



FROM MEMBRANE PRESSING PIONEER to 3-D Laminated Component Powerhouse

BY C.R. TRIMMER

Bierson Corporation – No Longer the Best Kept Secret of the Pacific Northwest

Not that many people know who we are,” says Don Casebier, president of Bierson Corporation. “We started this company in 1998 but we’ve all been around for a while.” Don shares how he and his brothers David and Dan “grew up” in the wood products industry. “Our dad owned a company called Cascade Pacific Industries, and our millwork and wood processing divisions were component suppliers to major door and window manufacturers Anderson Window and Morgan Door.”

In 1989 Don took a trip to Germany to visit Wemhoner, a membrane press manufacturer. Don was looking for a method to replace Douglas fir cutstock, used in panel door manufacturing, with a fir veneer/MDF panel. Wemhoner convinced Don that a membrane press could do the job; they also suggested he investigate the market for PVC cabinet doors. Don ordered a press and Cascade Pacific Industries opened a panel processing division, Progressive Panels.

That’s when Don really got excited about membrane pressing technology. “We were one of the first to bring membrane pressing to the U.S., but back then we were using it to supply PVC doors to national kitchen cabinet manufacturers. Our focus began to shift when we took membrane pressed doors to custom cabinet shops.”

During those early years Cascade Pacific Industries grew from 25 employees to over 200 employees and \$42 million in annual sales. Don believes it was their ability to innovate that was the key to their success. “When our customers came to us with a problem we came up with a solution, usually doing something with membrane pressing technology that had never been done before, and that’s pretty much the beginning of where we are today.”

When Don’s father retired in 1995 Cascade Pacific Industries was sold. Don continued to work there for a few years but was eager to start his own company. Enter Peter Tronquet, former operations manager for Morgan Door in North Carolina. “Getting involved with Don and starting this company was not a difficult decision,” says Peter, “I had been doing business with Don for 20 years – when using vertical grain Douglas fir became impractical Don developed engineered components that revolutionized the way Morgan made fir doors. Don’s



LEFT TO RIGHT: PETER TRONQUET, DON, DAVID AND DAN CASEBIER.

ability to do creative problem solving made being his business partner a very intriguing offer.” Don’s brothers, David and Dan, who had both been active at Cascade Pacific Industries and Progressive Panels joined Don and Peter and the four partners launched Bierson Corporation.

NOT JUST ANOTHER CABINET DOOR COMPANY

With their extensive knowledge of membrane pressing technology, the Bierson partners felt comfortable they could excel in the cabinet door industry. Peter says, “When we wrote our business plan we thought half our volume would be cabinet doors. But that didn’t happen at first – we ended up taking membrane pressing to industries and designers who had never seen it before.”

David recalls his first meeting with Mitsubishi: “Their senior mechanical design engineer, Jeff Nemits, had several parts we had made for other consumer electronics companies. Jeff wanted to understand the manufacturing process. We talked about our capabilities and how we would make his parts. Within a few weeks we were producing high-gloss components for their big screen TV cabinets. We ended up doing millions of dollars with Mitsubishi. It was rock and roll.”



“Bierson has invested in technologies to streamline processes for the best customer value, yet they retain the personal style of a family run organization.”

DAVID WILLIAMS, PROJECT MANAGER FOR IDX

“Bierson manufactured outstanding laminated wood components,” says Nemits. “They met our high quality standards and demanding delivery schedules. Bierson delivered when others could not.”

David also remembers a visit from an international digital piano manufacturer. “Their manufacturing manager came to look at some woodgrain finishes but when we showed him a sample in black high-gloss he got really excited about our ability to replicate their painted finish. Soon we were making parts for a display piano for National Association of Music Manufacturers (NAMM) Show. The piano business took off from there.”

Bierson has also worked with the idX group for a number of years, supplying store fixture components for some of their major retail store projects. “Bierson has invested in technologies to streamline processes for the best customer value, yet they retain the personal style of a family run organization,” says David Williams, Project Manager for idX. “It is the best of both worlds.”

“Bierson is constantly looking for ways to improve what they do for idX as a customer. Rarely has an order been placed that they have not presented interesting questions to help find better options, solutions and overall value in the product.”

Following their strategy of taking the thermofoil process to different industries, Bierson saw an opportunity in configurable office furniture components. Desktops were a perfect fit for the process, where seamless edge profiles and curvilinear shaped tops were seen as an attractive option to high pressure laminate/edge banded products. Bierson contacted Magna Design and began to supply components for Magna’s Tangent desk system. Says Andy Shiosaki, former product designer for Magna, “Bierson was instrumental in launching new product lines while I was at Magna Designs. They introduced us to the thermofoil process and were involved in all phases of the design and development of the Tangent product line. Their input and experience helped me realize the potential of thermofoil and I couldn’t have done it without them.”



