

# John Rock Expansion Features the First CAPE Mach 2 in the United States

By Rick LeBlanc



**Industry Leader:** John Rock Inc. is one of the largest single-location manufacturers of pallets and crates in the United States. Its Coatesville, Pennsylvania plant has been a showplace to the industry for years.

John Rock Inc. is one of the largest single-location manufacturers of pallets and crates in the United States. As a company that prides itself on its relentless focus on constant improvement and continual reinvestment, it was no surprise when the Coatesville, Pennsylvania-based operation turned to PRS Group and CAPE for its latest expansion of pallet nailing capacity – the first CAPE nailing line to be installed in the United States.

According to Bill MacCauley, president of John Rock, his company had been looking for a new style or alternative nailing system for many years. It stemmed from the company's relentless drive to become a more efficient operation. "We were looking for a machine that was easier to run than the current machines and would nail faster. We wanted a cluster chuck design, and we wanted a dual hopper for each board width." A few years ago, MacCauley started discussions with Jeff Williams of PRS Group, the exclusive U.S. and Canadian partner of CAPE. CAPE has been in business for over 50 years, and has pallet machinery in use in more than 45

countries.

"Bill and his plant manager Mike Lugo made a visit to PRS in the spring of 2018 to watch a demonstration run of

a Cape Mach II that was on our showroom floor," Williams stated. "They were impressed with the machine's performance especially with dense hard-



**Key Personnel:** Left to right. Jim Martin, trucking coordinator, Kyle MacCauley, Trailblazer specialist, Mike Lugo, general/plant manager, Cam Zook, shipping supervisor, Dillan Martin, assistant plant manager, and Austin Nettles, head of maintenance.



**Efficient Nailing:** *The CAPE Mach II has reputation for efficient nailing, simple operation and will even handle dense hardwood. All electric not hydraulic equipment, the Mach II is a more robust and durable system in terms of continuous operation according to John Rock.*

wood lumber.”

MacCauley also accompanied Williams to the Netherlands, where they checked out a fully automated CAPE line in operation. That, MacCauley stated, was when he decided he had to have one. “CAPE has a really good reputation overseas, so I decided to try them

out,” he said. And while they weren’t quite ready to take the plunge with a fully automated line, he liked the idea that it could be easily modified and expanded in the future for automatically loading components.

“The CAPE line in the Netherlands that was 100% automated,” MacCauley

noted. “There was nobody touching any lumber. The machine fed itself and our machine can be retrofitted to do that. While we don’t know whether we need to go there yet, I like the possibility that we can do it.” Aside from partnering with PRS Group, CAPE also works with Faunc, a company specializing in robot-



**Maximum Production:** *The CAPE Mach 2 is designed to produce stringer pallets. It offers a quick changeover between designs and can produce about 2,500 pallets in an eight-hour shift. An upgrade module is available to allow block pallet production. CAPE is represented in North America by PRS Group.*



**Block Cutting:** In March 2019, John Rock also added a Cape block cutting machine for their expanding block pallet business. The productive carousel type block saw made an immediate impact to production after its installation.

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— Bill MacCauley, president of John Rock Inc.

ics for unique pallet applications.

John Rock placed the order in the fall of 2018 and took delivery in December. It was running production within a week. The company then ordered additional options, modules, and upgrades that were completed by CAPE in the months that followed. Upgraded machine has been in full production since May.

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**New Building:** John Rock constructed a new building. The new addition also includes additional lumber and finished pallet storage, as well as room for an additional CAPE nailing line to be delivered in 2020.

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— Bill MacCauley, president of John Rock Inc. talking about CAPE machinery he saw on a recent European tour

The CAPE Mach 2 is designed to produce stringer pallets. It offers a quick changeover between designs and can produce about 2,500 pallets in an eight-hour shift. An upgrade module is available to allow block pallet production. John Rock uses the standard three operator configuration, although CAPE does offer robotics and other automation which can reduce or eliminate staffing requirements. Other modules can be added such as branders, automated lumber feed systems, in-line block cutting saws, corner clippers and automated stack banding systems.

A key difference between the CAPE Mach 2 line and other nailing equipment is that they are all electrical not hydraulic. The result is a more robust and durable system in terms of continuous operation. It is also quiet.

Asked about what he likes the most about CAPE, MacCauley remarked, “It’s the speed with which it nails. It’s smooth, it’s quiet. It nails a fantastic pallet.” He added that support from CAPE has been second to none. “They take service very seriously,” he said.

CAPE monitors the performance of the John Rock Mach 2 line remotely from their head office in Spain. “They can dial right into it if there is anything wrong,” MacCauley said. “They can figure out any problems and help us work through it.”

The CAPE was also enthusiastically received by John Rock employees. “It’s just an easy machine to operate,” he said. “When our other operators saw it run, they asked when they could have one.”

The Mach 2 standard layout requires three operators. But robotics and other automation in regards to feeding lumber can allow customers to reduce that number by one or two employees.

To make room for the CAPE, John Rock constructed a new building. “It’s the first one in the United States,” MacCauley quipped. “It deserves to have its own building.” The new addition also includes additional lumber and finished pallet storage, as well as room for an additional CAPE nailing line, which has been ordered and is expected to be in production in the Second Quarter of 2020. Like the main building built in

2004, it features radiant floor heating, which has proven to be highly effective.

In March 2019, John Rock also added a Cape block cutting machine for their expanding block pallet business. The productive carousel type block saw made an immediate impact to production after its installation.

Aside from the CAPE, John Rock also runs a Storti, a GBN Trailblazer, as well as seven Viking 505s for pallet nailing. The company values new equipment. Over the years, it has purchased 18 new 505s.

“I have owned more 505s than anyone on the planet,” MacCauley shared. “I have owned 18 of them. We currently have seven, so there are 11 other customers with our old machines.” He believes that three of his old machines are in Australia.

John Rock has a preference for new equipment. “We like to stay up-to-date, benefit from the current electronics and get the maximum speed out of machine you can physically get,” he said. In 2014, the company went a different route in building a sawmill with equipment it

sourced at auction. There were a lot of costs associated with the project. When it built a second sawmill in 2017, it went with new machinery.

“The first mill cost us a lot of money in the first year,” MacCauley said. “We spent so much time fixing equipment and reworking it. It’s not as cheap, going to the auction and buying this stuff, because there’s a reason why somebody got rid of it. It was worn out.”


John Rock has also boosted its kiln capacity from three to seven, with SII being its provider of choice. The justification for increasing kiln capacity was to avoid double handling. “I want to be able to offload it off the line and put it right in the kiln instead of having to handle it twice,” MacCauley said. “That’s why we put more in.”

John Rock, Inc. is centrally located in eastern Pennsylvania, ideally located to serve the Mid-Atlantic and lower New England regions, including the largest industrialized manufacturing corridor in the United States. Besides being close to the customer base, this prime location also allows John Rock to take advantage of the significant and plentiful certified



**Boosting Kiln Capacity:** John Rock has also added four SII dry kilns to avoid double handling and improve finished pallet flow.

sustainable Appalachian forest regions of Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland. Other John Rock companies include Rock Technologies, its trucking operations that boast over 50 tractors and 300 trailers, as well as Rock Wood Products, its two sawmills, and

Rock Hardwoods, a log sorting operation. 

**Editor’s Note:** For more information on CAPE equipment in North America, contact Jeff Williams at PRS Group at 866-546-8864 or visit [www.prsgrandin.com](http://www.prsgrandin.com).

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