



# Premier EuroCase: DILIGENT IN GROWING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

BY LEAH WHEELER

The popularity of modern, elegant gloss surfacing has soared in recent years, and these days, high-gloss treatments can be seen throughout the world in applications ranging from retail signs to promotional displays to office furniture to residential cabinetry, fixtures and paneling.

Andy Wilzoch, president of Denver-based Premier EuroCase, a full-service panel processor and manufacturer of thermally fused laminated panels, was an early innovator in high-gloss panel-process manufacturing. Premier is a leading North American producer of world-class high gloss and a top supplier of laminated panels for commercial office environments, custom cabinet components and store fixtures and furnishings used in some of the country's biggest retail chains.

Ten years ago, Wilzoch jumped on the opportunity to achieve better response time for his clients by self-producing TFL panels with a Wemhoner short-cycle press. He made large investments in top-of-the-line equipment, installed a certified clean room in his manufacturing facility and began producing Reflekt high-gloss acrylic surface panels. Reflekt is a breakthrough product in high-gloss

acrylic panels. It delivers impeccable surface consistency, color richness that enhances depth and clarity, and high resiliency, and Premier says it is the most scratch-resistant high-gloss surface on the market.

Reflekt panels consist of a premium quality MDF substrate with a co-extruded ABS/PMMA high-gloss acrylic top layer. The MDF core material is carefully selected to have low surface variance, so the Reflekt surface is not flawed by substrate imperfections. Using the in-house short-cycle melamine press, melamine is laminated to both sides of the MDF substrate to ensure the board is balanced and will not warp. The melamine faces are then thoroughly cleaned with brushes containing a mild alcohol solution that draws off any remaining traces of dust, foreign particles or loose matter.

Next, high quality acrylic sheets are laminated to the panels using heated PUR glue inside a Class-100 (ISO5) clean-room. This process guarantees Reflekt is as close to perfect as technologically possible. The glass-walled cleanroom creates a climate-controlled, 100 percent dust-free environment as positive air pressure is generated through HEPA filters.



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INSIDE THE CLEAN-ROOM, PREMIER'S BÜRKLE PUR LAMINATING LINE EMPLOYS A HEATED GLUE SYSTEM IN WHICH KLEIBERIT POLYURETHANE GLUE IS HEATED BEFORE BEING APPLIED TO THE PANEL SURFACE.



PREMIER EUROCASE LAMINATES 4' X 8' REFLEKT PANELS IN THICKNESSES RANGING FROM 1/4" TO 3" AND ALSO PROCESSES THE PRODUCT INTO FINISHED COMPONENTS SUCH AS CABINET DOORS AND DRAWER FRONTS.

Inside the clean-room, Premier's Bürkle PUR laminating line employs a heated glue system in which Kleiberit polyurethane glue is heated before being applied to the panel surface. This renders a perfectly consistent, smooth coat and also retards the setting of the glue, giving the bond added strength. PUR (polyurethane) is a reactive glue that interacts with existing moisture in the material and in the air to adhere dissimilar materials together. PUR, for example, can bond acrylic to wood, steel or other materials securely. The bond is virtually impenetrable.

The PUR line process is precise, and every panel is laminated at exactly the same temperature to ensure consistency. As the panels move along the conveyer, they are automatically mated to the acrylic sheets as they pass through the precision pressure roller.

**THE SECRET SAUCE**

What gives Reflekt panels their luminous color and exceptional resiliency are the high quality acrylic color sheets that are used in the manufacturing process. Produced in Austria by Senoplast, four-ply

acrylic sheets are made using a proprietary process that applies an ultra-hard coating of UV lacquer, two layers of acrylic and an ABS base sheet together.

The UV lacquer top coat gives the product extraordinary durability and hardness. It is the secret sauce that makes Reflekt panels the most scratch-resistant high-gloss panels on the market, Wilzoch said.

"The Senoplast product we use is recognized as the best acrylic sheet in the market today, and the finished product does not require the care and maintenance required by some competing brands," he said.

Reflekt panels are available in 16 colors, two of which are exclusive to Premier.

Once the acrylic sheets are bonded to the panels, they are allowed to cure for 48 hours before processing or shipping. An edgebanding treatment is applied that creates a water-resistant seal. Premier EuroCase laminates 4' x 8' Reflekt panels in thicknesses ranging from 1/4" to 3" and also processes the product into finished components such as cabinet doors and drawer fronts.

Premier uses two precise Homag KAL 310 laser edgebanders to



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ANDY WILZUCH, PRESIDENT, PREMIER EUROCASE

render invisible edge components suitable for the most discerning customers. Color-matched mirror gloss ABS or a V-Edge (two-tone) PMMA banding are both offered, and the result is a sleek, luminous contemporary look similar to back-painted glass.

Given the ultra-smooth sheen and reflective patina of high-gloss finishes, surface defects are visible, and the tiniest imperfection can spoil a high gloss surface.

“It’s incredibly difficult to do high gloss and do it well,” Wilzoch said. “You’re working with a very thin material on MDF substrate, and the tiniest speck of dust or flaw in the base creates a visible blemish. The precise fabrication process and the quality controls we put in place are all designed to yield an extremely high quality, resilient, scratch-resistant high-gloss product at a reasonable price.”

