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Jenny Maples, owner of Stone Masters of Texas, approaches the stone fabrication business from the perspective of an interior designer.

“I THINK THAT WE HAVE REALLY AFFECTED PEOPLE’S LIVES BY GIVING THEM A PLACE IN THEIR HOME THAT MAKES THEM HAPPY.”

Jenny Maples
Owner, Stone Masters
of Texas

Interior designer is carving a new niche

BY MIKE W. THOMAS

A bad experience with a home remodeling project 12 years ago helped persuade Jenny Maples that she could do better.

Shortly thereafter, she launched her own interior design business, JM Interiors.

“I realized that I had been letting trade people advise me — electricians, plumbers, drywallers — and I did not make great decisions because I did not understand the implications,” Maples says.

Today, Maples understands very well how to do interior design. Now, along with operating JM Interiors, Maples has expanded into a new area — stone fabrication. Ten months ago, Maples decided to purchase a majority share of Stone Masters of Texas, a custom stone and granite fabrication company. The local company was founded eight years ago by Chad Adame, and Maples had been using it as her stone fabricator on

all her interior design projects. But it was essentially a one-man shop and Maples said Adame was struggling.

“You can’t grow a business that way and I didn’t want him to get out,” she says. “That would have been a crime. So I bought the company and asked him to stay on as my partner.”

Since taking over Stone Masters, Maples has been making a push to grow the business, which used to get by with mostly word-of-mouth referrals.

The company cuts the stone and granite for custom countertops and other residential interior features and then installs the finished work.

“Chad didn’t even have his phone number listed,” Maples says with a laugh. “So that is the first thing we changed.”

In addition, Maples has established a Web site set up for the company and is starting to

make sales calls to drum up new business. She said that she hopes to increase Stone Master’s revenues by 40 percent by next year. The company had gross revenues of just under \$500,000 in 2007.

JM Interiors, which often takes on jobs in conjunction with Stone Masters, posted revenues of \$450,000 in 2007.

Design psychology

Maples, a native of St. Louis, came to San Antonio 20 years ago at the urging of her brother who was then a student at Trinity University. She spent some time in the property management business before taking a job in corporate hotel sales for the Sheraton Gunter Hotel downtown. But it wasn’t until she started a remodel on her home that she found her true calling.

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STONE MASTERS: Emphasis on design and customer service helps build stone biz

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"The design business has shown me how important it is to understand psychology when dealing with people," Maples says. "Part of my role is to explain to the husband how important the color of the countertop will be to his wife."

Maples says if something is not right in the kitchen or the bathroom after the job is done, it will bother the wife everytime she sees it.

"Women need to feel good about their environment," she says. "It affects our moods and it can make a difference."

Maples says she tries to help her clients figure out what they like. Sometimes that means educating them on the options that are available.

"I think that we have really affected people's lives by giving them a place in their home that makes them happy," she adds.

Maples says she also knows how important it is to complete jobs quickly. If they install new countertops in a home one day, she will arrange with a plumber to come out the very next day to have everything hooked up.

"We can usually guarantee a one-week turnaround," she says.

Variety of choices

Maples usually meets her clients at a stone yard where she helps them make their selection. The one she uses most often is Young Stone at 107 Nakoma. There, the clients can see the wide variety of stone colors and patterns available to them.

About 80 percent of the projects use granite, while about 15 percent use marble. Soapstone and quartzite makes up the remainder. Marble tends to be more porous and delicate than granite and is thus used most often in bathrooms where

it is less likely to get stained.

The price of the stone is determined almost entirely by availability. Different color stones come from different parts of the world. Texas granite is mostly red or pink. Blue tones come from Brazil. Gold tones come from India. And white marble mostly comes from Italy.

The harder it is to access and the further it is to transport, the more expensive it will be.

Ashley Ullmann, client and design services coordinator for Stone Masters, says prices can vary from \$10 a square foot to \$120 a square foot plus labor for installation. That is why they don't just leave clients to choose the stone by themselves.

"You have to listen to people and help them figure out what they like," Ullmann says. "There are too many choices otherwise."

David Cody, owner and president of Cody Enterprises Inc., a residential home-builder, says he has used Stone Masters to do all the granite countertops in his houses for the past four years.

"They do very high-end, quality work," he says. "The customer service is extraordinary. The way they deal with clients and with me is first rate."

Cody says the service has only gotten better since Maples bought out the company last year.

"We try to distinguish ourselves through our customer service," Maples says. "We strive for excellence."

■ Stone Masters of Texas

What: Stone fabrication company

Who: Jenny Maples, majority owner; Chad Adame, founder and partner

Employees: 5

Annual revenues: \$500,000

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