

SENIOR "CLASS"

By Russ Lee



It's a tradition repeated every year in secondary schools across the country. The graduating class works all year to raise money, pools its resources and then bequeaths a senior class gift to the academic institution. Typically, such gifts take the form of useful long-term capital improvements, such as a marquee in front of the school, a new concession stand for the ball field or even a well placed statue.

For its Senior Class Gift, the 2008 class of Choate Rosemary Hall Preparatory School, in Wallingford, Ct., wanted to leave behind something that would ease the lives of

succeeding generations of students, while creating a legacy for itself that was etched in, well, solid surface. The result was an undulating Corian bench inlaid with the names of every member of the senior class throughout its 120-ft. length.

That's pretty special by itself. But, what makes this thermoformed Corian bench so unique (and impressive) is what happens when the sun sets on the New England prep school campus. As the light fades, an eerie luminescent glow emerges from the solid surface. All night long silent voices whisper the names of the 2008 class over and over again, only to fade away into the nocturnal air with the re-emergence of the sun.

No worries. There's nothing supernatural going on here – just more solid surface magic created by the likes of ISFA charter member, Sterling Surfaces, in Sterling, Ma. The project is a series of Corian benches running through the center of the campus commons in snake-like fashion. The names of each member of the Senior Class are cut from glow-in-the-dark Lumistone solid surface inlaid into the Corian structure.

"It has been quite a project," said Jon Olson, operations/production manager for Sterling Surfaces. "We cut out more than 7,000 individual Lumistone letters using our CNC machine and routed corresponding cutouts in the benches to accept the letters, which were glued in and trimmed with a

router mounted on skis. The shop literally glowed in the dark from the Lumistone dust."

Imagine playing Scrabble with a set of 7,000 letters that you have to make first. Then imagine cutting out matching grooves in the playing board to hold each of those 7,000 letters.

"After the letter insets were routed into each Corian sheet, the sheets were thermoformed into the shape of the bench," continued Olson. "Thermoforming distorted the openings slightly, which made it hard to fit some of the letters. That created a number of voids which needed to be filled."

The benches have been engineered to withstand the effects of the cold New England winters, as well as the heat and humidity of summer. "There is plenty of room between the benches and the pavers to allow for expansion and contraction," said Olson. "Additionally, the benches were installed in sections with no hard seams."

Why Solid Surface?

This is a case where form, function and design dictated the use of materials. The architectural firm, Studio ABK, did its due diligence researching the surfacing options and comparing their relative benefits. In the end, the glow-in-the-dark properties of Lumistone helped tip the balance toward solid surface as the best choice overall in terms of beauty and long-term functionality.



"We presented wood, aluminum, powdered-coated steel, 3-Form resin, granite and Corian to our client, and they ultimately chose solid surface in part because of the Lumistone letters," explained architect Mai Wu, of Studio ABK. "All other options would have required lighting under the benches. They were concerned a metal bench would be too hot to sit on. Some people were concerned about the maintenance for wood over time. I can't say I know the exact reasons they chose Corian, but I am certainly glad they did!"

The prep school project, which took nearly four weeks to fabricate and three days to install, was professionally fulfilling on several levels, according to Sterling Surfaces managing director, Grant Garcia. "This project is a fine example of collaboration between the distribution spec rep and the fabricator," said Garcia. "Because of the spec rep's referral, we were involved early on, helping to brainstorm ideas and assist Studio ABK, a very open-minded firm, to explore what was actually possible. Finishes, lighting mechanisms, luminescent solid surface and mock ups were all explored before the design was presented to the client and any money exchanged. We truly enjoy giving feedback so early on in a project."

That kind of collaboration between fabricator, specification rep and architect is the hallmark of Sterling Surfaces, which has been involved in a number of high profile commercial projects involving solid surface



over the years. It is an art practiced and developed under Garcia's watchful eye, and which has made Sterling Surfaces one of the luminaries of the solid surface world.

Pun intended.

Editor's Note: Sterling Surfaces was actively involved in the production of the "ISFA Architectural Presentation Kit," which walks fabricators through the mechanics of creating and maintaining profitable relationships with the specification community. The DVD contains archived professional photos, a promotional video targeted to architects and designers,

a step-by-step guide on how to conduct an architect's "lunch and learn" and the new AWI standard for specifying solid surface. It is available to ISFA members free of charge. Non-members may purchase it for a fee. Contact ISFA at 877-464-7732 for more information.