“Doing What I Want to Do”

Dennis Hopper’s company, Ora B. Hopper & Son, Inc., of Phoenix, Arizona, has been in the lath and plastering business for over 50 years. They introduced Dryvit to the Phoenix area in 1974 and quickly became an EIFS pioneer, selling the first 20-story highrise clad in EIFS west of the Mississippi.

From 1974 to 1984 the company operated as a subcontractor and Dryvit distributor, installing over eight million square feet of EIFS in Arizona. By 1985 they began concentrating on distribution and phasing out their contracting business.

Recently, Dennis Hopper has found a new market niche—“custom specialty fabrications” using the EIFS technology—and he has uncovered some tremendous opportunities. More importantly, as he says, “I’m doing what I want to do. I’ve always admired anyone who could turn his ‘avocation’ into a vocation.” His projects meet unique artistic needs as he discovers more and more ways to utilize EIFS materials.

How It Started

The move to specialty fabrications was fairly easy. “As we concentrated more and more on distribution, solving architects’ design problems and specifying work for our customers, we were asked to create special EPS shapes for architectural details, corporate logos and signage,” he says. “My personal interest in the visual arts goes back to my degree in advertising from the University of Southern California. I relate to the artistic community, and we are fortunate to have a large pool of creative talent in Scottsdale, Phoenix, Sedona and Tucson. My challenge was to introduce the artisans to the possibilities of the EIFS system and how it could be added as a new medium to their palette for artistic expression.”

Their first major commission was a 16-foot, three dimensional horse with an Indian riding bareback armed with a rifle. The sculpture was attached to the eight story Mesa, Arizona headquarters of McDonnell Douglas, the manufacturer of the Apache attack helicopter. Their proposal was one-half the price of the competition (molded fiberglass). The custom graphic was sculpted by Susan Furini (who holds a Ph.D. in fine arts from Arizona State University) in collaboration with Hopper Mechanics. This successful project led to a large buffalo for a North Dakota college and four major murals for other Furini clients.

But the ability to provide the service on a national basis was made possible because his path crossed with George Treadway, the “guru” of computerized hot wire cutting of expanded polystyrene. Treadway Industries has turned EPS into an art form. His reputation was established for the architectural shapes he supplied to the EIFS contractor at Disney World and Universal Studios theme parks in Orlando, Florida.

A Disney production team visited Treadway and asked if he would consider opening a West Coast studio to supply his unique products for work anticipated at Disneyland in Anaheim, California.

Fortunately, Hopper persuaded him to locate in Phoenix and become a tenant in an 8,000-square-foot warehouse adjoining his showroom and offices. Treadway invested $100,000 in specialized cutting equipment and hired...

The horse and Apache sculpture created for McDonnell Douglas Helicopter’s AH-64 Apache plant, one of the first EIFS projects.

Construction Dimensions/February 1992 31
three skilled people to run the operation. Phoenix is a perfect location to service the western EIFS market, and they’re only five minutes from the airport.

With the “Treadway connection,” his experience in finishes and a network of artists, Hopper says he now has confidence to explore new markets on a national basis.

One of those unique clients is a leader in the auto show business. Hopper met them through the chief graphics designer at Toyota USA during their support work with Dryvit when the new Lexus dealerships were being designed with EIFS.

In the past two years, they have been challenged by their designers to fabricate original displays that include:

--Monument signs and large Toyota graphics for the “Skins Game” Golf Tournament.
--Six giant tennis balls and canopy for the entry to the Mazda Tennis Tournament in La Costa, California.
--Four major backdrops (including neon) and sandblast finish on car platforms for the Mitsubishi 1992 Model Dealer Show in Dallas, Texas.
--A full-scale EIFS mockup set of the new Toyota Image USA dealerships, erected at the MGM Hotel in Las Vegas.

The most recent challenge was to create 250 linear feet of a six-foot high facia (with signage), radius corners and panelized. The 14 panels were cantilevered from a structural steel tubular frame suspended 20 feet above a display of the new 1992 Toyota Camrys. The display opened in New Orleans, Miami and Detroit.

This type of work is really show business; the car is the star and each event is opening night. Anyone who wishes to play in the “auto-show game” must be detail oriented and committed to quality craftsmanship, be a team player and understand there are no excuses for not meeting schedules. “In this business you must anticipate your worst nightmare and prepare for contingency plans to make sure it doesn’t happen,” says Hopper.

**EIFS “tennis balls” for the Mazda Tennis Classic in La Costa.**

**Giant Pine Cones in New York**

Hopper was recently approached by “Design Solutions,” a display firm in Dallas, Texas, and a local artist, Tom
DeLapp, to produce 14 large pine cones to hang in the lobby of the Equitable Life Assurance building in New York for the Christmas season. Called “the largest pine cones in the world,” six of them are six feet tall, three are eight feet tall, three are 10 feet tall, and two are 12 feet tall.

The largest of the pine cones is eight feet in diameter, and since the cones were to be suspended upside down in and interior atrium, the pickup points had to be engineered and designed into the three part components of the 10 and 12 foot cones.

The cone cores were handmade with radius hot wires. PVC and steel tubing was embedded in the cores with threaded eye-bolts. Various needle sizes were digitized on the Treadway computer, and hundreds were cut by the electronic wire. Each needle was hand sculpted and received a #6 steel rod for attachment to the cone core. Hopper then sprayed the core and needles with a special two-part urethane protective coating with a special fireproof additive to pass the New York City fire code.

The needles were bonded to the core with a Dryvit A/P adhesive, received a primer, gold paint and gold glitter. The packaging was another problem to be solved, but by hanging the pine cones in a wood frame, the finished product made it to New York with minimal damage.

Hopper says he is proud of this job because no one had ever created EPS pine cones this large before. He remembers thinking before he accepted the purchase order, “If we can’t make pine cones, then we shouldn’t be in...
Pine Cone Construction

Workers cut the main cores of the pine cones from EPS.

Individual pine cone needles were created one at a time.

After assembly a water-based gold color was sprayed on.

The needles were individually sprayed with the special urethane fireproofing coating.

After spraying, cones and needles dried outside.

Workers glued individual needles to the cores after they had been sprayed, using long nails and Dryvit A/P adhesive.
Glitter was applied over the gold color to give the pine cones a festive holiday appearance.

Bill Best, a member of the design team, shows the scale of one of the smaller cones.

Completed cones were crated ready for shipping to New York the display business.

An Exciting Medium

A recent project involved working with a local artist on unique mosaic columns for the Barry M. Goldwater Airport in Phoenix. Treadway and Hopper created the basic shape for the columns from EPS and clad the surface with netting and primus, and the artist adhered mosaic tiles to the columns by hand. Ten columns are spread throughout the airport.

Hopper has just completed working with the Scottsdale Center for the Cultural Arts. He provided EIFS material for 19 artists to create mixed-media sculptures for a fundraiser. All 19 pieces of work were sold at the fundraiser for over $1500 each.

“We’re looking into creating a line of outdoor sculpture for landscape architects,” Hopper says. “I’d be interested in talking to AWCI distributors about potential sales representation for this line.”

Hopper notes that his work has opened a world of opportunities. “It’s quite exciting as a medium,” he says. “I’ve met some very talented people, I’ve worked closely on special projects for some of the largest companies in the world, and I’ve enjoyed doing it.”

Hopper concludes, “I spent 25 years as a plastering subcontractor to find out what I really wanted to do.”