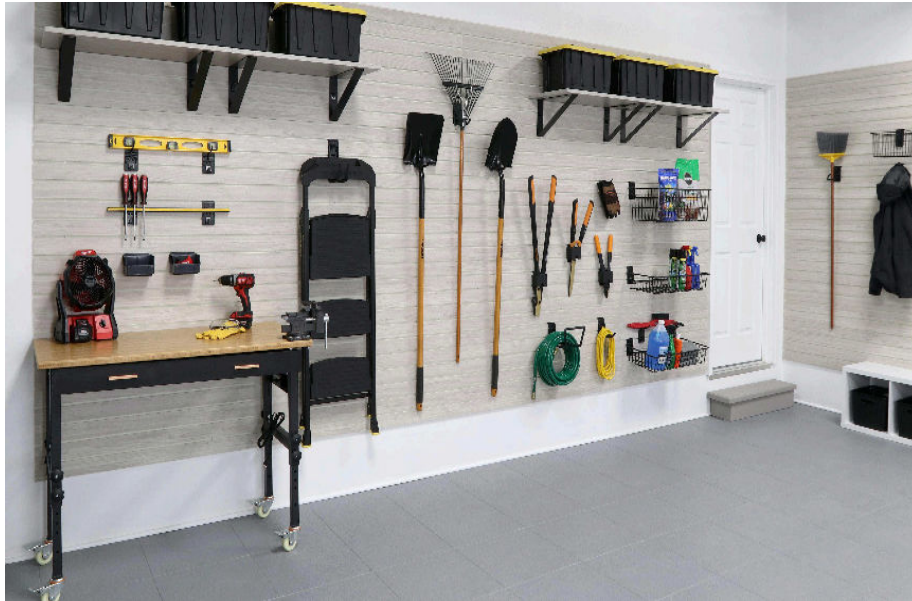


Woodworking Industry News

Milwaukee Slatwall aims to redefine high-end garage storage

By Rich Christianson September 24, 2024 | 8:51 am CDT



Milwaukee Slatwall is made of compressed PVC, surfaced with a scratch-resistant decorative laminate.

GRAFTON, Wis. — Since Milwaukee Slatwall was publicly unveiled at the 2024 Closets Conference & Expo in April, its owners have sought to position the brand as a higher-end solution for garage organization projects.

Milwaukee Slatwall, or MKE Slatwall for short, is made of compressed laminated PVC, “a much denser material” than conventional extruded PVC slatwall, according to Tom Keenan, who owns the company with his brothers John, Michael and sister Marie. Additionally, MKE Slatwall is surfaced with a decorative laminate. The patented product’s initial six colors, including textured woodgrains, were chosen to match the most popular designs used by the nation’s leading manufacturers of garage cabinetry.

"I see this as the future of PVC slatwall installed in high-end garages," Tom Keenan said, adding, "We are shipping product daily now."

Milwaukee Slatwall was about two-and-a-half years in development leading up to its debut at the Closets Expo. The company, while operating as a separate entity, has a formal partnership with storeWALL, a company co-owned by the Keenan brother's father Kevin. The storeWALL-MKE Slatwall partnership includes the sharing of manufacturing, warehouse, and market distribution.



Milwaukee Slatwall was soft launched at the 2024 Closets Expo and will make an encore at the 2025 Closets Expo in West Palm Beach, Florida.

"The largest segment of slatwall installed in the garage today is extruded PVC," said John Keenan. "In simple terms the extrusion process involves heating up plastic pellets, putting them into a funnel, color dyeing them, and pushing them through a mold. That is how 100 percent of PVC slatwall used in North American garages are made. This process, while efficient, essentially limits finish capability mostly to solid colors and simulated woodgrains."

"With Milwaukee Slatwall, we took a step backward," Tom Keenan said. "Instead of thinking about ourselves first, we thought about the dealers' needs and where they make money. The answer is cabinets. When we compared extruded PVC slatwall to the

cabinets that the dealers are installing we saw that they don't have the same aesthetics because they are made with two different materials. This led us to consider how we could get a laminate finish on PVC slatwall. In order to do that, we had to change our manufacturing process.

"The MKE laminated slatwall is essentially laminate pressed to PVC," he continued. "The backside of these wall panels are actually flat. We apply an adhesive, put the laminate on top and then press it. This process almost forms like a composite material. The net result is that compressed PVC is a much denser material with far greater weight capacity. Because it has that aesthetic look and performance capability, we're finding that MKE slatwall is making its way into the interior of the house. There are even dealers who are using this as a cost-effective replacement for drywall."



MKE Slatwall's introductory six colors, including Whitewood (shown), were chosen to match the most popular designs used by the nation's leading manufacturers of garage cabinetry.

"The laminate that goes over the PVC looks hyper realistic and production runs on MKE Slatwall will be consistent," John Keenan added. "Extruded PVC is kind of a batch formula. If you get the batch off by a little bit the color can be a little different from previous production runs. Because we are applying decorative laminates to a PVC substrate, the color is going to be exact in

every production run. That elevates the capability of what we can do.”

In addition to its superior weight capacity, John Keenan said MKE Slatwall is waterproof, scratch-resistant, and resilient to extreme hot or cold temperatures. Installation is also significantly faster because screws can be driven directly through the wall panel into the studs.

“The industry’s focus is so much on the closet and it is very competitive with more dealers entering the field every week,” Tom Keenan said. “When I look at the garage, I see a lot of white space and I truly believe the dealers who recognize that are going to be successful. I say that because the garage is the largest closet within the home. We don’t call it a closet; we call it the garage because that’s where the cars are parked. But in reality, the purpose of the garage is a place to store things.


“The garage is the last room the homeowner sees when they leave their house and the first room that they see when they return home,” Keenan continued. “And it’s the only room in the house that all of their neighbors see. When a homeowner recognizes all of that, it inspires them to take on a garage project that involves slatwall, flooring and cabinetry. It’s important for the dealers because it’s the one room in the house that all of the neighbors can see so it becomes free marketing. Once a garage is done and the door goes up all of the neighbors can see it and if they don’t have it they want it. One project becomes two, then four. New business just happens organically for the dealer through word of mouth.”

MKE Slatwall is available in 12” x 48” and 12” x 96” panels. The slats are made 3 inches on center, the industry’s standard, meaning accessories offered by MKE Slatwall, storeWALL, or other sources can be used.

Even as MKE Slatwall begins to make inroads in the market, the company is making plans to exhibit at the [2025 Closets Conference & Expo](#) set for June 11-13 at the Palm Beach Convention Center in West Palm Beach, Florida.

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Rich Christianson is the owner of Richson Media LLC, a Chicago-based communications firm focused on the industrial woodworking sector. Rich is the former long-time editorial director and associate publisher of Woodworking Network. During his nearly 35-year career, Rich has toured more than 250 woodworking operations throughout North America, Europe and Asia and has written extensively on woodworking technology, design and supply trends. He has also directed and promoted dozens of woodworking trade shows, conferences and seminars including the Cabinets & Closets Conference & Expo and the Woodworking Machinery & Supply Conference & Expo, Canada's largest woodworking show.

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