



Darren Fleck invested in more capacity with the purchase of the AscentPro E3.

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living the lifestyle

With nearly 20 years' experience in the industry, and just a few years after setting up his own joinery business 'Lifestyle Joinery', Darren Fleck started to consider his own lifestyle.

Good relationships with local builders meant he had consistent work making kitchens, manufactured from a workshop near Tai Tapu – a few kilometres south of Christchurch. But a recent proposal from another builder offered to at least double his workload, which – while appealing financially – Darren knew would likely be too much for his traditional panel-based workshop setup with just two staff. 'Lifestyle' wasn't just the name of his business, but something he wanted to enjoy away from work too.

"I'd always vaguely considered CNC as a way to grow the business" says Darren. "About four years ago I bought PRO100 design software, and I knew it had the capability to transfer my designs to CNC, rather than just to a printer so I had something to show clients. But I was wary. I had no CNC experience, I knew a couple of horror-stories about

cost, and I was confident our way of making kitchens was working well. But I realised we couldn't double our production without investing in more capacity, and I wasn't interested in assembling cabinets manufactured by someone else."

Darren looked at hiring more staff, but opted instead for a technology-based solution, becoming one of the first South Island owners of AscentPro's E3 CNC, from W & R Jack. Easy to use and featuring a heavy steel frame on which are a 9.5kW spindle, 5 + 4 station drilling head and 8-slot rotary tool change magazine, the E3 offers a heavy-weight solution at an affordable level of investment.

Installation was quick and it wasn't long before Darren was a CNC convert. "It's easier. And much faster. Using the E3 there are no accuracy issues, less waste, the holes are pre-drilled, and parts are labelled for easy assembly. While I know I was pretty quick at cutting up a kitchen on the saw, the real time saving with the E3 is that there's no time spent working out the cutting pattern, or identifying what goes where when it comes to assembly. It's easy to underestimate how long those things take."

Accuracy and the flow-on result of quick assembly is key in any workshop, and it's often only when mistakes occur that the real cost of human error becomes clear.

"Say someone winds the saw over to 45, and then doesn't quite wind it back square" says Darren. "A quick look says the blade's square, and next thing is you've cut and taped a complete kitchen only to find it's 5 degrees out and doesn't fit together. Or the jig you're using when drilling pantry shelves slips slightly. The E3 doesn't make those mistakes. With the efficiency we get from fast, accurate CNC cutting and drilling we've more than doubled our output without any extra staff. Or longer hours."

The installation of the AscentPro has resulted in other benefits too. "I usually nest two kitchens at once, so we're getting great utilisation from our sheets. And because we're making more kitchens now we're using a lot more board, so with larger orders our price per sheet has come down" says Darren.

"And I'm no longer having to turn work away if we're really busy. While we use the E3 most days we still have plenty of capacity. That's

nice to know when someone calls up to ask about progress on a job we've not started. I know we can turn it around fast."

Darren has focused the business on kitchens in the mid to upper level of the market – his average kitchen uses 25 sheets of white.

"We dabbled in commercial but the bigger companies take most of that work" he says. But with customers aware of his new E3 he's already being asked to use his CNC for other things. "We're getting requests for other stuff. Signs for example" says Darren.

"I know with the E3 we have invested in flexibility and the technology to branch out into new areas. But right now we're focused on meeting the demand."

With a new motorcross bike sitting in the corner of the warehouse, the AscentPro E3 is helping get Darren's lifestyle balance about right.



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