

Couple chisel out niche business in 'Counterstone'

By Chris Brawley Morgan Special Correspondent Chris Brawley Morgan: brawleymorgan@oklahoman.com

When Moses Schilling's information-technology job was outsourced, he replaced it with a career "outside the cubicle." At Hertz Corp., he said, people never approached him and said, "Man, that's a beautiful program you just ran." But, he said, now "they do come up and say, 'That's a beautiful island.'" Schilling and his wife, Vicki Schilling, are now in the business of creating Shirestone countertops for kitchen work islands and elsewhere in the home. Shirestone is natural stone that has been pulverized, powdered and combined with hardening agents to create a durable surface. The Schillings' company is called Counterstone Designs. In the north feature home of the Parade of Homes, they created the countertop for a kitchen center island and the sink base in the half bath. The south feature home includes Shirestone countertops in the kitchen, the bathrooms and in a display niche.

New career has 'perfect timing'

The Oklahoma City couple's connection with countertops began last fall, when Moses Schilling began hearing his long-term Hertz job might be outsourced to India. So it was "perfect timing" when the Schillings stumbled upon Shirestone counters at a fall log-cabin home show in Branson, Mo. "We were intrigued by it, the artistic properties that it has," said Moses Schilling, 52. Moses Schilling was laid off and the couple started their own company in late 2007, making them one of more than 170 dealers nationwide. These are some of the reasons why Moses Schilling is a proponent of Shirestone counters: They are hand-colored and hand-poured, as well as stainless, seamless and heat resistant. "You can take something directly off the stove and put it on the countertop," he said. The first countertop the Schillings created was in their own kitchen. "It took me six weeks to put something hot on it. I had been trained not to do that," he said.

Catching a builder's eye

Shirestone costs \$65 a square foot for countertops and \$75 per square foot for a work island. Schilling doesn't bill extra for extras, like chiseling. The business has evolved to the point that the couple has rented a shop in the stockyards area of Oklahoma City. As part of doing business, the Schillings joined the Central Oklahoma Home Builders Association. They discovered participating in the Parade of Home's feature home is a way to showcase new products. "It's really so hard to catch a builder's ear. They really are busy," Moses Schilling said.

Countertops gain following

The kitchen island in the feature home includes a chiseled edge and several old-world cracks. The counter includes a hand-hammered copper sink and sits on olive-green cabinets. The island is a dominant feature in the kitchen. Tim Egan, who built the north feature home, said he will continue to use Shirestone. Egan said he is already using Shirestone throughout a custom home in the Rose Creek addition in Edmond. After talking with Moses Schilling, Egan recommended it to the homeowner. "He bought into it; it's good-looking stuff," Egan said.



BY DAVID MCDANIEL, **THE OKLAHOMAN** Vicki and Moses Schilling of Counterstone Designs show the kitchen in the feature home at 9045 NW 147 Terrace. The company created and installed the counter for the kitchen's center work island, as well as the sink base in the half bath.