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There's no stopping C.P. Hart's Paul Rowland as he sets his sights on opening even more showrooms – page 55



GDHA chief executive Denver Hewlett celebrates Belling's British heritage as it marks its 100-year reign – page 62



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Smallbone's back in business



Renowned kitchen designer Charlie Smallbone, left, is back at the top end of the kitchen market following the launch of a new "luxurious" furniture brand.

Rock & Bone is a collaboration between Smallbone, the founder of the iconic Smallbone of Devizes brand, and Damian Lawrance, MD of Knaresborough-based architectural and construction business LaRock.

"I've been planning my return to the furniture industry for some time," says Smallbone of the new venture. "I've always harboured this desire to recreate a high-end business – and to go as high as I can."

"It's luxurious – 50 jobs a year instead of 500, and built to the highest quality that we can possibly offer. Rock & Bone will feature all original designs by me built in a specialist joinery workshop." The team has been prototyping furniture for the last four or five months. "This isn't the sort of furniture where you can just wing it," says Smallbone.

Since 2009, Smallbone has been working on various projects, including one with Fired Earth. "I was working on their affordable luxury concept," he says, "and it's done very well for them."

Smallbone parted company with Smallbone of Devizes after it went into administration in 2009 and it was bought up by current owner Leo Caplan, who also owns Mark Wilkinson Furniture.

Rock & Bone's furniture will feature exotic timbers, deep coloured and metallised lacquers, bronze and silver finishes, metals such as pewter, rare marbles, and the latest cooking and interactive technology.

Purchasers will receive an iPad containing Smallbone's initial freehand drawings, along with plans, details of the materials used and how to care for them, and biographical information about the craftsmen who've built the pieces.

The first fruits of the partnership will be launched at Maison & Objet in Paris in January, where Rock & Bone will share a stand with appliance brand Sub-Zero & Wolf. Though there's no official link between the two



Rock & Bone's Ammonite kitchen island

businesses, Sub-Zero & Wolf is also hosting a preview of some of the Rock & Bone furniture at its Brompton Street, London showroom this month. Rock & Bone itself will have no showroom.



Look twice: One of just 100 LoopArt basins, this limited-edition, hand-made Second Glance basin is the result of a collaboration between ceramics manufacturer Villeroy & Boch and American artist Ebon Heath. The basins feature a deep textured surface décor with filigree elements, applied, says VGB, using a world-first revolutionary technique. Elements from VGB's history are found in the 18-carat white gold embellishments and hand-designed illustrations – but only reveal themselves on close inspection, hence the Second Glance name. Part of the proceeds from the sale of the numbered and signed basins will go to the International Museum of Children's Art

Roper Rhodes secures rights to TC designs

Bathroom manufacturer Roper Rhodes has acquired the design rights to what it describes as "a large number" of sanitary-ware ranges from TC Bathrooms' portfolio.

Dewsbury-based TC ceased trading in October and Roper Rhodes' purchase of the design rights of its more popular ranges – for an undisclosed sum – from administrators will see it introduce some of the TC designs into its R2 range from January.

Other TC designs – including the popular Mini collection – will be incorporated into the Roper Rhodes and Tavistock ranges at a later date, and the company says that some models may retain their original names to make for easier identification by retailers.

Bath-based Roper Rhodes' marketing director, Simon Taylor, said his company beat off a number of other bidders to secure the design rights. The deal was concluded at the end of October. "While we consider how best to incorporate these lines into our brand portfolio, we wish to make it very clear that we are determined to protect these design rights," he said.

Aquaforce Trading, the Elstree-based bathroom products importer and supplier, has secured what it describes as "a large quantity of furniture items" from TC Bathrooms' existing suppliers.

Aquaforce said it stepped in to secure the stock after hearing "many stories about

frustrated customers and independent stores being let down in the supply chain". It is understood the furniture items include vanity sets and basin cabinets. In a statement released by Aquaforce Trading, the company said: "It's business as usual for us, but while there are many customers who are still struggling to find alternative suppliers, our decision to take this opportunity to expand our range of products and increase our client base was a no-brainer. With an already substantial range of sanitaryware, brassware and bathroom furniture, we're confident that our increase in lines will fulfil all our customer needs."

