BY DAN PELTON, *FEATURES EDITOR* • PHOTOS BY PIERRE LONGTIN

Turn to Stone

Quebec building products manufacturer uses home-made stretchwrapping equipment to ensure maximum holding strength for its palletized shipments of stone and brick

A stretchwrapped load of Permacon product can weigh as much as 4,000 pounds, which required installation of a suitable conveyor system equipped with extra-thick, heavy-duty rollers to handle the heavy loads.

For the past 50 years, **Permacon** has been living in the stone age ... and doing quite nicely, thank you. Since its founding a half-century ago, the Montreal-based company has strived to become eastern Canada's industry standard in building products such as concrete blocks, paving stones, and specialty decorative brickwork like Dufferin stone—a tumbled concrete stone designed to be used as a random ashlar stone veneer.

Over the years, the company's stone creations have fueled impressive growth. Today, Permacon operates a total of six manufacturing plants, including its vast, central manufacturing facility in the Montreal suburb of D'Anjou, and Ontario-based plants in Milton, London, Oshawa, Belleville and Ottawa.

During that time, the company's reputation for top-quality product has also grown immensely. For example, the Permacon-made residential products—guaranteed by Permacon for life—have been recognized and applauded by the likes of the **Association des paysagistes professionnels du Québec**, an industry group representing landscape professionals, for their variety and versatility.

The company's architectural concrete block features both smooth- and split-face block construction that offers a high degree of protection against any acts of vandalism, providing both a sound physical barrier and top flame-proof properties that can actually lower the owner's fire insurance premiums, according to Permacon.

This low-maintenance building material is offered in a wide range of both solid and blended colors to deliver a perfect aesthetic finishing touch to any building project.

As for the so-called Dufferin stone—a proprietary mixture of of Portland cement, water, sieve-graded sand aggregate, sieve-graded crushed stone aggregate, and synthetic pigments based on metallic oxides—it provides the natural look of bush-hammered limestone. This product is offered in three stone heights, if five different lenghts each.

Shipping such heavyweight products to customers in two-pallet loads obviously demands the use of solid, end-of-line packaging machinery to make sure the shipment is properly secured and stabilized.

To this end, the company has recently outfitted its D'Anjou plant with two model WCRT-200 stretchwrapping machines—manufactured by **Wulftec International Inc.** at its 110,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Ayer's Cliff, Que.

Marcel Boutin of Emballages Jean Cartier *(left)* and Permacon plant manager Francois Rodrigue standing in front of the Wulftec WCRT-200 stretchwrapper.

The machines were installed by **Emballages Jean Cartier**, Montreal-based distributor of packaging equipment from leading manufacturers such as Wulftec, **3M**, **Intertape**, **Kimberly-Clark**, **Sigma**, **Tyco**, and many others.

Part of the **M.J. Mallis Group**, an international conglomerate specializing in end-of-line industrial machinery—strapping, wrapping, taping, shrinkwrapping and other such equipment—the Wulftec operation is solely dedicated to designing and manufacturing stretchwrapping machines and related systems.

While it's true that practically every stretchwrapping system installation inherently requires at least some degree of customization, to achieve an optimal match with the application at hand, one of the two Wulftec stretchwrappers employed at the Permacon has some truly unique features that make it really stand out—namely the so-call T.K.O., short for Technical Knotter Operation.

Currently available as an option on Wulftec's WCRT-200 automatic wrapper, the T.K.O. comes into play after the machine has "roped" the film that's applied to the pallet. The so-called "roping" technique is a Wulftec-develop method for reinforcing the already-stretchwrapped loads of heavy items with a rope of film spun by the WCRT-200.

Applied properly, the T.K.O. provides a sure-fire way to eliminating the commonplace problem of tail ends—those annoying, loose bits of film at the end of the wrap, which can pause all sorts of potential safety hazards to both plant personnel and the equipment. Besides being a safety hazard, tail ends are also aesthetically displeasing—making an otherwise decent stretchwrap application look shoddy and amateurish.

The T.K.O. mechanism grabs the film ropes through one end, ties a knot with both of the ropes' tail ends, and then releases the knot onto the load—providing a strong-hold solution for unitized products that are shipped via open-flatbed transport, stored outside, or warehoused in an area where the units are subjected to friction.

"The T.K.O. can be adapted to all automatic Wulftec machines," explains Marcel Boutin, equipment representative for Emballages Jean Cartier. "This knotter is a good thing for the brick industry.

"When they ship the product on a flatbed truck, often the film comes loose and goes all over the place.

"This way, it all sticks together," says Boutin, adding that the T.K.O. would also be very beneficial for companies shipping such loose-bulk products as peat moss, gravel and sand.

By all reports, the knotter has been well received at Permacon. So well, in fact, that plans already have been made to incorporate the T.K.O feature into the plant's second WCRT-200 stretchwrapper during the winter shutdown.

In addition to enhancing the holding strength, the T.K.O. also helps reduce the total film requirements and, perhaps most noteworthy, allows for greater ventilation of the shipped product.

"Sometimes you will see some whiteness on a brick," explains Boutin, "which happens because the brick has retained moisture from the humidity formed within the wrapped load. With the strength of the roping, the moisture is ventilated out, which means there will be no fading on the product."

A custom-designed conveyor attached to the Wulftec machine ensures that a pallet only needs five feet of space in order to be moved—saving the plant valuable floor-space. The conveyor is equipped with heavy-duty, three-and-a-half-inch-diameter rollers—roughly an inch thicker than standard rollers—to enable it to handle wrapped loads of concrete and stone that can weigh as much as 4,000 pounds.

Boutin stresses that the key to any successful stretchwrapping installation, such as the one at Permacon, lies in optimizing the match between the machine's capabilities with application requirements through well-thought-out equipment modification and customization.

"A stretchwrapper is a stretchwrapper like a car is a car: it's your needs that are important," he says. "If you have to move eight people, you won't get a Jetta: you will get a minivan.

"There's always special things to adapt to, and so the key is to be able to customize a wrapper to the customer's needs, and to do it well and on time.

"We need to have a good machine, a strong machine, and a machine that's available at a reasonable price.

"And Wulftec's very good at delivering all that." ❑

For more information on:

Wulftec International Inc. 441
Emballages Jean Cartier 442