

DURCON
A WILSONART COMPANY



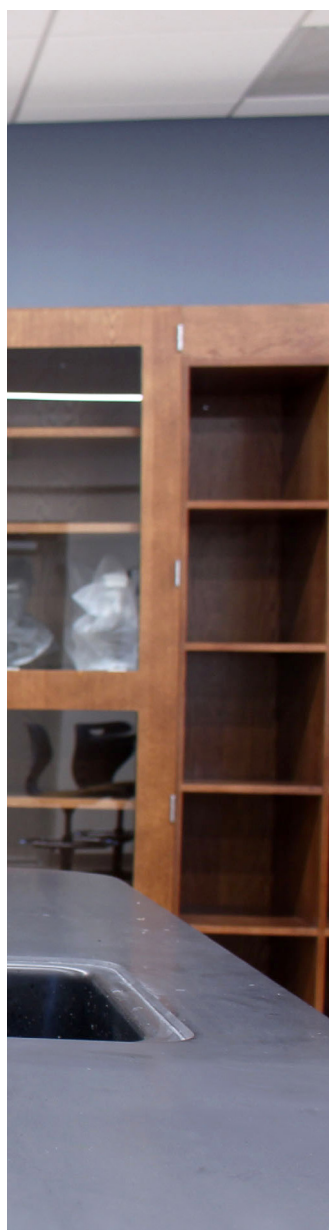


INNOVATIVE

WORK SURFACES

& More

DURCON[®]
A WILSONART COMPANY



Renowned for manufacturing high-quality epoxy work surfaces, sinks, and accessory systems engineered to withstand harsh chemicals and high temperatures, DURCON® A WILSONART COMPANY is the world's largest producer of epoxy for laboratories. The company's work surfaces and sinks are famous for their durability and are found in research facilities, public schools, universities, and government and industrial sectors around the world.

Written by Robert Hoshowsky

“Our products outlast the buildings they are in, which would fall apart around it before the epoxy corrodes. It's very hard to destroy,” says DURCON® Vice President Kent Cook. “And because our product doesn't wear out, we are dependent on new schools going up and renovations in order for us to get new product in.”

The story of DURCON is one of technological innovation, ingenuity, evolution, and recognizing the needs of the marketplace. Back in the early sixties, parent company Duriron began

fabricating piping and fittings from epoxy resins – also known as polyepoxides – which had outstanding fire and chemical resistance. At the time, laboratories were still using thick slabs of quarried stone as work surfaces, and epoxy resin was applied to make them better withstand day-to-day challenges from chemicals and heat. As the laboratory market grew, the decision was made in the seventies to branch off from Duriron. The name changed to DURCON, and the focus shifted to fabricating durable epoxy work surfaces. ▶▶

- ▶ The company continued to expand over the years. It moved locations to a larger facility in Taylor, Texas, was once known as LabTops and even added global fabrication operations in Poland and Malaysia. Other milestones include a new phenolic resin laminate, achieving ISO 9001:2015 certification, and plenty more.

To begin its modern era, DURCON was acquired by Wilsonart® LLC in 2013. Wilsonart is a respected manufacturer and distributor of engineered surfaces including laminate, solid surface, quartz, and more. The acquisition has proven to be extremely beneficial for both Wilsonart and DURCON.

Wilsonart has been in business for sixty years and operates in over one hundred countries worldwide in sectors from education to healthcare, retail to residential. "It has been fantastic," says Cook of the acquisition.

Although it was the largest laminate and engineered surfaces company in the United States, Wilsonart did not have the type of access to the laboratory surface market it wanted, the type of access DURCON did. The acquisition of DURCON immediately opened up this business space. "We are the best in the country at it, so Wilsonart acquired the number one player in this space."

DURCON, now a part of the Wilsonart house of brands, is a complement to the larger offering of engineered surfaces. "DURCON adds a niche that they didn't have before, and they provide us resources and strength we didn't have before, so it's a good fit."

Wilsonart continues to make significant investments in DURCON's 130,000-square-foot facility, located in the town of Taylor, Texas, a few miles northeast of Austin. Wilsonart first helped create separation in the system of mixing, pouring, curing and fabricating epoxy, creating a safer, organized environment.



Additionally, Wilsonart installed air-conditioning in parts of the facility that did not have it, providing a welcome reprieve from the heat for DURCON's 350 to 400 employees, especially during the Texas summer months.

DURCON obtains as much raw material as possible from within a 500-mile radius of its facility – primarily from Oklahoma and Texas – as part of its LEED certification. One of the company's product lines is environmentally responsible Greenstone. These specialized epoxy resin countertops incorporate post-consumer recycled glass and are used in buildings wanting to acquire LEED points.