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EASY DOES IT

Funktional Kitchens' success is testament to quiet determination and a flexible approach to opportunities as they come along. We head to North London as directors Vicky Shudell and Emma Hood open their doors to Doca

Words Amelia Thorpe Photos Paul Craig

There's a quiet determination about Vicky Shudell, owner of Funktional Kitchens, and her fellow director Emma Hood. You won't find flashy launch parties or banners which trumpet their success – just a clear focus on growing their business. And grow it they have: from opening what Shudell freely admits was a 'tiny' showroom in Crouch End in 2005, they opened a second showroom in Islington in 2008, and have recently opened a new – and larger – showroom in Crouch End, and taken on furniture ranges by premium Spanish brand Doca in the process. And all through some of the toughest economic times on record. "When we opened Islington and the recession hit, we were worried," admits Shudell. "But actually it turned out to be the best move, because while sales at Crouch End dropped off, they took off at Islington." Although both North London locations are only a few miles apart, they have surprisingly different clienteles: more families at Crouch End, more city slickers at Islington.



Directors Emma Hood, left, and Vicky Shudell

essential retailer profile Funktional Kitchens



Looking towards the front of the showroom, with Häcker Classic units in Anthracite and laminated worktop, also by Häcker, in Dark Concrete



The Alveus Laguna mixer in Anthracite blends with the streamlined finish of the Doca Dacu Furniture

We like the fact that Doca is a bit more individual. In this climate, it's essential to stand out from the crowd

Vicky Shudell, director, Funktional Kitchens



So they were open to new opportunities when Doca made an approach in 2010. "I normally dismiss those kinds of sales approaches," recalls Shudell. "But as soon as I saw the catalogue, I was impressed. I liked the look and felt that Doca offered something really different."

As a satisfied Häcker dealer, Shudell says she wasn't, however, particularly looking to take on a new range. "I was dubious, but when Doca arrived on our doorstep, I decided to go to Barcelona to take a look," she says. "I could see it was an opportunity to offer an alternative to what we already had, especially something that would so clearly make us stand out." With Häcker offering a good selection of entry and mid price-point kitchens, Shudell and Hood could see the potential for a premium product, with more options than those available from the Häcker range.

So what makes the Doca product so distinctive? Doca UK business development manager Sara Wells suggests there are four stand-out features. "It is a design-led product with an exceptional selection of handleless designs, lots of clever concealments, a huge range of doors and finishes, which can give you continuity throughout the house, and

a great build quality with a higher specification than most," she says.

After showcasing the Doca product on their stand at the Grand Designs Live Show in 2011, Shudell and Hood introduced a display to their Islington showroom in August of that year, then set about moving from their small studio in Crouch End to larger premises, with an opportunity to showcase the Doca product, as well as Häcker, to greater effect.

"Even though the houses around here tend to be Victorian and Edwardian, most of our customers want contemporary kitchens," says Hood. "So we kept the ceiling rose, cornice and chimney breast in here, to show how a modern kitchen can still work really well in a traditional setting."

They clearly understand the need to be flexible and adjust their plans as time goes on. "I did think we'd have three showrooms by now," says Shudell. "But, with the recession, we've decided to concentrate on two." Instead, their next plan is to develop the basement of the new Crouch End showroom, and they have already had it tanked, ready to double their display space, with a planned launch date of May 2013.

"We've started to promote bedrooms and bathrooms because we now have Doca," she says, adding that they want to create a studio flat-style arrangement downstairs to showcase a kitchen, bedroom, bathroom and utility display.

"We like the fact that Doca is not widely available across London and that it is a bit more individual," says Shudell. "In this climate, it's absolutely essential to stand out from the crowd."

IT IS A DESIGN-LED PRODUCT WITH AN EXCEPTIONAL SELECTION OF HANDLELESS DESIGNS, LOTS OF CLEVER CONCEALMENTS, A HUGE RANGE OF DOORS AND FINISHES, AND A GREAT BUILD QUALITY

Sara Wells, business development manager, Doca UK



company profile

Doca UK

Who are we? Sara Wells, business development manager

Where are we? Studio 20, 10 Acklam Road, London W10 5QZ.

