

Putting glasswork ahead of the pack

LARRY KENIGSBURG DESCRIBES A RENOVATION PROJECT IN NEW ZEALAND THAT USED DIGITAL PRINTING TO CREATE LARGE-SCALE DECORATED ARCHITECTURAL GLASS

metro GlassTech, a glass supplier and manufacturer based in New Zealand, recently purchased DIP Tech's GlassJet, an industrial direct-on-glass digital printer. This versatile flatbed unit is suitable for many glass applications, including interior and exterior architectural glass.

Traditionally the creative possibilities of designing on glass have been limited by screening – an expensive, labour-intensive process that involves set-up, cleaning, storage and reclamation which makes the use of multiple unique images cost-prohibitive. With the GlassJet, short-to-medium runs are cost-efficient and have a fast turnaround.

Recently, Metro GlassTech was given the opportunity to provide the glass for the renovation of the Wall Street Mall in Dunedin, New Zealand. Owen Booth processed the supplied files, scaling and tiling them to suit the glass sizes provided by the construction company.

AN UNEXPECTED CHALLENGE

The glass sizes provided Owen with an unexpected challenge. "Despite the architects being notified of our maximum print size, we were given panels about 3890 mm wide," he said. "We had to tile them, print one section, then rotate the glass and stitch the remainder without it looking awful. We had just received the GlassJet software update a week prior, with the 'print top to bottom' option."

The project presented several other specific demands. The architects' design required that the glass and inks had to be very durable because the glass is exposed on both sides to the elements. They also wanted to use the printed image to create a lower opacity to control the light entering the offices. Other than that, the architects just provided images scaled to the right aspect ratio for each section.

The GlassJet quickly and digitally processed the images,



THE PRINTED GLASS WALLS OF THE LIFT INSIDE OF THE BUILDING



A PRINTED GLASS FRONTAGE WALL ON THE SECOND FLOOR, CLAD TO THE OUTSIDE OF THE BUILDING

accommodating a wide variety of file formats such as EPS, PDF, JPG and TIF. It received the images directly via the network. The GlassJet easily handled variable data for tiling projects, numbering each pane in accordance with the designer's plan.

APPROPRIATE CLEANING SOLUTIONS

Owen had only one major problem: finding the best cleaning solution to deal with the residue from the various steps involved in glass processing, such as cutting, drilling and polishing; the glass also had marks from machinery tracks that were impossible to see until a light dusting of ink is printed on it, as the droplets tend to attract or repel on dirty areas. Therefore, cleaning the glass properly was essential before the GlassJet could do its job.

The GlassJet eliminates most of the barriers that previously stopped Metro GlassTech from accepting projects. "The GlassJet saves money and reduces production time by printing multiple colours at once. Being able to print white and black in the same pass effectively halved the print time," Owen added.

"We have several forthcoming



PRINTED GLASS DECORATION IN THE BATHROOM

projects that are perfect for this application," he concluded. "One in particular is of a lion, nine metres tall, for a brewery. It uses a lot of complex shading. To do this the traditional way is not an option, as the cost to prepare 12 screens for a one-off job just wouldn't be economical. With the GlassJet, the brewery will receive a beautiful rendition of the artwork on glass exactly as specified." ■

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