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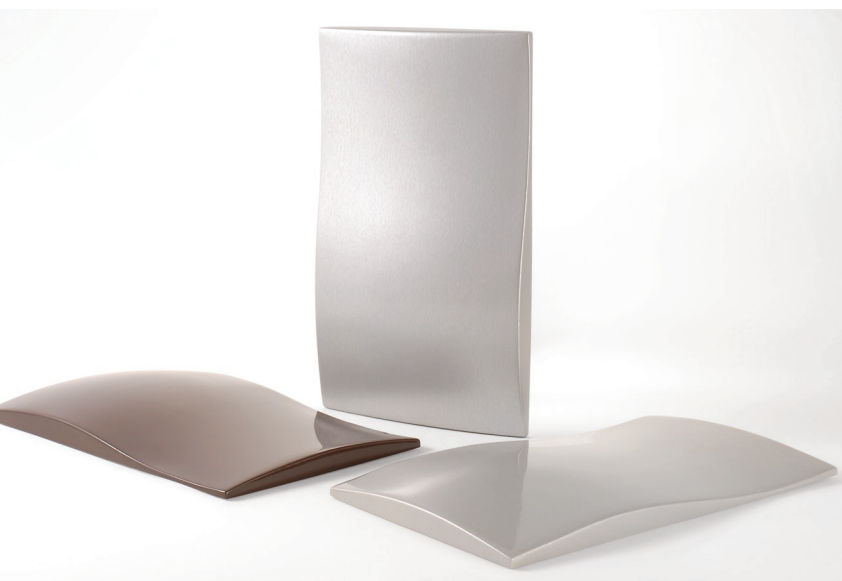
MAKING IT LOOK EASY

From engineering to shipping, Bierson has worked hard at making sure they had the best personnel and tools for the job.

“Our Heian CNC machining centers with multiple tool changers are probably the best in the business,” says Don. “Our latest purchase was a Heian router with an eight inch moulder head that gives us C-axis 360-degree rotation and simultaneous four-axis machining.” David adds, “This means we can achieve a much larger profile shape quickly and at a fraction of the up-front tooling costs; in other words, really cool parts, fast.”

“We have a motorized thermofoil delivery rack that makes changing jobs easy,” says Dan. “On any given day we will be running speaker cabinet parts, shelves and store fixtures, and then finish up with some piano parts. For us, flexible manufacturing is achieved by making sure that our employees are cross trained on all stages of the process.”

Recently an electronic data transfer system was developed for a major U.S. cabinet manufacturer.



HEIAN 8 INCH MOULDER HEAD QUICKLY PRODUCES LARGE PROFILE SHAPES

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DAVID CASEBIER, VP OF SALES AND MARKETING

“We implemented the system so we could cut down our lead times,” explains Don. “On a typical day we get an order for 300 to 700 parts made up of hundreds of individual items, a tremendous amount of data which runs seamlessly through our server to the CNC machines. Code for dynamic nesting is generated automatically, part tracking data is generated, the parts are machined, tracking labels are applied, the parts are sanded and pressed, loaded into carts with part specific location, shipping documents are printed and the customer invoice is generated. All this data passes through our plant without us touching it. We promise turn around in 24 hrs, and in some cases expedite parts the same day.”

Peter adds, “We invested \$50,000 in this custom software, which gave us an immediate advantage. Now our customer can replace warehouse space with production and they don’t pay a labor force to manage an aging inventory. We can supply this same service to any customer that requires a lean manufacturing process and needs components shipped on a daily basis.”

In the midst of this ingenuity and productivity Don finds time to work one-on-one with a designer who’s trying to launch a new project. “We do a fair amount of one-off prototyping and will take small runs of 50 to 100 pieces. We know not everybody needs thousands of the same part but if they do we can handle it,” says Don.

Bierson’s primary substrate is high-grade medium density fiberboard (MDF) in either the standard, fire rated or “green” variety, which contains no added formaldehyde and 100 percent recycled wood fiber. Raw MDF can be thermally fused with a melamine backer or flat pressed with a matching 3-D laminate finish. Finishes, known in the industry as both 3-D laminate and rigid thermofoil (RTF), come in literally hundreds of styles, including solid colors in high-gloss, matte, textured or durable horizontal grades; brushed or “hammered” metallic, rich wood grains and abstract patterns, just to name a few.

Bierson’s machining capability combined with an impressive selection of finishes creates an array of design possibilities. David says, “We are excited about our three dimensional laminating technology because we know we offer design options that are not available with other processes. We see the market demand for graceful contours and seamless edge profiles, and we are aggressively looking for new opportunities for our technology.”

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