

# Popular all round

*Popular Kitchens, has grown just like the city they serve: fast! Owner William Zhang was one of just two who started the company back in 2006. Today there are 26 staff based out of a large manufacturing facility in Pakuranga, Auckland. With eight design and sales staff in the office, there are another 18 staff either in the workshops, or out delivering and assisting installers. With their own trucks, a paintshop, and a granite benchtop facility, Popular Kitchens is totally in control of the customer experience. Now with a new Homag 1870FSC edgebander with airTec capability, they can also cater to every customer requirement.*

With his background as a mechanical engineer, it's no surprise that William is scrupulous about the quality of the machinery he purchases. First came the decision to offer cabinets with a hi-gloss finish via hot-air activated laser-edged tape. Second was deciding what edgebander to buy to do it. Given how happy he was with his Brandt (now branded Homag) 1600 series machine, purchased in 2013, William didn't hesitate to talk to his long-time Jacks rep John Walton. "John's been working with me for many years" says William, "and he knows I'm only interested in quality. I've always wanted the best machine for the job. Better not to buy at all than buying something that isn't going to meet our quality standard". Already familiar with Homag quality because of his existing machinery, William had no hesitation opting for John's suggestion of Homag's 1870FSC. It helped that Jacks had a machine in stock, so he could satisfy customers requiring airTec edgebanding immediately.



*William Zhang (right) with Jacks sales rep John Walton and the new Homag 1870FSC.*

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The 1870FCS offers a high level of production with a correspondingly high level of finishing quality. Capable of working with EVA, PU and airTec then it's an extremely versatile machine. The top driven V belt increases workpiece stability while parts are being processed, resulting in a more consistent high-quality finish, and a significant advantage with smaller workpieces. There's multi-profile tooling on all trimming and scraping units, and matching tooling radii for tape thicknesses, 1mm and 2mm tape. Feed speed is up to 20m/m, with the workpiece gap optimisation increasing output by up to 25%. Both William and John are big fans of the blue LED lights too!

William has never been in a rush to grow the company, although from two to twenty-six suggests he's getting something right. "We're certainly not the cheapest company in the market" he says, "and we don't want to be the most expensive. Our prices are fair, and with the quality we produce then the customers will come."

And come they have. Popular Kitchens is busy, with one property development company alone providing them with upwards of 120 kitchen orders per year. "We have good relationships

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with several housing companies, large and small," says William. "Then we get quite a few customers via word-of-mouth. We stopped advertising four years ago as we have more than enough work. So much in fact that we've never got around to building our showroom. But with the changing expectations of the young people these days - they want to come and view something - then I think we're going to have to get around to building it eventually."

Upgrading an edgebander usually means a trade in or second-hand sale. But Popular

Kitchens now use the "smaller 1600" Homag edgebander for carcass work, while the 1870 does all the visible doors and panels. "The 1600 is still providing excellent results" says William. "Now we not only have airTec capability, but a far greater capacity in the workshop too". Just one operator covers both machines and is often to be found on the Weeke CNC as well - with this often running up to 10 hours a day.

However, it's not the workshop that is the bottleneck. "Even with 8 in design and sales it's often the office that's the source of any hold ups" laugh William. "We run PRO100 software and can generate the designs quickly. But with customers changing their minds, not confirming the job, changing the designs - there are so many reasons why we can't send a job to production!"

But when the jobs get to production, the latest Homag edgebanding technology is ready to maintain the quality result that Popular Kitchens trade on.

