



Oct-Dec, 2007

Shapes Newsletter

In This Issue

[Labor of Love](#)

[Green Board II](#)

[Show Preview](#)

[ASR September Review](#)

[Ten Count](#)

Quick Links

[SIMA](#)
[FedEx](#)
[ASR](#)
[Surf Expo](#)

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

Shapes Newsletter

Editor: Mike Cianciulli

Labor of Love

A Change of Heart in the Domestic Surfboard Industry

By Bill Bahne and Shea Weber

In the early days, as the surfboard industry grew the workers evolved as well. They were self-taught in the art of shaping, glassing, sanding and glossing. Shapers had to develop their craft using the same tools used in woodworking. They took to using power-planes instead of draw knives. And as surfboards' cores shifted from balsa wood to polyurethane foam, rough shaping became a lot easier. Surfboard shapes, because of the foam core, became more flowing and curvier in all three dimensions.

Good shapers developed great hand-eye coordination. They were able to read the foam and deal with the bumps and twists that were in the blank due to bad mold design or bad glue-ups with the center strip. A standout shaper was the elite of this new industry. To break into shaping, these pioneers had to learn the craft from one of the original guys by doing all the basic rough work such as cutting plain shapes and roughing the blank. Then, after some time, they got to finish the blank. Once they were consistent in their shaping, only then did they advance into the ranks and become known as a good shaper.

Laminators also had to grow with the industry, borrowing material from airplane and boat building industries. Their responsibility was to give the surfboard blank its strength using materials that were new to everybody. They developed techniques that were original and could give the clear look and strength to the surfboard blank. Good laminators were also perched high up in the hierarchy of the surfboard industry. Similar to shapers, to break into this craft meant spending a great deal of time learning from the masters. The same also holds true for sanders, glossers and polishers.

These original people who worked in the board building industry had a love for the lifestyle and wanted to be part of it. Often they would start doing the dirty, dusty, clean up jobs just to get their foot in the door and

then would work their way up to the job that they wanted. In the pre-glass shop era, great pride was taken in working for the big-name surfboard manufacturers. In fact, the workers helped develop the look of that manufacturer's surfboard line.

As the industry grew and regulations came into being, commercial glass shops started up to handle the increase in production. Soon, labor became harder to find. Young people ceased coming to the factory looking for work. Suddenly surfboard manufacturing became just another job. To further hinder things, most glass shop owners did very little to attract new laborers to their factories.

In the early 90's shaping machines came into the manufacturing system. This allowed shapers to produce more quality shapes, without the drudgery of having to cut the blank. This added shaping capability put more pressure on the glass shops to increase production with a limited labor pool. Laminators, sanders and glossers were already running from glass shop to glass shop to perform their skill. While shapers pumped out more boards, there wasn't an increase in the amount of workers -- meaning the overall lead-time for getting boards finished increased. The production time also grew from one week to nearly one month. This played hell with seasonal sales cycles.

Speaking of seasonal sales, shapers now deal with a global market place to sell product. They currently manufacture boards all year long, making for better job security. Most workers in the surfboard industry, even though they are paid by the piece, make decent money yearly. With this shortage of labor, the employees tend to be in a place of control when it comes to their pay rate.

One work-in-progress solution aimed to increase the core board builder work force is reaching the youth. California's El Cerritos Community College has a composites class and surfboard building is one of the major parts of this program. Moving forward, the industry looks to establish vocational schools to train potential employees. Currently, most people don't know there are jobs available or how to break into the industry.

Another idea is that glass shop owner's could set up at high school job fairs and promote the opportunities that are available in the surfboard manufacturing business targeting high schools in coastal communities like San Clemente, Huntington Beach, Oceanside, and Carlsbad. Factories could also set up training programs within their facilities and charge money to train and certify people in the skilled labor positions.

Although in the past, most of the laminators, sanders, glossers, and polishers haven't wanted to share their trade skills with others since they have a good thing going. They set their own hours, demand inflated per piece work wages, adjust their day according to surf conditions, and all without having to worry about anyone replacing them. With a shortage of labor, the shop employees actually control the final cost of the surfboard and the time frame in which it gets done. How many times have you heard, "Sorry, the board isn't done because Johnny Polisher didn't come in to work?"

Shapers often worry about production going overseas but the American surfboard manufacturing industry should first make itself more competitive and attractive. They keep doing things the same way they been done for years. As the old saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Here's some news for you, It is broke and so are more and more board builders.

