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## Former engineer turns to green building materials

By [ARI KRAMER](#)

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Trees cover the land between Amee Quiriconi's home on Squak Mountain and nearby Cougar Mountain. But even in a desert, her views would probably take on a green tint.

Last year Quiriconi, formerly head lighting designer with Abacus Engineered Systems, launched Tiger Mountain Innovations. She's spent months in her garage mixing waste paper, flyash and granite dust with Portland cement to form Squak Mountain Stone, a recycled-content slab for countertops, tables and shelves.

Quiriconi hopes the brand will become an environmentally friendly alternative for consumers who aren't in the market for the more pricey Corian or Richlite. But even if testing shows her slab needs some work, Quiriconi plans to keep at it until her efforts turn a profit.

"I made the company ... before I really knew what I'd be making," she said, sitting by an end table covered with a "weeping willow" slab, her brand name for green. At this point, Quiriconi is the both manufacturer and main customer. "A lot of people make products before they have a company."

Quiriconi moved to the Seattle area eight years ago, eventually settling in Issaquah. She grew up in Salina, Kan., and studied architectural engineering at Kansas State University.

Quiriconi's schooling focused on concrete, steel, mechanical and electrical engineering, and business management for construction and design. "When I was in college, nobody talked about being resource-efficient and using green building materials," she said.

That changed when Quiriconi started at Abacus, where she specialized in energy conservation, performance contracting and lighting design. In 2000 the firm did electrical and



Photo by Ari Kramer

**Amee Quiriconi got interested in green building projects while working at a local engineering company and now has started a company to make a recycled-content countertop material.**

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lighting design for the Seattle Justice Center, one of the city's first U.S. Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified buildings.

That project sparked a passion for green building. Quiriconi took American Institute of Architects green-building courses, read books and enrolled in a Sustainable Building Advisor program sponsored by Seattle City Light and Seattle Central Community College.

Last summer, she earned a degree in Environment and Community from Antioch University. She said her company, which she incorporated last year, was inspired by a paper she wrote at Antioch about "import substitutions," based on Michael Shuman's book "Going Local: Creating Self-Reliant Communities in a Global Age."

Shuman advocates nurturing local businesses that operate in an efficient and environmentally friendly way. Quiriconi said she enjoyed brainstorming with other students about Shuman's ideas, but wanted to put them to work. If the company grows and she hires help, Quiriconi said employees will have to buy into her values.

But for now it's just her. Her family's income now comes mostly from her husband, Sean, a Microsoft software testing engineer. When Quiriconi isn't taking care of her 18-month-old son, Oz, she's often in her garage, adding recyclables to Portland cement to see which mixtures perform best.

Her garage is a shrine to slab. It has a paper shredder, paper scraps, bins, buckets, coffee cans, a springform pan, flyash and granite dust. Quiring Monuments, a north Seattle monument designer, generates granite dust as a waste product. Quiriconi found Quiring Monuments on King County's Industrial Materials Exchange Web site, and gets hundreds of pounds of dust for free.

To make the slab, she mixes ingredients, pours them into a mold, lets the mixture dry and smooths the rough edges. Quiriconi expects she'll charge about \$25 per square foot. Buyers can drill holes, or Quiriconi will do so for a small fee.

So far, Quiriconi said she's engaged mostly in "friendly testing." She said she'll soon install her slab in a vanity in her home and install 45 square feet in a friend's kitchen. She's given samples to friends such as Ann Schuessler, director of sustainable building practices for The Rafn Co., whom Quiriconi met at Antioch.

Schuessler said Rafn's green-building clients approach new products cautiously, but Quiriconi's product could fill a niche.

"I think there's a lot of value to it," she said, adding it is lighter than some comparable products and appears easy to work with.

Carolyn Forbes of AIA Seattle said Quiriconi's slab could attract interest because LEED credits are awarded for using for local products. Forbes said the slab will do well if it's durable, resists germs and stains, and doesn't cost much extra.

Quiriconi is confident about her product's price. As for its quality, it will soon undergo American Society for Testing and Materials testing through King County's LinkUp program.

Quiriconi plans to have preliminary results by April, in time for the GreenWorld/What Makes it Green? product show, sponsored by AIA Seattle and the International Interior Design Association's Washington chapter.

"If we have to make changes we're going to make changes," Quiriconi said. "We're not abandoning this thing."

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