DURCON unveiled its latest innovation last June. DURCON Solicor-CR (the CR stands for Chemical Resistance) boasts many advantages and was "developed in conjunction with DURCON parent company Wilsonart to give designers and builders what they have long asked for – a lightweight, easy to fabricate, chemical-resistant work surface that is the same color the entire way through," according to the company.

DURCON Solicor-CR is strong, and because it is, at 7.4 pounds per square foot, about half the weight of the industry norm 1-inch thick epoxy, is light enough to be applied to vertical as well as horizontal surfaces. It is moisture resistant, withstands corrosive chemicals, and is Class A fire-rated, heat resistant, and scratch and impact resistant, making it exceptionally well suited to schools, the pharmaceutical industry, healthcare, hospitality, retail, research facilities, government, and many other sectors.

It grew from a similar product aimed at the laboratory market, a pressed phenolic material called Solid Phenolic Compact (SPC), which uses pressed paper with resin as a binder and has a thick black core between two color sheets. "The innovation – and this is a big deal for the laboratory space – is the solid color core; it has the same DURCON Epoxy-matching color throughout, where the core used to be black," says Cook. "Soligor (no CR) was first a Wilsonart product, developed as a pressed paper product with the same color on top and bottom as well as the middle. Then this Soligor was given the chemical resistant treatment and now we have Solicor-CR, and that's the real innovation." Solicor-CR is available in DURCON Graphite and DURCON Gray, both made to match DURCON products Epoxy Resin, SPC, and Greenstone available in Graphite and Gray as well.



"Customers love it," comments Cook. Solicor-CR allows for a broader, more modern look to lab work surfaces and design and is being embraced by labs, designers and architects alike. Laboratories on university campuses are more open and visible these days, with greater amounts of glass being used so more of the lab can be seen. As a result, architects give more thought to lab aesthetics. In the past, options were limited to black epoxy; today – with Solicor-CR – shelves, furniture, and even modesty curtains on desks can be incorporated into the overall design.

"Laboratories can now have epoxy surfaces for their everyday, heavy-duty worktops, and they can also have matching shelves and matching furniture made of Solicor-CR. The best part is that every surface is both color coordinated and chemical resistant. This is an option they have never had before. So for the architects and designers, it opens up a whole new world of visual lab design."

DURCON has played a vital role in the construction of significant laboratories over the years. In 2013, Singapore's Campus for Research Excellence and Technological Enterprise (CREATE) was recognized for "excellence in laboratory design, materials, and construction" with the Laboratory of the Year award by **R&D Magazine**. DURCON was the supplier of the epoxy resin work surfaces in the CREATE facility. Again, in 2016, Lab of the Year winner the Electrical and Computer Engineering Building at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign had DURCON epoxy work surfaces in its facilities. "**R&D** looks at the best, most cutting-edge labs in the world for their prestigious Laboratory of the Year award," says DURCON's Marketing Manager Matthew Solomon. "More often than not, labs in the competition are using DURCON epoxy tops; the best of the best use DURCON."

DURCON products are subjected to rigorous analysis, including being tested for resistance to dozens of volatile and non-volatile chemicals. DURCON has received the employer award of excellence as selected by Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area and is a founding member of the Scientific Equipment and Furniture Association (SEFA).

DURCON continues to find new ways to support its customer base. As one of the largest fabricators in the U.S., DURCON's customers are asking the company to fabricate other materials outside the laboratory. In addition to fabricating Epoxy and phenolic, DURCON has capabilities to fabricate other materials such as Solid Surface. This capability will help DURCON serve its customers outside of the laboratory and across other areas of schools, universities and industrial buildings.

The United States is the company's largest market, although the Middle East and Asia are also significant sales regions. DURCON's fabrication locations in Poland and Malaysia supply



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customers in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Russia and the Asian markets, including large customers in Japan.

DURCON attends trade shows such as the upcoming Pittsburgh Conference on Analytical Chemistry and Applied Spectroscopy (PITTCON) and ArabLab expos, attracting buyers from over one hundred countries. DURCON specification representatives travel the country meeting with architects and designers to ensure DURCON products appear in specifications. The company is familiar to laboratory planners, designers, and casework companies that bid on jobs.

"You'll be hard-pressed to find a specification for epoxy in a laboratory space that doesn't have a DURCON specification in it," states Solomon. "We are extremely well-known." DURCON also hosts training programs, customer events, and more at its Taylor, Texas, corporate headquarters.

"DURCON remains the world's largest fabricator for laboratories," says Cook, "and just as we've expanded with Solicor-CR, it is exciting for us to expand our fabrication expertise into areas outside the laboratory as well. Where that used to be limited to laboratories, we are now headed towards being the custom fabricator of all surfaces because our customers are asking for it, and that's a good next step for this business, and we are pretty excited about that." ■

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206 Allison Drive, Taylor, Texas 76574 | P: 1.512.595.8000 | F: 512.595.8400

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