Indeed, Premier EuroCase’s Reflekt rivals the quality and gloss level of the heavy, costly solid acrylic panels fabricated in Europe, and it sells for a more moderate price.

#### **IT’S THE TECHNOLOGY, STUPID!**

The company’s ability to deliver made-to-order components in just 10 business days is enabled by its world-class technology and efficient manufacturing processes. Wilzoch, a self-confessed “machine junkie,” said he has always been intrigued by technology, and since opening his shop in 1987, he has been diligent about growing through technology.

“We are deliberate about adopting new processes and adding fabrication capacity that is complementary to our current production capabilities,” he said.

Premier has made investments in high quality German production equipment, including a short-cycle melamine press, two laser edgebanders, multiple panel saws, point-to-point CNC and BAZ machines, a robotic inventory control system, as well as the world-class clean room for production of high-gloss acrylic surface panels.



All of the equipment is computer controlled and accessible from a central network that manages parts distribution, drawings and overall production capacity.

Premier EuroCase Reflekt high-gloss panels will be showcased in the mHouse, which is slated to open Sept. 30, the day after the Surface & Panel Symposium. The mHouse is in Watertown, WI. The symposium will be in Milwaukee.

“Reflekt is one of the industry’s finest new products, and its applications in the mHouse project will demonstrate some of the exciting new possibilities that exist in modern residential interiors,” said John Aufderhaar, publisher of *Surface & Panel*, which is building the mHouse. Premier EuroCase is one of the original sponsors of the mHouse.

The process of making high-gloss panels calls for attention to detail at every step.

“It’s a combination of having the right technology, the best equipment available on the market, and a terrific team of employees, many of whom have been with the company for 10, 15 or even 20 years,” Wilzoch said. “We have a lot of in-house knowledge, and that is a pillar of our ability to maintain high quality standards.

“I think we are recognized as a great place to work, and good people want to come work for us because we are a progressive company and we have awesome technology. We also have unequivocal quality standards that everyone understands.”

Wilzoch founded Premier EuroCase nearly three decades ago in a modest 900-square-foot industrial space. Since then, the company has grown to occupy a 300,000-square-foot state-of-the-art manufacturing facility that employs 115 people.

“My philosophy is to invest in the best and compete at the highest level. Be the best, or get out of the game,” Wilzoch said. “That’s what’s brought us to where we are today.” **s&p**



PREMIER'S SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT IN EQUIPMENT INCLUDES A WEMHONER SHORT-CYCLE MELAMINE PRESS, HOMAG LASER AND TRADITIONAL EDGE BANDERS, HOLZMA PANEL SAWS, AND WEEKE POINT-TO-POINT MACHINES, ALL OF WHICH ARE COORDINATED, NETWORKED AND WORK TOGETHER AS A SYSTEM. THE PREMIER FACILITY ALSO HAS AS A GLASS-WALLED CLASS-100 (ISO5) CLEANROOM AND A BÜRKLE PUR LAMINATING LINE.



## Premier EuroCase: A HOUSE OF TECHNOLOGY

Just as Italy has become the global hub of design innovation, Germany has established itself as an engineering leader and go-to source for top quality manufacturing equipment used in materials fabrication, said Andy Wilzoch, president of Premier EuroCase, a top North American panel processor and manufacturer of thermally fused laminate panels.

Wilzoch noted that virtually all of the fabricating equipment and many of the materials used in his 300,000-square-foot state-of-the-art Denver manufacturing facility are from Europe, made by prominent names such as Homag and Bürkle.

"Having the latest technologies and manufacturing processes allows us to stay a step ahead of our customers' expectations as well as our industry rivals," Wilzoch said. "To uphold our philosophy of taking care of customers, our investment in technology has gone beyond the initial investment and into continued additions and upgrades to repeatedly put us in a position to be a market leader and to respond quickly to customers' demands."

Premier has made significant investments in high quality German production equipment manufactured by the Homag Group and imported by Stiles Machinery of Grand Rapids, Mich., including a Wemhoner short-cycle melamine press, Homag laser and traditional edgebanders, Holzma panel saws, and Weeke point-to-point machines, all of which are coordinated, networked and work together as a system. The Premier facility also has as a glass-walled Class-100 (ISO5) CleanRoom (see pg. 13) and a Bürkle PUR laminating line for production of high-gloss acrylic surface panels.

"This is precision equipment that is engineered intelligently. It is the best of the best, and it is what enables us to maintain accuracy, cleanliness, consistency and tight quality control," Wilzoch said. "The process of making high-gloss panels calls for attention to detail at every step along the way. It's a combination of having the right technology and the best equipment available on the market."

Advanced technology is embedded in the materials that Premier uses, too.

Premier's high-gloss Reflekt panels, prized for their luminous color and exceptional resiliency, are made with acrylic color sheets produced in Austria by Senoplast.

"The Senoplast product we use is recognized as the best acrylic sheet in the market today," Wilzoch said. "Our ability to deliver first quality panels and made-to-order components in just 10 business days is really made possible by the amazing technology that is embedded in our processes and our products."

"Being known as a company that is forward-thinking and progressive in our materials, methods and machinery also helps us attract and retain good workers," Wilzoch said. "Some of our employees have been with us for 10, 15, or even 20 years, and that gives us a solid base of in-house knowledge and experience that complements our great technology." ■

— by Leah Wheeler