

"Vitamix is one of the most recent projects completed by C.T. Taylor Construction. With an additional \$60 million currently under construction, C.T. Taylor is proud to be one of the largest and most successful builders in the region."

A Perfect Blend

Bold new design mixes with nod to history at newly expanded Vitamix headquarters

By Doug Bardwell | Photos by Jim Maguire

Turning onto Usher Road in sleepy Olmsted Township, you are not expecting to see a world headquarters campus nestled in the woods. Originally purchased for a family farm, this 22.2-acre plot still showcases the 3,400-square-foot, kit-built log cabin that was the first expansion of the original Northeastern Ohio home of Vitamix.

But with popularity comes the need for more space and we now witness the completion of the modern-day Phase III expansion. The current \$12 million, over 42,000-square-foot addition brings the company's Olmsted Township campus to more than 182,000 square feet.

What's the formula for such meteoric growth, you ask? Take a wildly popular icon in American kitchens, mix with a sincere desire to improve people's health, blend in modern marketing to an international market, and there you have it. How much growth? How about international sales now in 100 countries, contributing to 500% growth in the last five years. The year 2013 saw the production of over one million machines here in Northeastern Ohio.

Setting the table

Way back in 1921, William "Papa" G. Barnard decided it was time to start a business of his own, promoting kitchen utensils from his home in Westpoint, Illinois. Americans were becoming used to new conveniences like automobiles, the hair dryer and the electric razor. Determined to improve the nutrition of the nation, in 1937 he set about to deliver a blender where the value far exceeded its \$11.59 purchase price. After demonstrating and selling the units for two years at the Cleveland Great Lakes Exposition, he decided that the north coast was the area where he wanted to build his new business.



In 1942, Papa's son, William "Bill" G. Barnard purchased the original 12 acres in Olmsted Township, setting up a base of operations for the company's future growth. As adjacent residential properties became available, they were purchased, giving the corporation the space needed for much of their anticipated growth. From day one, the buildings have always been non-smoking, and now they have a non-smoking campus.

Papa and Bill created the world's first infomercial in 1949. In their program, Papa Barnard turned the tables on cooking culture, showing the country how to improve their health with whole foods. With his infectious smile, his sincere message and the promise of better health, phones rang off the hook that night at the WEWS-TV studio.

In 1969, it was Bill who introduced the country to the Vita-Mix 3600, the first

machine that could grind flour, knead bread dough in three minutes, blend ice cream and even make hot soup.

Bill's son, Grover took over in 1985, and brought assembly in-house, where it still remains today. That same year, brothers Frank and John developed the first commercial blender – the Flurry. With John's engineering background, significant advancements in technology followed, making Vitamix the world leader in high performance blending.

In 1997, an international division was created and was spearheaded by John's daughter, Jodi Berg. In 2009, Berg became president, and in 2010 she became CEO, while John became executive chairman.

Rearranging the ingredients

With the completion of Phase II construction in 2010, the company finally added a new shipping facility that could



RECIPE BUILDING Created for further developing recipes, products and for pleasing the palates of customers and visitors, the Ruth Barnard Culinary Center (top) is a high-tech kitchen for chef presentations and experimentation with various ingredients and machines. In the reception area (bottom), visitors can browse the equivalent of a museum interior featuring the company's timelines and various informational exhibits.

handle the increased daily traffic of large semi-tractor rigs leaving with thousands of units.

Because of the rate of growth being experienced however, still more space was going to be needed – and fast.

Kenneth Emling, RA, NCARB, principal of Richard L. Bowen + Associates Inc. had worked with Vitamix on Phase II and started again with work on Phase III in September 2011.

"The goal was to provide Vitamix with additional office space, additional flexible, collaborative meeting spaces and a state-of-the-art culinary center for recipe development," Emling says. "Due to the fact that the original shipping docks were no longer in use, this area became the logical place." It was decided right from the start that this next addition would be more progressive in its design than the previous additions, Emling adds.

"This was meant to coincide with the growth of the company," he says.

"We still use stone and wood to blend in with the former building's rustic feel, but we've added some high tech metal panels, solar glazing and shading panels for their new look."

Cleveland-based design firm Karen Skunta & Company became a key contributor. "Our firm was fortunate to join the team to add memorable, authentic and unique elements of branding, both internally and externally," says Karen Skunta, president and creative director. "It was actually Jodi [Berg's] idea to have the company's brand be represented in the environment. With that in mind, our first recommendation was that 'Vitamix Red' be used to announce the company as you drive in, before you even see the signage."

Now as you drive down Usher Road and before you even get to the driveway, through the trees you can see the dramatic, multi-angular red portal that frames and announces the entry to the reception area.

"The materials and new facade really reflect our progression and growth as a global brand," adds Ivan Sim, director of real estate and facilities for Vitamix.

Digging in

Repair of customers' units is still done in Olmsted Township, but assembly of all new Vitamix units moved to a 175,000-square-foot facility in Strongsville in 2012. It was this facility that United States Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew visited in May of 2013, using it as an example of vital U.S. manufacturers who actually export product to the rest of the world.

With the assembly function relocated, the demolition and new construction could begin; but, with the space right in the center of the property, this wasn't going to be easy.

Plans were bid in spring of 2012 with C.T. Taylor Construction being selected as general contractor. Construction began in May 2012.

An additional 143 parking spaces were added first for the number of new employees joining the firm and to replace some spaces that would be lost under the new addition. That didn't allow for the 75 construction workers who would be coming though.

"Whenever you have a large commercial construction project in a residential community, there's the potential for unique challenges," explains Sim. "I am grateful that we have a wonderful relationship with not only the township, but also our neighbors. They've both been wonderful to work with. We also asked a lot of our employees, and they responded so positively, knowing that the end result would be worth it."