In Asia, the factories making surfboards train great numbers of workers to do the various jobs. These workers didn't know what a surfboard was or what the materials were before being trained and yet produce a great number of useable boards. If these domestic labor problems aren't

addressed, the trend to go overseas will continue growing. Most domestic board brands would prefer to manufacture here in the U.S., but without an increased labor pool (which will help decrease the production costs, decrease production times, and make the future of domestic manufacturing much healthier as we move forward), it will become more and more attractive to manufacture overseas.

It is evident that the surfboard industry changed drastically in the last few years. The domestic board brands and glass shops should look at these issues they are faced with. There is already a revolution of sorts (technology based), so why not address the labor issue as well? Between the board brands and glass shop owners, there should be a plan to get the control back. Collectively, the industry should find a way to get more people interested in the trade of making surfboards and also help facilitate their learning. Now is the time.

Greener Surfboards, Part II

By Hank Johns, Graphite Master Inc.*

It is well known that there are environmental issues with producing a high-performance surfboard. As last issue's message from Ned McMahon thoroughly explained, this production challenge is truly a paradox. But it's not just the Surfboard Industry; there are inherent problems in the production of all man-made products. So reaching for the pen-ultimate of sustainable, eco-friendly materials and systems is a commendable and worthy long-term goal for us and small, incremental steps can be made to get closer to a "clean and green" objective.

A surfboard is a composite made from three basic material groups: core materials, fiber reinforcements and matrix solutions -- better known as foam, fiberglass and resin. Within each of these primary ingredients there are varying degrees of "clean and green."

Standard polyester resins, used universally today, contain dangerous chemicals regulated by OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration www.osha.gov). The most widely used is SIMAR 249A. Legislation of styrene content for this product requires larger manufacturers such as boat builders, to use alternatives or move out of state. Little known, but safer and greener polyester resins are readily available at the same price, although the surfboard market is reluctant to change.

Why then for example have only about five-percent of Southern California-based board builders embraced this alternative? It is not because of quality or price. Perhaps this is a carryover from the Clark Foam dynasty of "standard production procedures?" It's too soon to tell but since that standard has vanished, this "low hazard" alternative will hopefully grow in its market acceptance.

Epoxy resins with 100% solids and no volatile organic compounds are also now widely available and provide a substantially improved "green" solution to the matrix dilemma. These formulas are legal in all applications, safe, user-friendly and "green." Believe it or not, glassers can, and in some cases do, laminate in their retail showrooms.

Fiberglass fabrics made from silica (sand) are subsequently processed with varying degrees of "green" and "non-green" methods -- especially from one country to the next. Our ability to safely process and regulate this dangerous cleaning process stops at our borders. Even within the U.S., from one company to another, the finishing processes are nasty. Water washing used prominently by one leading U.S. manufacturer wastes heaps of this precious natural resource. Moving away from this kind of solution cleaning can make relative gains towards helping the

environment.

Our industry's fabled green Volan finish is no stronger or better than clear finishes, but looks cool. It also however has chromium as an effluent that carries with it heavy metal pollutants of the worst kind into our ground water.

Pigments and tints also have varying toxicities. The U.S. outlawed the dangerous ones, so most are produced abroad and imported illegally. Manufacturers use them anyway because of their pretty colors. Some base resin additives (optical brighteners and UV absorbers) are now outlawed in Japan because of their "dirty" processing consequences. When will the U.S. do the same?

OSHA, EPA, AQMD ,RULE1162, and the alphabet soup of regulatory agencies that busted Clark Foam reach only to our borders. Although Japan and Australia have similar environmental requirements, imported materials from many origins around the world ignore these stringent "green measures". Sadly, a lot of the Surfboard Industry still folds to market pressures at the expense of our environment.

The future isn't all that bleak though. Many amazing, new technologies are emerging in other industries that will ultimately find their way into surfboard production. We can do our part by taking these small steps today and sharing this information with our bros in the lineup, the sales guy at the retailer and most importantly your board builder and shaper.

*GRAPHITE MASTER has for 27 years, supplied advanced composite materials to surfboard, commercial aircraft, performance marine, sporting goods & automotive industries. Located in Los Angeles, CA. G.M. services the composites engineering community worldwide with carbon, fiberglass, & aramid fabric & tapes. G.M. specializes in epoxy & polyester technologies, closed mold, vacuum processed & lightweight wet lay-up lamination techniques. All surfboard warp fabrics were developed by Graphite Master.

SURF
EXPO

BOARD BUILDERS GEAR UP FOR
JANUARY '08 ASR AND SURF
EXPO'S PREMIERE PAVILION

asr
asr11z.com

January 2008 will mark the one-year anniversary of the ASR/SIMA Board Builders Pavilion. From shapers and foam makers to fin guys and shaping machines, the Pavilion has taken on a life of its own.

