

Artistic Plating Company's new nickel/tin line can be used for simultaneous rack and barrel plating in unison. It features a patented plating and rinsing system that increases production and saves water.

Plating Shop Overcomes Disaster; Emerges With New Direction & Future

On October 7, 1996, fire destroyed the finishing shop at Artistic Plating Company, Milwaukee, WI. It was a devastating experience for owner John Lindstedt and the company's employees. Getting through the disaster together has made the company stronger, wiser and better prepared to meet the needs of its customers. It has also provided John Lindstedt with enhanced respect and affection for the people who run other plating jobshops in Milwaukee's surface finishing community.

Artistic Plating Company is a family-owned surface finishing jobshop that was started by James Lindstedt and his father, Harry, after James returned to Milwaukee following military service in World War II. Before the war, James worked for Adolph Werner, the original silversmith in Milwaukee. While employed there, he learned silver and gold

plating, primarily finishing flatware and sacred vessels used in local churches. After James started Artistic Plating, he continued to specialize in the type of decorative plating that he learned from Werner.

In 1959-60, a series of jobs for Square D Electric Company launched Artistic Plating into the industrial plating area. The jobshop found it could fill a "niche" by plating parts that required more than just an ordinary industrial finish. Some parts required a little higher quality finish and special handling. Artistic could provide it. Soon after, other companies, such as Display Corporation and Allen Bradley Company, were sending parts to Artistic for processing.

James' son, John, grew up in the business. He worked at the shop after school and during summer breaks while attending college. He received a BS in chemistry from the University of Wisconsin, and completed post graduate

studies in electro-analytical chemistry at Arizona State University.

After college, John served four-and-a-half years in the U.S. Navy, including a tour of duty on a submarine during the Vietnam War. "I spent 14 months of my life under water," he said.

Following military service, John joined his father in the family plating business. When he started, the company had seven employees, with annual sales of about \$250,000. Today, the company typically employs 75-80 people, and has annual sales of about \$5.5 million. John has been at the company's helm since 1989, when his father retired. The business is still at its original location in downtown Milwaukee.

John's commitment to preserving the environment eventually led him to spearhead the pro-active involvement of Milwaukee's plating community with the local regulating authorities, and fostered his involvement in AESF's Government Relations program.



The company has noticed an increase in demand for its production polishing services since the fire.

Fire Destroys The Plating Shop

Lightning from a rare October thunderstorm struck on the morning of October 7, causing a fire at Artistic Plating that burned the jobshop to the ground. It was a sobering experience for John Lindstedt.

"I saw 25 years of my life in ashes, and I no longer had control of any of it," said John. "It was now under the control of other authorities: The police and fire departments, the environmental regulators, health department, insurance company and the bank."

For six weeks following the fire, John could do little except work toward satisfying all of the requirements of all of the entities with an interest in the company. "It consumed all of my time," he said.

Customer Needs Had to be Met

It wasn't long after the fire that customers began to call Artistic wanting parts plated. They were sorry to hear about the fire, but it didn't matter, they still had a business to run. John had a dilemma. How could he process parts without plating lines?

Jobshop Friends Come to the Rescue

"If it were not for good friends in the plating business, I would not be in business today," John said. "They literally saved the business for me."

Three family-owned jobshops were quick to offer a helping hand following the fire. Milwaukee Plating Company, located just across the street from Artistic, was the first. The company's president, Al Matticotti, visited John and offered him use of Milwaukee Plating Company's process lines while

Artistic's lines were being restored. So, after Milwaukee Plating ran a full shift during the day, an Artistic crew would rack and run parts on the lines at night or on additional shifts, to provide customers continuing service. "It really saved a lot of our business," John said. "It gave us time to get some temporary arrangements completed so we could get up and running after the fire."

Reliable Plating Works, Inc., another Milwaukee jobshop operated by the Maliszewski family, became the temporary administrative headquarters for Lindstedt following the fire. "They were there as soon as they heard," John said. "Whatever I needed—equipment, drums, any supplies—I just called Jaime (Maliszewski) and he would find it for us. Their help enabled us to get back to producing a lot faster."

S.K. Williams Co. provided its entire production laboratory for Artistic to conduct analytical tests.

Rebuilding

It was six weeks after the fire before the site was chemically stable. All liquids and other materials from tanks and retention areas had to be recovered and stored in drums to await treatment before they could be disposed. There were

125 solutions and 53 rectifiers involved. The entire electric power system was completely destroyed. All walls were structurally unsound and had to come down. There was virtually nothing left.

After clean-up and salvage operations were completed, Lindstedt built a temporary roof, primarily to keep out the snow and rain so that some reconstruction could be completed on the shop floor.

The waste treatment system was the first thing to be rebuilt. When it was up and running, temporary plating lines were built so the company could start plating some gold, and begin treating other waste left behind from the fire. All liquid waste was treated and the solids were shipped to a licensed reclamation center for proper disposal. Temporary tanks were installed to handle rush jobs for some customers. By this time, it was already Thanksgiving.

