



i take the floor

BY JONATHAN TRIVERS

Washington creativity: It must be the granola

The state of Washington has a mystique about it, and if you move there you must live up to the mystique or they ask you to leave.

You can arrive in Washington as a chain-smoking, vodka-swilling, SUV-driving, football-coaching guy. Within 30 days you must purchase bikes for all members of the family; Birkenstocks with socks are worn on the weekend; you own a pair of pants that have those zippers by the knees so they can act as long pants or short pants — or if you are really weird, one leg long or one short; you know the different brand names for soy milk; you talk about hybrid cars; you coach soccer and begin to worry about global warming.

Now you are allowed to stay.

There is something liberating about all this goodness and granola crunching. It heightens the creative senses. Following are two examples:

Wanke Cascade is an excellent flooring distributor serving the Northwest. It recently introduced Terra Living, a collection of earth-friendly products — namely cork, bamboo, Marmoleum linoleum and Marmoleum click. This is all packaged together in one display unit that helps retailers simplify the purchase process for environmentally conscious consumers who are in the market for a new floor.

The display rack is a recycled, retrofitted Formica flooring display that was saved from landfill, and the promotional brochure is printed using 100-percent, chlorine-free, post-consumer fiber, printed with soy ink. (I licked it; it tastes awful.) Plus, a percentage of the profits will be donated to Ducks Unlimited.

Wanke Cascade has done a first-rate marketing job in tying all these elements together. This really is a great idea and not just for the good citizens of the Northwest.

If you are a retailer in the Northwest you'd best get this, and if you are a retailer anywhere else in the U.S. you need to have this same kind of program from your distributor. Baby boomers everywhere are looking to give back, to be less wasteful, to be genuinely concerned with their environment and their grandchildren's environment. Terra Living does that.

Benissimo Granite Solutions is a simple idea whose time has come. Today, if you want a granite countertop, you either wait a long time for a slab to be fabricated or you need two 12 x 12 tiles and a bullnose to complete the task. (All traditional countertops are 25½ inches deep.) Either way it is labor intensive.

Mike Stupfel, owner of Benissimo

Granite Solutions, goes to a supplier and has it make one 12 x 12; the second one is 12 x 13½ with the bullnose already attached as part of the tile. Two pieces, front to back, and you have a finished look. It is the granite-slab look at a fraction of the cost, but it is still granite.

With that stroke of genius, installers use far less time, make far fewer cuts and have far less waste for

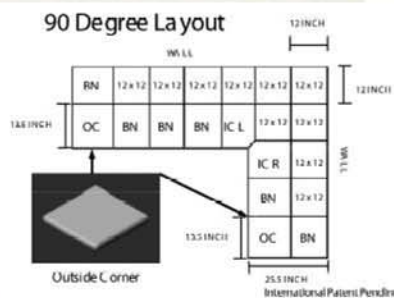
standard countertops or islands. In addition to countertops and islands, this can also be used for staircases, split-level entries, fireplace surrounds and showers and tubs.

Benissimo's commitment to quality control is stunning. Every carton — and every tile in that carton — is taken out and inspected for color match to master sample and workmanship of the tile. (Yes, every tile!)

The inspector signs his name to each carton; the packer signs his name and the shipper does, too. Why? Benissimo believes quality comes from every employee having a personal interest in achieving zero defects.

What surprised me most of all when I visited Wanke Cascade and Benissimo is that no one was wearing steel-toed Birkenstocks. What's with that?

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