

# Everything but the kitchen sink

Mission statements are the vogue in modern business, but The Richmond Cabinet Company Limited preferred to forego the grand visions in favour of a simple and durable value to sum up the business – the word is trustworthy

The Richmond Cabinet Company Limited comes of age in 2008, having been established 21 years ago to manufacture kitchen units for local authority homes.

In those days, business was perhaps simpler since the market was geared to mass-produced, bulk items as befitted the 'one size fits all' orthodoxy of the era. Times change, and the arrival of Decent Homes ushered in today's era of resident involvement and the move from the conformity of mass production to what might be called 'mass bespoke' design and manufacture.

"Today, we offer a durable product range for the social housing market that is versatile and stylish further expanding our choice of kitchens to suit individual resident's choice" said managing director Ian Hodge. "The business continually adapts to deliver the ever changing market requirements. We have CAD designers, who will go in to a resident's property, put together a kitchen layout within the rules adopted for the scheme, offer a range of colours and fittings, and then design the kitchen. The resident is shown a 3D representation of the model and from that we supply an individual kitchen to suit an individual house."

Clearly, making this kind of transition is one that requires a flair for flexibility, but it also essentially requires a commitment to the modern principle of inclusion. Involving residents in the bespoke design of their kitchen is one, but Richmond proves it by taking the next step.

At the CIH gathering in Harrogate, the company will present its new product range, with its selection of colours and hues designed not only to provide a choice selection for residents, but also provide the means to design kitchens that meet the more critical needs of, for instance, the visually impaired.

"We have given serious consideration to our work on social inclusion and with RNIB Cymru further developed our product range to remove barriers to mobility and give independence to people who have visual impairments or restricted mobility," Hodge added. "Richmond provides technically sound colour contrast information that facilitates the appropriate selection of fascia, handles and worktop colours, ensuring the most appropriate combinations to help remove the barriers of visual impairment within the kitchen environment."

The key aspect here is contrast. Without sufficient contrast between kitchen surfaces, then people with a visual impairment find it difficult to tell surfaces apart, which may lead to accidents. Good colour schemes are not only aesthetic in such circumstances but also help the resident make use of the kitchen safely.

"Somebody with restricted vision or restricted mobility should be able to have the same kitchen as their next door neighbour so there's no discrimination," Hodge said.

The company operates throughout the country, either working as part of the supply chain to main contractors, or directly as partners with RSLs, but it's a testament to the scale of work in Wales that the company has made a strategic commitment to establish a presence in that country should it become economically viable.

This is as much about community involvement, as it is a business decision, and the plan is a long term consideration – far exceeding the commitments made in Decent Homes and the Welsh Housing Quality Standard contracts. By establishing a presence, should Richmond be successful in securing business, the company will not only be providing a regional supply base but local employment in a

project that may be 30 years or more in the making. This is planning for the long-term.

Community and Social responsibility has always been high on Richmond's agenda as the company has always been aware of potential impact, particularly in regards to the environment where the company has often positioned itself as an innovator of good environmental practice. Richmond was one of the first businesses within the industry to install a biomass fuel plant, eliminating the need for a natural gas supply to the factory and reducing landfill waste produced. Richmond is now exploring the possibility of expanding the function of the biomass fuel plant to supply part of the electricity supplied to the building. As an organisation Richmond continually reviews its commitment to environmental good practice, and is keen to explore schemes with like minded organisations. This has resulted in a new scheme where all cardboard and paper waste is recycled for the benefit of local charities and a potential scheme where Richmond will recycle old kitchens.

Longevity and durability are regarded as key facets of the Richmond character, sustained and bolstered by its principle of inclusion and flexibility. The over-arching essence of the company's vision, however, is not some fanciful mission statement but a simple – and durable – value. Simply put, it is about trust.

Throughout its operations, Richmond is determined to keep its promises, meet its commitments, rather than make promises it cannot keep. In essence, to be trustworthy.

As Hodge said: "It's simple really, we do what we say we will do, and we will only say what we will do. That's the core value of this business that we try to generate through the supply chain to this business and also through into our customer base. We've then got a condition of trust."

See us at CIH Housing 2008, Stand 285 Hall M

Richmond

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