

# Interior Metal Surfacing: The Inside Scoop

Architizer Editors

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“Let’s crank some metal,” reads the large mural on a factory wall at Chemetal, the Easthampton, Massachusetts–based manufacturer of metal designs and laminates. Walk around the plant and you’ll see people wearing T-shirts and hoodies emblazoned with the same saying. “It’s fun, but it’s also what we do here,” says Geoff Schaefer, Creative Director and President of the second-generation family-owned business. “Every day, we grind, age, distress and patina sheets of aluminum, brass and copper.” The company makes decorative metal designs and laminates that A&D professionals specify and install in commercial and residential interior spaces everywhere.



Besides making many designs in-house, and in the USA, Chemetal sources metal designs from the world over including HPL metal laminates from Germany, printed metals from Japan and anodized aluminums from the Midwest. “It adds up to what we consider the most expansive collection of metal designs and laminates,” says Schaefer. “We have over 200 product offerings and 15 variations of that ubiquitous metal standard brushed aluminum.”



Walk through any airport and you’re bound to spot Chemetal in retail fixtures, wall panels and signage. Stay in a hotel and you’re apt to see it as column covers, wall panels, inlayed on counter fronts and headboards and as accents in hospitality furniture. Retail and sports venue designers use Chemetal for just about everything decorative, restaurants and homeowners install it as counter fronts and backsplashes.

Asked about current trends in metal, Schaefer says, “It’s very distressing,” laughing. “We’re making a lot of aged and distressed aluminum, brass and copper. Stuff that looks like it belongs in an old factory. These materials bring depth and venerability to modern spaces, and they match well with almost all wood types.”



Also, many Chemetal designs emulate the look of steel, both stainless and aged, in aluminum, a lighter easier-to-use material. Steel is timeless, but it’s also hard to fabricate. Most Chemetal materials are softer thinner metal. Sheets of Chemetal can be laid up on a wood substrate and fabricated with woodworking equipment using minor saw-blade modifications. This allows design professionals to bring metal into their projects more easily and without having to use a metal shop to process heavier and sometimes more expensive materials.

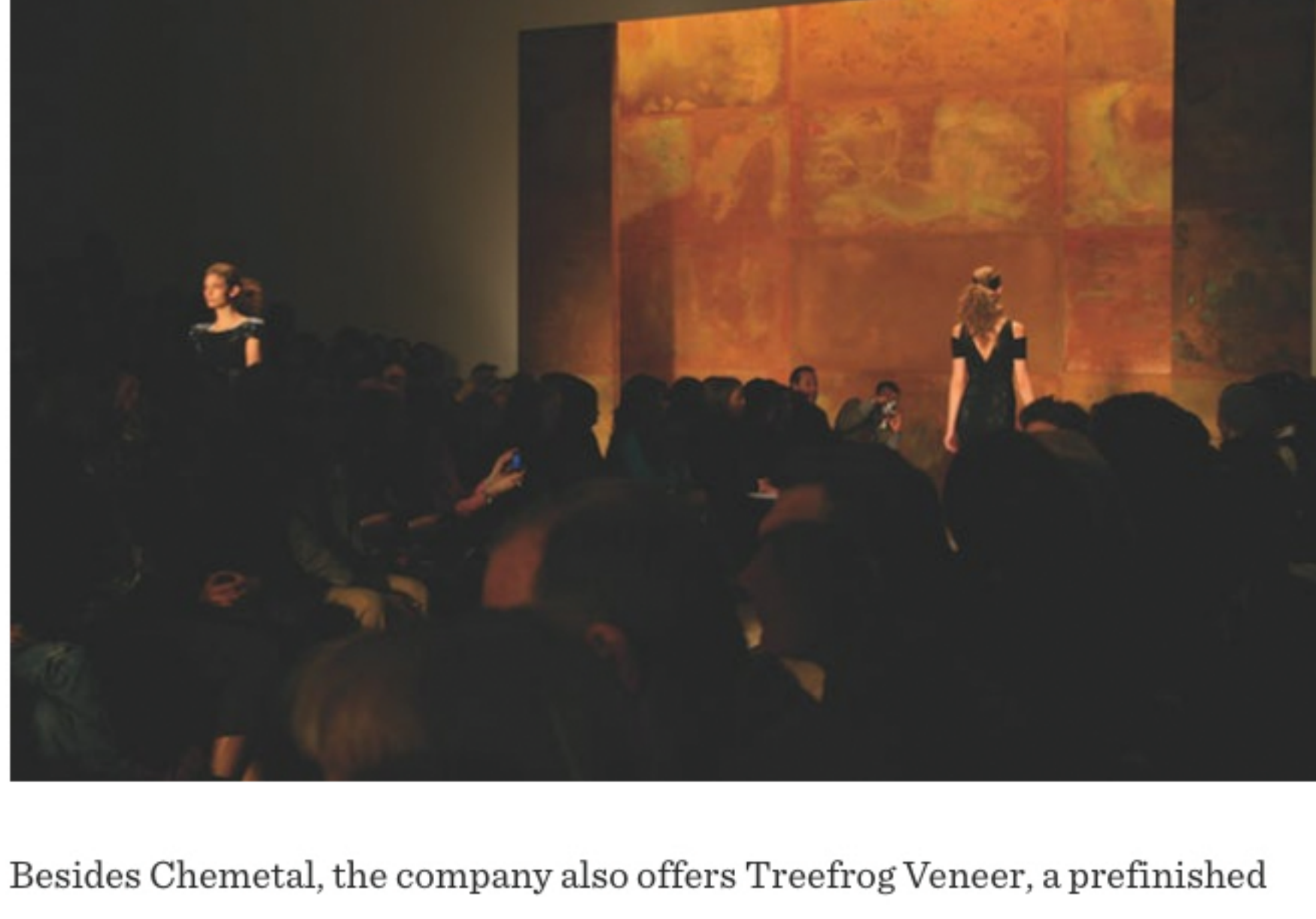
Chemetal is available in standard sheets sizes, 4 by 8 feet and 4 by 10 feet. Brass and copper are only available in 2-foot widths. Almost everything can be produced or cut to custom size. That’s because Chemetal is a metal manufacturing facility that can complete custom-size pieces, bends, wraps and other bespoke designs. Last year, the company produced a variation of its popular ALU designs (think blackened steel) in custom sizes as decorative office dividers installed into an Allsteel office system in Elkus Manfredi Architects’ New Balance headquarters project in Boston.