"The residential neighbor to the north allowed us to park some heavy equipment on his property while construction was going on," relates Ryan Fink, project manager at C.T. Taylor. And the church across the street allowed the construction crews to park there during construction.

The main facility had been growing linearly since the original addition of that log cabin in 1950. "By now, all utilities and communications wiring were running like an umbilical cord right through the center of 'the pole barn,' the space to be demolished," says Emling. Much of the wiring was hung from trusses above.

ELEVATING ATTENTION A floating glass stairway with stainless steel handrails leads to second-floor offices.

Before the trusses were removed, wiring needed to be relocated, meaning interruptions of service for employees throughout the building. Daily meetings helped to coordinate expectations and C.T. Taylor performed most demo and noisy operations before or after hours. Sound-rated construction partitions were installed where possible to minimize interference with normal operations.

"We removed the skin from the structure and working in phases, removed the trusses while also installing new LVL [laminated veneer lumber] to support the structure," recalls Fink. "We needed to install a new, single-sloped roof to tie into the east side of the addition, but the walls remained as they were."

The new second-floor level would be four feet different than the adjacent offices, which needed to be combined. Three-hour fire shutters separate all openings between new buildings and old, while allowing large windows to make the two areas feel as one. A new elevator installed along the common wall has separate landing levels so both floors are ADA compliant.

For the addition, multiple materials were used outside: an ashlar patterned cultural stone, aluminum composite panels and a curtainwall system.

Roofing consisted of white T.P.O. (Thermoplastic Polyolefin) for energy savings for the majority of the space, with a small section of vegetative roof. Standing seam was used where the old truss roof was removed.

Completely new Mitsubishi, variable refrigerant flow units were used for better energy efficiency, being able to cool certain zones while heating others. With branch circuit control, the system can remove heat from spaces where cooling is required and recirculate the heated air to areas needing heat.

Site lighting outside is configured such that zero footcandles of light leave the property. Along with the other energy efficient decisions made on the project, the owners hope to receive Silver LEED certification.

Outside, a curved stairway leads down to a large terraced area that has tables and chairs available during the warmer months. On the third floor, a



door also opens onto a slender exterior porch so employees can go outside and get some fresh air.

Another directive from Berg was that she wanted all employees to have access to as much natural light as possible. The wooded campus also makes for interesting views in most directions. With that in mind, most private offices are located in the building core with full-height, glass corridor walls. Low office cubicles are then used closer to the exterior walls, where they also enjoy floor-to-ceiling views out the expansive curtain-wall windows. Grey, solar-tinted glass and aluminum sunshades prevent heat gain during the summer months.

"If we do have offices on the exterior, you'll notice we use floor-to-ceiling glass front partitions," Sim says. "This provides transparency and allows everyone to benefit from the natural light and the views of the landscape."

Berg's office also has a notable feature — a transparent ceiling tile. That's so she and her visitors can look up and see the last piece of steel erected on the expansion, signed by dozens of employees before being hoisted into place.

Office One Furniture and Services provided space planning and furnishings of the occupied office areas. "We have been working with Vitamix for over 11 years which has given us the privilege of knowing the intimacies of how the Vitamix

culture has developed over time, and how their office space supports that," says Sal Parrella, president of Office One.

The company also installed a sophisticated sound-masking system by Soft dB. "This system actually listens to the voice activity levels of each office area and self-adjusts the masking noise level in real time according to the need," he says. "This reduces the distractions of overheard conversations, increasing employee comfort and productivity. When the noise levels drop during less active times of the day, the masking follows along and lowers as well."

Flooring materials change depending on the area. Heavily textured grey carpet squares echo the stone textures found on feature walls and provide a perfect backdrop for the occasional seating areas done in bright, bold colors. Vinyl, rubber and ceramic floors can be found in other utility spaces.

The Vitamix name and brand represent "vitality," so a neutral palette was chosen for the interiors and serves as a backdrop for the Vitamix product to be displayed. Photos of the products made by the Vitamix also lend a splash of color where used. Vitamix Red is strategically used to accentuate the brand throughout the space.

The final mix

The completed package is stunning. From the Vitamix Red portal to the main lobby, the customer is made to feel like they are entering a place made just for them – which they are. As they wait in the reception area, they can browse the equivalent of a museum interior with the company's timelines and four "heritage boxes," displaying information about the first four company chairmen.

Continuing further into the first floor space, one arrives at the Ruth Barnard Culinary Center, named for Berg's grandmother, who developed and published the first Vitamix cookbook showcasing techniques and recipes using whole food. A high-tech kitchen, perfect for chef presentations and experimentation with various ingredients and machines, it is also a working laboratory for innovation. It was created for further developing recipes, products and for pleasing the palates of customers and visitors.

Walls and ceilings are a special combination of textured and angular elements, all designed for sound absorptive pur-

poses when 15 to 18 blenders might be operating simultaneously. The balance of the first floor is primarily for meetings or collaborative spaces.

Taking the floating glass stairway with stainless steel handrails and aircraft cabling to the second floor, you'll find yourself among the product management and senior leadership teams.

The third floor mostly houses sales teams, but this is also where you will find the 1,200-square-foot fitness center. With shower facilities, it's ready to service those who work out as well as those

who like to ride their bikes to work. It's just another reason why Vitamix is a favorite in Cleveland's "Top Workplaces" list each year.

After seeing the photos of the products made by Vitamix and after watching the videos of how easy the dishes are to prepare, it's no wonder Vitamix needs to keep expanding – and it's wonderful to have them based right here in Northeastern Ohio. **P**

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