

Mirror

image

Where lay people only see shine, experts see defects. When looking at reality, the standard tells all.

By Anitra Brown

the U.S. mirror industry has published a new standard that raises the quality bar for mirrors. Now, it's time to let customers know about it.

The biggest change: terminology that codifies different grades and levels of quality. Historically, mirrors were designated only by size, thickness and color. There was a general understanding among manufacturers, glass-shop owners and glazing contractors that quality would correspond;

$\frac{1}{4}$ inch would be better quality than $\frac{1}{8}$ inch; 72-by-100-inch stock sheets better quality than 84-by-130-inch "lehr ends," the ends of the glass ribbons as they come out of a lehr oven.

Now, using the ASTM International's C 1503 Standard Specification for Silvered Flat Glass Mirror, approved in June 2001, the mirror industry has established three grades:

- Mirror cut size, for final use in the size ordered
- Stock sheet, for architectural use and where trimming will be required

- Mirror lehr end, for recutting into smaller sizes.

The standard features two levels of quality:

- Mirror select, with minimal distortion and blemishes

- Mirror glazing, with minor blemishes and distortion acceptable.

Lee Harrison, president of Walker Glass Co. in Toronto, and a driving force behind the standard, says it harmonizes expectations though the supply chain, provides guidelines to match products to uses and provides a dispute-settling mechanism.

"Even when the customer pays for the highest quality, there will be imperfections," Harrison says. "Float glass is inherently flawed to some degree."

The old guidelines were so lenient as to be meaningless, he insists; the new, more rigorous standards set levels of acceptable imperfection. Mirror quality hasn't changed—but the labels will: Manufacturers are going to be reclassifying their inventories during the next few months and changing case cards and packaging: "We're generating materials internally to make sure we are meeting the standard in the plant," says Drew Mayberry, president of Lenoir Mirror Co. in Lenoir, NC, and current chairman of the Glass Association of North America's Mirror Division. His



The author is an Ellenville, NY, freelance writer.

company specializes in high-quality cut glass sold to other manufacturers.

Changing case cards and packaging will be relatively easy, admits Randy Brooks, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Gardner Glass Products in North Wilkesboro, NC. “If you’re already producing to the standard, it’s no trouble to put it on the package.”

The larger challenge: communicating the standard to distributors, architects, installers and specifiers—and winning their acceptance. “Getting them to recognize that there are different grades of mirrors is a tough sell,” says Ron Brock, president of Sunshine Mirror in Fort Pierce, FL. The condo owner “wants a perfect mirror on the wall.”

Harrison says that the purpose of the standard is to provide an objective, credible benchmark to judge products. But for the standard to be effective, it has to be communicated up front. “If an architect refuses a job because it’s not up to spec, you have an ugly situation. If you pull out ASTM C 1503 to prove that it is up to spec, you still have an ugly problem, because you’re bringing it up after the fact. We have to let them know at the beginning what quality to order, and what to expect when it’s delivered.”

To implement the standard effectively, manufacturers must begin using these designations in all of their documents: case tags, packing slips, invoices and sales materials. “The real obstacle is not financial, but cultural,” Harrison explains. It requires educating production staffs, sales forces and customers who have been doing business the same way for decades.

To help in this process, the Glass Association of North America has created a template letter designed for manufacturers and other people who sell glass mirrors to send to customers such as glass distributors, contractors, glass-shop owners and architects. It explains the standard in easy-to-understand language, and accompanies a two-page executive summary that lays it out more specifically.

Ashley Charest, GANA account executive in Topeka, says U.S. and Canadian manufacturers need to make sure their customers understand the difference between various grades and qualities of products. “It’s important for the business-to-business side.”

Randy Brooks of Gardner Glass emphasizes the importance of communicating the standard: “Our customers can go to the end user and say, ‘The industry has established a very good standard, and the product we install meets it.’ It gives us a benchmark.”

More information can be obtained by visiting www.mirrorlink.org. Copies of the standard are available by contacting ASTM International, 100 Barr Harbor Drive, West Conshohocken, PA 19428-2959, 610/832-9555, www.astm.org.

Sources:

- **Lee Harrison, Walker Glass Co.**, 9551 Ray Lawson Blvd., Toronto, Ontario H1J 1L5, Canada, 514/352-3030, lee@walkerglass.com, www.walkerglass.com.
- **Randy Brooks, Gardner Glass Products**, Box 1570, 600 Elkin Highway, North Wilkesboro, NC 28659, 336/651-9300, www.gardnerglass.com.
- **Ashley Charest, Glass Association of North America**, 2945 S.W. Wanamaker Drive, Suite A, Topeka, KS 66614, 785/271-0208, GANA@glasswebsite.com.