



Making money in mirrors

By Christina Lewellen

for glass shop managers who think the days of making money in mirrors are long gone, it may be time to take a closer look. “The mirror business is still a viable business,” says Hershey Blitstein, senior vice president of sales, Creative Mirror & Shower, Chicago. “It has not completely disappeared from the scene like a lot of people are thinking.”

Mark Pritikin, president, Creative Mirror & Shower agrees. “The glass shops that are not promoting mirror are completely missing the boat. There’s a huge market for mirrors,” he says.

Homeowners are putting a lot of thought and money into customizing their bathroom shower enclosures, vanities and tiling to finish it off with a “big box” mirror, says Erica Chandler, co-owner, DEsigned Glass, a retailer in Burnsville, Minn. “We’re starting to see people put more money into custom mirrors.

Antique mirrors are popular right now, as well as beveled frames and custom shapes. Homeowners also are seeking framed mirrors, some with contemporary frames and some antique frames and flea market finds, Chandler says. “People are buying frames they like, and having us put in a quality mirror.”

Although the once-popular dining room mirrored wall seems to be a trend going to the wayside, mirror applications are not limited to the bathroom. Consumers are mirroring home gyms, closet doors, wet bars and kitchen backsplashes, says Pritikin. “The mirror market is out there, and it’s probably bigger than ever,” he says. “It’s just different.” Mirror design is getting increasingly creative with tilting mirrors, mirrors installed among the tile in a shower, mirror-on-mirror overlays, and custom shapes and designs.

The right skills

While off-the-shelf, inexpensive mirror options at big box retailers may be daunting for glass companies, Chandler asserts that offering a better quality, customized product is a profitable opportunity. Department stores and chain retailers offer limited size options and the mirror itself may be a far cry from “vanity grade,” she says. If a consumer is dealing with warping or the silver coating peeling from the glass, it’s easy to help them see the value in a better quality product. Many times, the price difference between a custom mirror and a stock mirror isn’t significant, she says. “People think that



Far Left: Glass shops like Creative Mirror & Shower, Chicago, find that offering high-quality, customized mirrors is still a profitable market.

Top right: Homeowners spend a lot of time customizing their vanities, shower enclosures and tiling to opt for a low-grade, off-the-shelf mirror, retailers say. Photo courtesy: DDesigned Glass, Burnsville, Minn.



Bottom right: No longer only for dining room walls, mirror applications include home gyms, bathrooms, wet bars, kitchen backsplashes and decorative accents around the house. Photo courtesy: Creative Mirror & Shower, Chicago.

a specialty shop means they're going to end up paying an arm and a leg, but that's not true," she says. "It really doesn't cost what they were thinking they'd have to spend to get a mirror cut."

Pritikin contends that some glass shops may have lost sight of mirrors in recent years as they've focused on more lucrative shower enclosures. "A glass shop can offer quality mirror and expert installation and there's no other type of company that can do that," he says. "With the whole shower door market that's taken off in the last 10 years, a lot of glass companies, with their shower doors and automatic cutting lines, have almost lost their expert mirror skills."

With some glass shops having turned their backs on mirrors, there's even more opportunity for retailers who want to stay the course. "In any market, when there are fewer people doing something and still the same level of demand, you can make money at it," Pritikin says. "We're positioned as a custom mirror specialist. We install mirrors, use only the highest quality and even transport in box trucks, inside the trucks, so they're not getting rained on and exposed to road salt."

This type of focus is valuable to consumers, especially for those who have experienced firsthand the quality issues that come with low-grade mirrors, Pritikin says. "I had a woman in here yesterday who bought a mirror from an Internet site," he says. "It came in with a blemish, and she ended up sending it back three times." Eventually she gave up on the Internet mirror and turned to a specialty retailer to complete her project.

Creative Mirror & Shower's Chicago showroom drives the majority of the company's mirror business, executives say. "The showroom is critical because a customer can see what they get, and not guess what they get," Pritikin says.

"It gives them a chance to see what the actual

mirror looks like in the room setting," Blitstein says. "When someone comes into our showroom and sees all the beautiful displays, they can see that mirrors are still a necessity."

Add-on sales

Mirrors give glass shops an opportunity for an up-sell when representatives are already in a home for a shower enclosure or other glass project, Blitstein says. "If you're going into a home for a shower door lead and you see where a mirror application would work, you tell them and explain why. Nine times out of 10, you'll make an additional sale."

"The frameless shower door business still is a good business, but mirrors are also a good business, especially when combined with other aspects of what you offer," Pritikin says. "We have a lot of 'add-on' pricing. We're already there [at the home], so we give them an incentive to do mirrors at the same time."

"As a full service shop, I started to do custom mirrors," says Mel Gordon, president, Gordon's Glass, Warminster, Pa. "Anytime I went in to measure for a mirror if there was no shower door, I'd say, 'Why not look at a shower door?' Now it's the other way around. I say, 'While I'm here, let me tell you about custom mirror options.'"

Chandler says the types of mirror projects her company offers are a result of customer inquiries and requests. "Don't limit yourself," she advises. "Listen to your customers, and they're going to tell you what you need to be doing." ■

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