Tel: 0203 603 8835. www.docauk.com

What we do Manufacture contemporary kitchen, bathroom and wardrobe furniture

Business history Friends Daniel Dolz and José Luis Castells got together in 1980 to create a small kitchen furniture factory in Vinaròs in the Castellón province of Spain. Doca, named after the first two letters of Dolz and Castells' surnames, has grown to become a brand well-known in the Spanish mid to high-end market sector with a turnover of about €9m. All the kitchens are manufactured in Spain at the company's 20,000sq m and €20m factory near Barcelona, which was opened in November 2006. Dolz and Castells continue to own and run the company today from the head office in Uldecona, Tarragona. As well as kitchens, Doca produces bathroom furniture and wardrobes. There are over 200 finishes. Doca UK is the regional representative of Doca in Spain. It is a separate company owned by directors Steve Holgate and Gideon Wegh, and opened its trade-orientated 1,500sq ft London design centre and showroom just off Portobello Road in the summer of 2012. There are currently 12 dealers, spread across London and the home counties. Business development manager Sara Wells has set her sights on having a total of 30 to 40 dealers within 18 months to two years. "But it is really all about quality, not quantity," she adds. London is now well covered, with the exception of east of the city, from the Stratford area up into Essex. Wells, 42, joined Doca UK in 2012, having previously worked at Alternative Plans for two years as sales designer and assistant showroom manager



This Häcker Emotions 'pod' in black and white lacquer, with integrated Siemens appliances, is a glossy showpiece



A Doca double larder from the Leach range featuring stainless steel drawers with walnut detailing



Planar doors on the wall cupboard are designed to slide in front of the adjacent door when open, while lift-up doors offer different options



Doca Dacu handleless furniture, displayed with an orange glass splashback, Miele induction hob and Ceramix worktop from Rossi Stoneworks



Häcker Systemat furniture in Antique White satin lacquer sweeps along the wall, its shape mirrored by the Cimstone Grimsey worktop



Solid walnut clads the lower section of the island, which features Häcker Systemat units in black high-gloss lacquer, and Corian Lava Rock worktop



Häcker Classic units in Anthracite create a sleek design, which blends with the period setting



Emma Hood, left, and Vicky Shudell outside the Funktional Kitchens' showroom in Crouch End

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retailer profile

Funktional Kitchens

Who are we? Directors Vicky Shudell and Emma Hood

Where are we? 128 Crouch Hill, Crouch End, London N8 9DX.

Tel: 0208 341 2020. Also at 42 Cross Street, Islington, London N1 2BA.

Tel: 0207 359 4041. www.funktionalkitchens.co.uk

What we do Contemporary kitchen retailer

Business history Founded by Vicky Shudell and husband Mark Flint in 2005, the couple continue to own the business today. They were joined by fellow director Emma Hood shortly after the business was started. Hood, 42, is now based largely at Crouch End, Shudell, 39, at Islington. Shudell has had a career in the kitchen industry, working at Wickes when she left school, and most recently, before setting up Funktional, running Rhode Design in Islington. Hood worked in banking, but always harboured an interest in interior design, so says she didn't hesitate to take up the opportunity to join Shudell when she was made redundant from her banking role. Funktional Kitchens today sells furniture by Docca and Häcker. The starting price of a kitchen by Häcker is £10,000 to £12,000; average £15,000 to £25,000. The starting price for a kitchen by Docca is £20,000; average £35,000 to £40,000. The most expensive to date across both ranges is £60,000 for a Docca design. Sales are almost entirely retail, and new business is generated largely through recommendation. Docca is still relatively new to the company, and currently accounts for about 20% of sales. Appliances are mainly by Siemens and Miele. Sinks and taps are by Franke, Blanco, Alveus

Sales stats "2011 turnover was £900,000. This year is about the same," says Shudell

Staffing levels Five – owners and directors Vicky Shudell and husband and fitter Mark Flint, director Emma Hood, a designer and an administrator

Favourite aspect of job "Being my own boss is the greatest thing," says Shudell

Least favourite aspect of job "And it can also be the worst," she says

Strange but true "Everybody thinks we're sisters," laughs Hood