Empire West Press Release Supplemental Information

This information is intended to supplement the press release and provide additional information about Empire West. Much of the copy was written by the company for their website but has not yet been uploaded.

How long has Ed Davis been with Empire West?

Ed Davis, President of Empire West has been with the company for 27 years and is continuing to have fun in the position as you can see from the bio on the website:

Known far and wide (we may be prone to exaggeration) as “The Ceiling Tile Guy” on YouTube (2 million views and counting!), Ed’s license plate reads “CEILUME” and he may obsessively take photos of the amazing (not always in a good way) ceilings he encounters. An expert in ceiling tile safety and performance testing, when he is not spreading the word about Ceilume, Ed can be found running (slowly) the trails in Sonoma County, playing bass, and indulging in his passion for writing (his latest novella, “In All Things” was just released!).

How did Empire West get into the Ceiling Tile Business?

Like many long time manufactures Empire West has had to constantly adapt to market conditions. In 2007 Ed Davis saw an opportunity transform his company from a custom manufacture and develop and nurture a distinct product line. He purchased the Ceilings Magnifique line from Snellings Thernovac and has been designing and manufacturing the Ceilume line of products since.

This is an abbreviated version of the Celiume story, Ed provides a much more colorful history on the website:

You know how James Michener novels always seem to begin with “First, the earth cooled”? We’re not going to go back that far, but there’s a good story to tell about modern decorative ceiling tiles, and how the Ceilume brand came into being. Though we aren’t going to start with the last ice age, Ceilume’s roots do go back a long way - to the 1940’s and a little company called CEPCO Manufacturing, located in the heart of San Francisco’s Chinatown. Herb Wong, CEPCO’s co-founder, was one of the first to hold a patent on “Modular Ceilings”, which is what we now think of as drop/suspended ceilings. While others were using gypsum board and mineral fiber for their panels and tiles, Herb saw the tremendous potential offered by thermoformed plastic. Across the bay in Oakland in the 1950’s and 60’s, United Lighting and Ceiling Company began to take advantage of thermoplastic’s unique physical characteristics to introduce innovative lighting products, and to expand listings and approvals that allowed use of their ceiling tiles as “drop-out panels” beneath fire suppression sprinklers. Fire sprinklers were not widely used in those days because they were new, they were expensive, and they were really ugly (the ugly part has changed, but not much). The ability to install United Lighting’s panels below sprinklers, concealing them from view but allowing them to function in the event of a fire, helped many reluctant customers move into the sprinkler age. When CEPCO closed, United Lighting purchased their patterns. When the folks at United Lighting decided to go fishing thirty years later (seriously… that’s what they decided to do), Ceilume stepped in. We still offer many of CEPCO and United’s designs, but we’ve also taken safety testing and approvals that they began to a
whole new level, adding IAPMO, CertMark, and ICC recognition to their existing FM Global and UL listings.

It was in the 1970’s that The Old Jefferson Tile Company, operating out of the Twin Oaks Plantation in Jefferson, Texas (currently listed among the most haunted locations in Jefferson!), began manufacturing "faux tin ceilings". Though they may not have coined the term, they were among the first to offer these elegant tiles for sale. Thicker than the products offered by CEPCO or United, they had the feel of authentic tin and were suitable for either glue-up or grid installation. Jefferson was a historic steamboat port from the 1800’s, so the company took inspiration for their designs from the ceilings found in century-old structures around their community.

Down in Blanchard, Louisiana in the 1980’s, Tom and Daisy Snelling setup shop as Snellings Thermovac. Starting with a few designs that came to them from The Old Jefferson Tile Company after it closed and adding many of their own creations, they introduced their Ceilings Magnifique line of decorative ceiling tiles. Over the decades that followed they assembled a comprehensive family of products that was favored by interior designers, architects, restoration specialists, and builders alike. When Tom and Daisy retired in 2007, Ceilume purchased the product line. We are proud to include many of those beautiful styles, and those from The Old Jefferson Tile Company, among our offerings today.

What about Ceilume itself, you ask? Our company began as Empire West Inc. in 1968, manufacturing custom thermoformed products for the photofinishing, electronics, optics, agriculture, and automotive industries. Always an innovator, we were among the first in our industry to embrace CNC technology on our production lines, J.I.T. fulfillment, and what came to be known as Lean Manufacturing (we just called it common sense). But job shop work is fickle, and over the decades, as custom customers came and went, we always had our eye out for a product we could develop and nurture on our own. Thermoformed ceiling tiles became that product. By combining our focus on customer service and technological innovation to the rich heritage these products brought with them, we have built the Ceilume brand into an industry leader.

Oh yeah... We've also had a heck of a lot of fun along the way!

How long has Empire West been in Sonoma County and how did they end up in Graton?

Empire West has been operating in Graton since 1980.

Again copy written by Ed for the website:

We manufacture every ceiling tile we sell right here in historic Graton, California, which is located in the heart of wine and apple country about an hour north of San Francisco. "Why Graton?" you might ask (probably not, but work with us here). Once you've been here the question quickly becomes "Why anywhere else?"

The railroad came to our little town about a hundred and ten years ago, and in the century that followed Graton's fortunes waxed and waned as the agricultural industry, primarily built around the indescribably yummy Gravenstein apple (seriously... go eat one), ebbed and flowed. Railroad passenger service ended in 1932, and shortly after we arrived on the scene in 1980 the railroad literally pulled up stakes and left town for good - the apple business had moved elsewhere. What remained was a mostly vacant main street, several hundred acres of dwindling apple orchards,
and the empty canneries and dryers that used to prepare Gravenstein apples for the world to
enjoy.
One of those beautiful old apple facilities became our home.
We like to think of ourselves as early adopters. We embraced recycling before most in our
industry came on board - not only recycling our materials, but actually recycling the building we
come to work in every day; converting it from an empty shell to a safe and modern
manufacturing facility that still reflects the character of its glorious past.

And we adopted the town of Graton, supporting the local economy with good jobs, and seeing
the potential that over our thirty-plus years here has become fully realized. What was once a
mostly forgotten backwater is now a destination, with great restaurants, fine wineries, and an
easy country ambiance that is pretty hard to equal.
Though the railroad left town a long time ago, its modern equivalent, the World Wide Web,
showed up about the same time we did. Now instead of providing delicious Gravensteins via
train to the dining tables of the world, we provide designer ceiling tiles via the Internet for the
ceilings of the world.
All from right here in beautiful downtown Graton!

Ed is more than happy to answer any questions and can be reached at:

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