edging, etc.

EleMar hands out a two-page list of 40 stone fabricators to its customers and offers free delivery to any of them once the customer has picked one.

“We focus on local fabricators,” says Neilson, insisting that local is an important consideration here.

“We’re all homegrown Oregonians,” testifies Jay Malhi. “We elected to locate here because we live here.”

Malhi and driver Joaquin Romero live in Tualatin. Jessica is a Beaverton resident, and Darrel Boyd lives in Aloha. The only other employee at EleMar Oregon is Olivia McElderry, who helps in the office part time.

“We’re all sort of personally invested in the company, and we’re all emotionally invested in it,” says Neilson. “I guess we’re passionate about it – we’re stone junkies.”

A quick visit to EleMar’s Web site, www.elemaroregon.com, will show you that there are two other EleMar locations on the East Coast (in Boston and Virginia). This small “chain” has some advantages, giving the Oregon store the ability to buy stone on the international market and share the costs.

“We are relatively independently owned,” explains Neilson. “We all act as small businesses.”

‘It’s hard to visualize’

“Our whole business approach here has been service,” says Malhi, adding that customers are given plenty of information, time and freedom to make decisions. “They need to feel confident that they can see the material they’re going to get.”

Nobody at EleMar takes those decisions lightly, he adds.

“Looking at a slab, it’s hard to visualize what it’ll look like on their countertop.”

In that spirit of customer service, the EleMar staff, when told a customer has broken a piece of stone, will try to hunt down a piece from the same batch.

“Sometimes we’re able to accomplish that. Sometimes we won’t, but we’ll make that effort.”

As she walks from one slab to another, Neilson explains, “We focus on the more midrange stones. Mostly, we try to offer stone that’s really different,” she says, adding that EleMar Oregon tries to stay away from safe, consistent colors and patterns, the kind you might see in a spec house.

Though a lot of stone comes directly from Italy, others come from Brazil, India, Madagascar, Norway and Pakistan – often through suppliers in Italy, because they’ve been cutting, polishing and shipping the stone for centuries.

The variety of colors and patterns you’ll find at EleMar range, like ice cream flavors, from white to pink, gold, green and shades of black and brown. Some, like onyx, allows light to pass through it, adding an even more dramatic element to its appearance.

“We just shop and pick out the pretty slabs,” says Neilson. “And if a person says, ‘I really like this one,’ we’ll pick it up and take it outside there – and nine times out of 10, once they see it out in the light, they’ll say, ‘Oh, I really like it.’”

Buying stone can be a little confusing, but the process is pretty straightforward. Rock from all over the world is mined into blocks that are purchased by quarries. Quarries cut and polish the stone into slabs. These slabs are numbered in sequence, packaged into bundles and shipped by container overseas to import-distributors.

Distribution warehouses like EleMar are open to the public for slab viewing and selection. The warehouse staff can give general information regarding the stone cost and help guide customers through budgetary issues. Once the stone is selected, arrangements are made to deliver the slabs to the fabricator for fabrication and installation.

EleMar will hold the stones for a customer for five days with no money down. A fabricator can hold the slabs longer while the quote is processed. If the project is weeks or months down the road, a deposit is normally required to hold the slabs for that period of time.

If a fabricator has not yet been selected, EleMar can provide a list and help obtain quotes for the project.

Selecting a stone is very important and personal process that deserves a lot of consideration. Feel free to bring in color and cabinet samples to compare with the stones. Ask lots of questions. Lighting is important. If you need more light, our staff will provide it. Courtesy is the first rule at EleMar because we understand the importance of your investment in natural stone. It’s an investment that will pay dividends in beauty and functionality for many, many years.