

# TEXSTONE COUNTERTOPS

## Local Materials and Urban Production

by Allison Parrott

HIDDEN AMONG THE TRENDY MIDTOWN HOTSPOTS IS AN OLD RAILWAY STOP THAT has been converted into a warehouse where used concrete and glass aggregate is fabricated into gleaming countertops.

Jeff Kaplan, one of the founders of New Living, is primarily known for converting the old Wagner Hardware on Kirby into a green building supplies store. He cites TexStone as an example of how the company goes beyond simple retail by taking a collaborative approach to incubating ideas that lead to new, locally made products.

The fabrication of TexStone countertops both creates a market for landfill-diverted waste and utilizes local production. According to Kaplan, it is the only locally made countertop, and everything that goes into its production comes directly from Houston. In fact, none of the various components of the countertop have ever been outside the 610 Loop.

The production process is small-scale and fairly low-tech. Basically, New Living purchases glass aggregate from local companies. The glass arrives at the warehouse in 100-pound bags that get emptied into large vats and mixed with concrete. The mixture is then hand-poured into frames and vibrated to remove any air bubbles. Once the concrete cures, it is taken off-site to be polished, then delivered to the job site and installed.

"TexStone was born out of a desire to use local materials and lower the cost of glass aggregate countertops," Kaplan said. By using a microglass aggregate instead of a typical glass aggregate, like TexStone's New York competitor IceStone, New Living was able to skip a step in the production process. This saves money by speeding up production and keeps energy costs down because heat is not needed to melt the glass.

With New Living, Kaplan envisions utilizing Houston's industrial resources to build a new factory model for urban production. TexStone is an early experiment in this emerging, community-based, collaborative fabrication model.

"I think we are at a point when America has to make things," Kaplan said. "This is the moment." ☺



Joel Reyna at the warehouse off Main Street where TexStone is fabricated.

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