

BASIC FABRICATION

When you begin fabricating solid surface materials, you'll find that there are as many ways to fabricate, as there are materials to fabricate. Our goal at Specialtytools.com is to offer ways to fabricate that have been proven by fabricators to work well. Our products are "the best of the best". Indeed, fabricators like you have developed many of the items

you'll see in our line. The catalog is a sampling of the items we carry. Our website, www.specialtytools.com, offers thousands of products for solid surface, plastic laminate, wood, stone and E-stone fabrication. We also have video clips on many of our tools and techniques that give you a clear understanding of how the tools operate.

The most important step of fabrication is often overlooked: leveling your work surface. If you fabricate a top that's not flat it will break from stress. It's kind of like laying up plywood to a form: when you glue up two pieces together with rigid set glue, they hold their form. The same happens with solid surface: so if you fabricate a bow into the top it will stress and break when it is installed on a flat surface. Purchase our fabrication stands or build your own that can be shimmed level before you start fabrication and you'll save yourself a lot of aggravation.

Once you've leveled your work surface you'll need a good straight edge. You can make one yourself out of solid surface, MDF or plywood but it's just not the same as a professional edge. The most popular edges are made of 5/16" aluminum with ground edges for your router guide to run on but the industry seems to be leaning toward the less expensive solid phenolic style with interlocking corners. Either one is good, it's your choice. One thing to consider when purchasing a guide is the length. Once you get over 102" you're talking costly freight, not UPS. If you absolutely need the longer edge you'll just have to bite the bullet. A good way around a long edge is to use a 102" and slide it along the top as you rout. To do this you place the edge where you'd like to rout and place three glue blocks behind it, one at each end and one in the middle. Slide the edge to the other end of the top and place a fourth glue block behind it. You can then slide the edge as you rout without developing a bump in the rout.

The second most important tool is probably the Template Guide which attaches to the bottom of your router. A router bit passes through the guide eliminating the need for a bearing to follow the work. The Guide engages the edge of the straight edge while the bit cuts the work. You do have to allow for the setback distance from the edge of the bit to the edge of the straight edge. Many fabricators prefer to use bearing bits and templates which are fine but the draw back is that every time the bit gets sharpened it becomes less and less flush to the bearing. Another option is Insert Bits. They are expensive up front but well worth it when you

consider there is no down-time and the bit is always the same diameter.

Since I've brought up router bits, let's talk about them for a minute. Our first choice is Velepec Bits. This manufacturer worked closely with Dupont to develop bits for use with Corian. They continue to work closely with Dupont as well as many other manufacturers to develop bits for trimming the different bowls available. We also carry Amana bits which are another good choice. Amana offers many bits that are not offered by Velepec. Saw blades can be another confusing decision. Many manufacturers claim theirs are the best. In my opinion, a blade for cutting solid surface is rarely used to provide a finished seam. That job is generally left to a router. That said, a blade should be Modified Triple Chip design and have adequate carbide to allow for many sharpenings. Number of teeth required to make a good cut is dependant on the feed rate at which the material will be cut. 40-60 teeth are generally adequate; any more and you tend to grind through the material instead of cutting through.

Adhesive guns are available in 2 sizes: the 470ml gun dispenses cartridges used by Dupont Corian fabricators, the 250ml gun dispenses all other manufactures cartridges. Seam adhesive is available through your local distributor or through us. You may want to check pricing on both. We carry both the Cox gun which is an all steel gun great for taking abuse and the Mixpac gun. Both guns do well at dispensing adhesives. Mixing tips for all cartridges of this type are changing industry wide. MFX 08-18 is slowly replacing the tip most familiar, the MCX 08-18. Check with your adhesive supplier for the right tip number.

Choosing a sander is another critical decision; it can make the difference between a bad or good finish. In a 5" to 6" random orbit electric tool, my choice is Festool, especially the Rotex model. If you're looking at air tools, look at our Windstorm line by Beaver Tools. Large footprint sanders are also becoming very popular with fabricators. Gem offers an 11" Random Orbit sander, Performance offers the 11-1/4" HiPer and Surcare offers a 13" and a 15". The

13" model offers a 6mm stroke more like that of the smaller random orbit sanders. Many fabricators use these large footprint sanders to finish their sheets before they fabricate and do their touch up work with the smaller sanders.

When it's time to fabricate your first seam take a look at our new Mirror Seam Fixture. It's about as fool-proof as it gets. Once your seam is cut you'll have to fabricate it. For that we recommend the Beaver EZ-Seam.

Sanding techniques is an issue all by itself. The best fabrication job can look terrible if finishing is done improperly. Sanders available range from 5" air or electric models to 15" large footprint models, the choice is yours. Abrasives should be given a serious look. Microns abrasives are the most used for solid surface. Our Joest abrasives were my personal favorite until Ken and I did a head to head test against our new Klingspor extra-lube product. Take a look at our site for more details on both and the video we shot.

That's about it for basics. We offer tools for all phases of fabrication and we stand behind them all. If you have a fabrication question or a particular question about a tool, just call our office and we'll try to help.

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