Before making a commitment to rebuild the shop, John Lindstedt had to deal with some very serious questions. He called on his most trusted advisers—family and friends—to examine all options.

"We had to consider a lot of things," John recalls. "Should we rebuild at all? If so, should we upgrade or change our processes in any way?" After careful deliberation, the decision was made to rebuild with some major changes.

Changing for the Future

From a practical standpoint, plans were made for some changes during the rebuilding phase, such as switching from



Artistic offers a variety of electroless nickel plating and other electroplating processes, including bright tin, solderable tin, immersion tin, silver, gold, bright nickel, Watts nickel and sulfamate nickel.

electric to more cost-effective steam for the heat supply, and planning for strategic placement of plating lines to make the best use of space.

Looking to the future, a decision was made to put more emphasis on functional plating, but still offer decorative plating. The company is focusing on the electrical power distribution industry and other industrial manufacturers with corrosion requirements. To help accomplish this, Dan Kopplin was hired to head a sales force for Artistic. With 25 years' experience in the industry, Kopplin has a background in functional plating and a thorough knowledge of the territory.

Artistic is now marketing more tin and nickel plating, such as bright nickel, Watts nickel, sulfamate nickel, and multiple electroless processes. Other functional processes offered include bright tin, solderable tin, immersion tin, silver and gold.

A permanent roof was completed on January 25, and a traditional, manual-hoist silver line was put into operation in the front of the building. The electroless nickel line was functional about May 1, and an automatic nickel/tin line was started on June 23. The last line to be put in operation was the automatic silver/nickel line, which was started on July 28. The nickel/tin line is an automatic rack and barrel line that operates in unison. This gives customers more options and helps Artistic provide a quicker turnaround on parts.

All equipment in the plating lines was supplied by Hardwood Line Manufacturing Company, Chicago, IL. All tanks can use DI water. Barrels are designed with a patented plating and rinse system that is more efficient. It

uses about 80 percent less water, while rinsing and plating approximately 30-percent faster than traditional barrel plating systems.

The powder coating and production polishing operations are located in a separate building and were not affected by the fire. The polishing operation recorded a significant increase in business following the fire. "If you can't sell plating, you sell whatever you can deliver," said Kopplin.

Management Team

A major change was made in the company structure when John decided to establish a management team of key people to run the plant, and create an active board of directors to oversee operations of the business. The management committee is empowered to run daily operations, and all departments report to the committee.

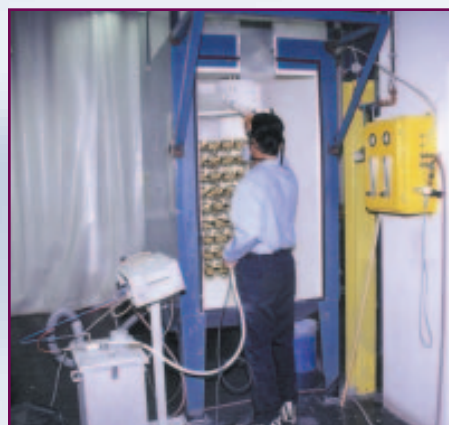
As company president, John reports to the new board of directors, which consists of John, his father, a sales professional, a financial consultant, and a technical expert who is thoroughly familiar with the plating industry. Another board member is the owner of a small business (not plating) that is about the same size as Artistic.

The management team consists of Dan Kopplin, vice president of sales; Terry Collins, director of operations; Jim LeClair, plant manager; and Toni Nagle, technical manager.

Keeping Its Good Qualities

Artistic is expanding on the unique qualities that have made the company successful in the past. The jobshop was a pioneer in the Milwaukee community in pollution prevention and was one of the first to install an effective waste treatment system. Artistic is continuing to emphasize a strong commitment to protecting the environment.

It's also a people-oriented company. Employees enjoy the work and the challenge of resolving problems for customers. John says the corporate philosophy is: "Produce for the customer, regardless if it is easy or difficult." It's an engineering approach. "We know



The powder coating operation gives Artistic customers more options, including clear coatings for plated parts.



we have to make money," John says, "but the challenge of solving a customer's problems comes first and making a profit will follow."

Kopplin's personal goal is to double business for the shop by developing a sales force and production staff to deliver quality finished parts on time. "We'll find the work because we can take advantage of the things Artistic does better than other shops," he says.

Discussing the experience of the fire, Lindstedt says: "It was the worst thing I've ever had to go through. Losing your business is a tragedy of such magnitude that you cannot handle it alone. It is because of the guidance of my God, the support of my wife and father, the hard work of all Artistic employees, and the commitment of the metal finishing community to help me and the company, that Artistic Plating survives today. Because everyone pulled together, we were able to rebuild and become even better than we were before. The company now has the best equipment it has ever had, and is better prepared to succeed in the future." P&SF



Quality finishing is emphasized in all finishing processes at Artistic Plating. These parts are being racked for powder coating.