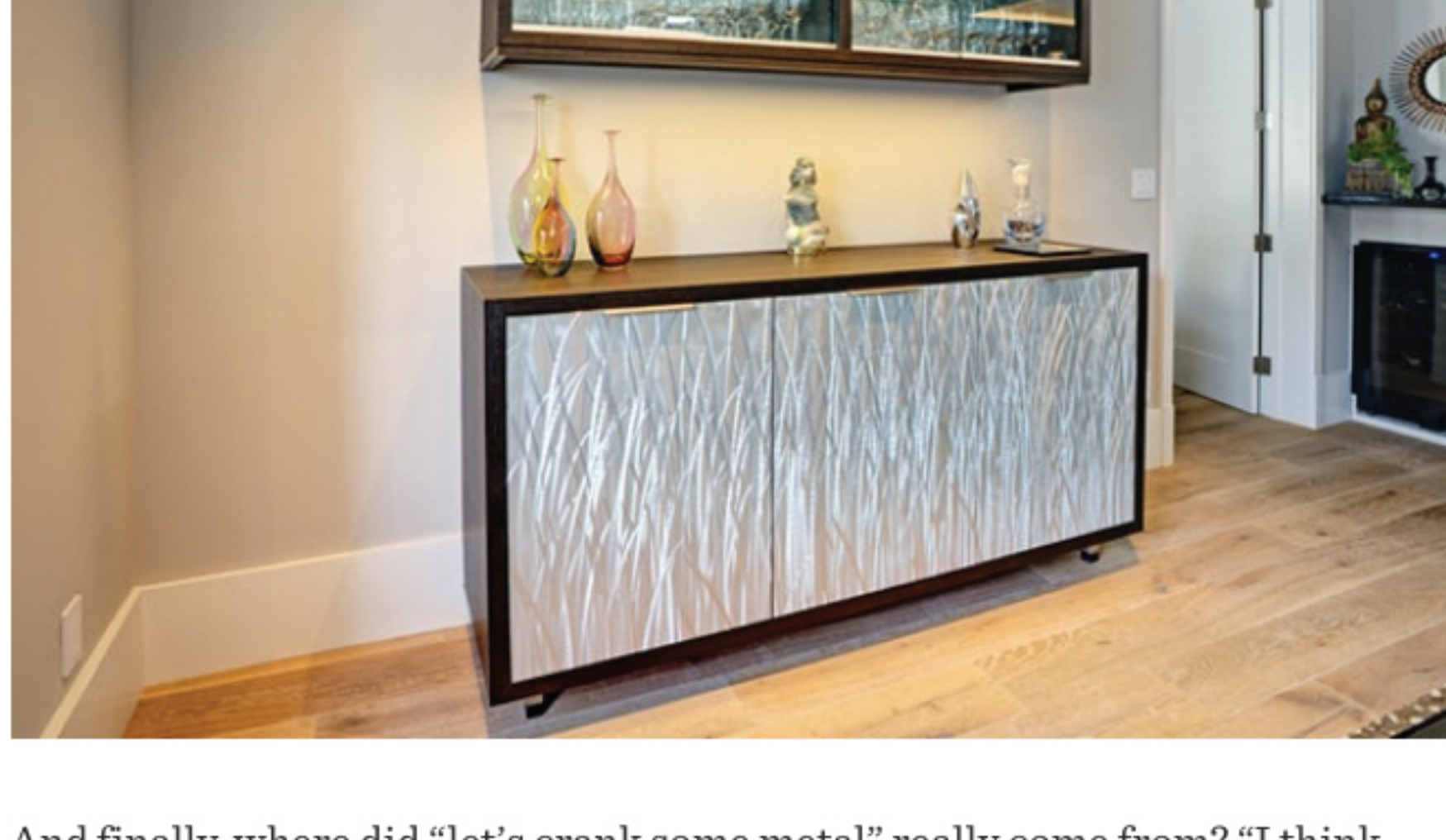
Chemetal is sold through an international, though mostly domestic, sales network with close to 100 distributors in the USA and several in each larger market. The company says they back it with exceptional sales and customer service that cares about getting it right.

In business for over 50 years, Chemetal is still cranking. In 2016, they doubled the size of their factory, to 72,000 square feet, and added 590 solar panels on the new roof to produce 37 percent of their electricity from the sun.

For 2017, Chemetal is introducing Glowing Metals, 36 new metal designs and laminates. It’s called that because these are warmer, richer and more energetic metal designs, staying on trend with popular brass, bronze and rose-gold and blue metals. These emerging materials feature texture, variation in scale and design depth.



Besides Chemetal, the company also offers Treefrog Veneer, a prefinished veneer laminate from Italy, and Interior Arts, an HPL design laminate.



And finally, where did “let’s crank some metal” really come from? “I think one of the guys in the plant came up with it,” says Schaefer, “rotary grinder in hand, classic rock blaring, happy that it was Friday afternoon.”