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» Outside St. Peter's in Rome – No Pictures Allowed in the Sistine Chapel!

Yes, home for seven weeks without a flight! A new world record? Perhaps, but it was also a sign of a different type of work that allowed me to stay busy from my office for a change. I'm happy to report that the general good health of the rotomolding industry is reflected in a steady list of project enquiries and opportunities. Between market surveys, legal enquiries, preparing presentations and writing reports, it was actually nice to stay put and reconnect with my neighbors for a change. However, I think Orla was confused and was waiting for me to leave so that she could go back to her normal routine!

Rotomolding activity in many regions and markets seems to be running counter to the general media-driven malaise about manufacturing. The signs are good in North America: molders are gearing up for new projects and actively ramping up production in key areas such as the agriculture and shale-gas supply chains; new companies are starting up molding operations; good quality second-hand machines are hard to come by; and there are a number of molders currently expanding their factory space. My recent contact with molders from South America during the recent conference in Mexico was equally productive and a number of projects have been proposed over the next few months. Material suppliers there are expanding their capacity and future sources. There seems to be a quiet confidence afoot.

I've also set up a lab of sorts in my garage with a parallel plate rheometer and small lab rotomolding machine to study the melt properties of materials and have started a project looking at all the rotomolding base grades currently on offer around the world (or as many as I can gather). With the help of the technical staff at Penn College, I've also started working on a number of material blends and modifications as I see several areas that might be interesting for development. Time will tell how it all turns out but in the meantime, it gives me a great excuse to spend more time at home and the smell of rotomolding is always a welcome one! All I need now is a small twin-screw extruder and a lab-scale pulverizer to complete the picture. Maybe next year...

...and Rome

Don't worry, the pause in travel had to come to an end sooner or later and what better way to do it than to go visit your mum? She was treated for cancer recently and to help celebrate a successful treatment and an all clear from her doctors, we sent her to Italy to visit my uncle in his new home in Spoleto. I took the chance to join them for a few days and take her down to see the Vatican and St. Peter's Basilica nearby in Rome (I must score some brownie points somewhere for this one). I hadn't been there since Orla and I visited on our honeymoon back in 1989 and it was just as awe-inspiring as before. The Sistine Chapel is somewhere that everyone should visit once in their lifetime. I don't mean for religious reasons or even to admire the quality of the art but just to contemplate how hard it must have been for Michaelangelo lying on his back by candlelight to have created it, especially with a Pope pestering him everyday to hurry up and finish! Few among us are given such opportunities to leave such a legacy.

Of course, never wanting to waste a trip, there was an opportunity to catch up with a client while I was in Rome and then to go visit Persico near Milan to see the latest in rotomolding technology as it develops. The renaissance in Italy is clearly not over as their constant promotion of the use of high-quality CNC molds, automatic equipment and support for artists using rotational molding has transformed some market segments in rotomolding with eye-catching moldings that often look like injection molded parts. It's always worth a visit - they always have something new to see.