



Jake Clark of the
Armstrong-Clark Company



by Allison Hester

Jake Clark worked seven years as a coatings contractor, helping teach guys around the country how to clean and preserve wood shake roofs. And for seven years he walked along wooden shake roofs, scratching his head, trying to figure out a better process.

Clark came from a paint and coatings background, a career that goes back five generations in his family, with ties to the Civil War era. In the painting industry, which was where he had worked since 1974, the available products were dry sealers that were applied to dry wood.

It didn't make sense.

“Wood deteriorates because it dries out, cracks and curls,” he explained. “It seemed like common sense. If your hands are dry and chapped, you put a non-drying conditioner on it. Not a drying coat. The same holds true with wood.”

Clark was getting his roof coating materials from Jim Armstrong, and was actually buying about 95 percent of Armstrong's production. This, and the desire to return to his coatings manufacturing background, led him to join with his supplier and create the Armstrong Clark company in 1989. “I used what I had learned from both manufacturing and contracting experience to create a sealer that would actually give wood the treatment it needed.”

The result was a different kind of product – one that incorporated non-drying oils that

separated from the dry parts of the formula (e.g., linseed oil, fungicide, water repellents and pigments). This allowed the non-drying components to seep into the wood while the dry components sealed the wood at the surface, locking out water.

Entering a New Industry

For several years, Armstrong-Clark sold most of their products to paint stores, and mostly on the West Coast.

Then Alan Broom, a wood restoration contractor in Birmingham, Alabama, happened upon the Armstrong Clark website. Broom bought some product, tried it, liked it, then wrote about the stain on some of the industry bulletin boards. He found that essentially no one had heard of Armstrong Clark, and they were leery of what they felt might be another “fly by night” company – even though in truth, the manufacturer has been around for 24 years.

“To be honest, I'd never heard of the pressure washing/wood restoration industry before either,” Clark added. “Oh, I knew there were a handful of contractors that did this kind of work, but I had no idea how large the market really was.”

So, Clark set up a program to help interested contractors eliminate their risk by sending out free four-ounce sample cans of each product in each color. “We let them brush those out, pick the one color they liked the best, then sent them a free five-gallon pail,” he explained.



National Growth

A large contractor, Steve James, asked to open a physical and cyber store called the Stain Shop. Other distributors, such as ACR Products, The Sealer Store, and PowerWash.com, have also come on board.

Having distributors greatly helped Armstrong Clark get their products into the contractors' hands faster. "Not having to ship from California has helped out a lot, and it's been a wonderful experience getting to know the wood restoration guys."

However, perhaps his favorite way of getting to know the "wood restoration guys" has been through his involvement with the Power Washers of North America (PWNA) where he has been a member and sponsor since 2008. "It's been very exciting to meet these guys and become great friends with them at the PWNA conventions," he said. "It's exciting to see them take the wood certification classes. I love getting to talk with people who know about wood restoration. That's why I'm a major sponsor for the PWNA, other national organizations and round tables."

In 2010, Armstrong was given the Robert Hinderliter Award for Excellence by the PWNA.

Continued Growth

While Armstrong Clark has some new products in development, the company's biggest change for 2013 will be moving to a new, much larger facility. Clark assures his customers there will be no interruption of service during the moving process, but adds that he's holding off on some new product campaigns until he can give them his full attention.

"We really enjoy our affiliation with the PWNA," Clark concludes, "and we know we never would have gotten as far as we have – to a place where we need a new, larger facility – if it wasn't for their support."

To learn more about the Armstrong Clark Company, visit their website at www.ArmClark.com.

The program was extremely successful. "It seemed like a common sense offer to me, but it had bigger dividends than I ever imagined," Clark added. In fact, today about 30 percent of Armstrong-Clark's business comes from the pressure washing industry.

Since that time, Armstrong Clark has become a leader in wood sealers for the pressure washing/wood restoration industry, and Clark has made many great friendships along the way. "I really like this industry," he adds. "It's a great bunch of hard-working people who are dedicated to their craft."