Since its inception, the Pavilion was seen as a place for show attendees to hang out and talk shop with shapers and board builders. Its not uncommon to see everyone from Sun Diego founder Dave Nash to Billabong President Paul Naude (and everyone in between) having discussions with the board builders. As one Board Builders Committee member put it, "Everyone wants to talk to the coolest guy in the room and at a trade show that guy is a board builder." This was most prevalent at the last two trade shows in the Board Builder Pavilion. And if history is any indicator, it will be the same at the January 2008 ASR.

Not to be outdone, Florida's Surf Expo will launch the first-ever Board Builders Pavilion at the January 2008 show. Surf Expo in January has long been regarded as a great show for the surfboard builders. Surf Expo has taken notice of that and given the board building exhibitors their own area -- front and center.

The new Surf Expo/SIMA Board Builders Pavilion will be placed in a very prominent area of the new Surf Expo floor plan for January 2008. The Pavilion will be set up along the larger center aisle just as you reach the center of the show. Board Builders from across the country will be there to display their boards, open some new accounts, and talk about the icon of our sport -- the surfboard.

ASR/SIMA Board Builders Pavilion fast facts:

- Floor space expanded to 7,700 sq. ft.
- 25 exhibitors
- Special pricing for Board Builder exhibitors
- Vintage Surfboard Display by Surfing Heritage Foundation
- Reef Board Build Off, Orange County Edition
- Central location on main show floor
- Free beer on opening night compliments of ASR and SIMA

Surf Expo/SIMA Board Builders Pavilion fast facts:

- Total square footage: 7200 sq. ft.
- Discounted booth space
- Booth sizes from 5x10 and up.
- Central location on main show floor
- Special signage and decor for the Pavilion
- 38 10x10's and 12 5x10's spaces available

TWO AND COUNTING

ASR/SIMA Board Builders Pavilion on the rise



The ASR/SIMA Board Builder Pavilion, now in just its second trade show, has more than doubled its square footage and revealed to show attendees that its here to stay. Anyone who spent more than five minutes in the Pavilion was aware of the vibe there as most visitors to the Pavilion talked boards for hours on end.

The Pavilion debuted at the January 2007 ASR. This past September's show (notoriously not a surfboard show) saw the Pavilion grow from 3,300 sq. ft. to 6,000 sq. ft. Some new manufacturers were on display as well as returning exhibitors from the January show, including Dewey Weber Surfboards who had one of the busiest booths in the Pavilion.

"We haven't done ASR September in about eight years because it never was a show that included very many board manufacturers," said Shea Weber. "With the Board Builder's Pavilion expanding into its second show, we felt it was very important to stay involved. It was amazing to hear some of the comments from our customer's that came by the booth like, 'This is the most boards I've seen at ASR in a long time!' It was confirmation that the Pavilion concept is working."

Since the Pavilion has brought board builders back to ASR in a big way, show execs are obviously very pleased. The ASR team is fully committed to the area and plans to grow the Pavilion even more for the January 2008 show.

Show Director Andy Tompkins has been a driving force behind the Pavilion since day one and cited the success of the September show, "Not only did the area allow ASR to showcase its commitment to the surfboard building community, but it also allowed thousands of retailers' access to

new shapers and technology. The Pavilion has quickly become a favorite for buyers on the ASR show floor and we look forward to expanding the area and offering new features in 2008."

And with another great show in the books, there isn't much time to rest as the January show will be here before we know it. The Pavilion will grow even more for the January show, but space is limited so if you want to exhibit in the Pavilion please contact Malia Murray or Dan Moylan at ASR, (949) 226-5574. - Travis Wilkerson

TEN COUNT

Ten ways a board builder can maximize their ASR experience--From show Director Andy Tompkins



1. ASR is the most cost-effective way to meet and influence thousands of buyers from around the world.
2. Exhibitors can hand carry items in to the San Diego Convention Center without additional costs.
3. Exhibitors with up to a 10 x 30 booth space can take advantage of the 'GES Cart Load Service' and move-in up to 400 lbs. of booth material for under \$50 per load.
4. All exhibitors that commit to ASR booth space by November 9th receive a complimentary half page spotlight in the ASR Digital LineUp.
5. ASR can help exhibitors find buyers via our hard copy attendee list provided free of charge with each booth space.
6. All exhibitors can post up to five efforts they are undertaking for the environment for no charge on ASRbiz.com.
7. ASR offers a special rate to shapers who exhibit in the central ASR/SIMA Board Builders Pavilion.
8. ASR provides an exhibit sign to each exhibitor at no extra charge.
9. ASR helps promote each and every exhibitor with contact information and product category on ASRbiz.com and the on-site floor plan.
10. ASR will serve host a keg on the opening night, Thursday, January 24th in the Board Builders Pavilion.