

News

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ABET

A Fond Farewell

After the best part of 50 years in the industry, Phillip Tuhill has finally said farewell to the laminate world - maybe we could say delaminating!!

From 1959 to the end of 2006, Phillip has worked in an industry that has developed and evolved in dramatic and diverse ways to become the complicated world of high pressure laminates that we know today.

Phillip originally joined Islington-based Formica and Waverite distributor Allied Manufacturing Co. in 1959 at the age of 16 as an office boy, eventually reaching the position of Sales Manager. He left the company 18 years later to go and work for Sefen in Israel as their export manager for 'English Speaking Countries'.

Returning to England in 1980 to get married, he noticed an advert from an Italian laminate manufacturer looking for a UK Sales Manager to open a branch in the UK. That is when Abet Laminati established its first direct presence in the UK.

Originally located in Grand Buildings in Trafalgar Square, with just himself and a secretary, Phillip steadily grew Abet's presence in the UK, taking on more office staff and a dedicated sales team. Eventually, in 1997, Abet built new offices and warehouse in London Industrial Park to serve the growing distribution network; this has been Abet's home ever since.

CHANGES OVER THE YEARS:

Having such a long history within the industry, we asked Phillip what major changes he'd seen. He commented, "One of the major changes is the sad

demise of many of the original independent family distributors. Names such as George E. Grey, F G Chambers, Lamdec Boards, Gunham Plastics and Viking Laminates have all disappeared over the years with the development of larger multi-branch distributors."

He adds, "Another change over the last 30 years has been the significant growth of imported laminate. When I started in the industry, imported laminate accounted for perhaps 5 - 10% of the market; today it's more like 60 - 70%. This has led to the demise of many traditional UK laminate manufacturers. In the 60's, there were seven (leading) UK HPL manufacturing units (Formica, Waverite, Panax, Marlica, Fablonite, Decorplast and Arborite) - today there is only one."

INNOVATION:

When asked about innovations, he comes out with the startling news that originally there were no plain coloured laminates available! He says, "The earliest laminates were either basic woodgrain, softglow (mottled) or linen patterns. It wasn't until 1961 or 1962 that Arborite offered the first plain colour collection." This is even more amazing when you take into account that plain white has always been the best selling plain colour laminate and plain colours probably account for 70 -80% of HPL sold today.

Another innovation over the last 30 years is a dramatic reduction in laminate thickness - from 1.5 mm to today's 0.7mm or 0.8mm. Over the last 15 years, there has also been a phenomenal growth in sales of compact solid grade laminate.



Phillip cuts the cake at his retirement party

THE FUTURE FOR LAMINATE:

Phillip is proud of Abet's innovation and dedication in pushing the boundaries of laminate manufacture and the constant development of more radical laminate products, styles, finishes and textures. With continual innovation and development, which has produced such varied results as translucent, super gloss and digitally printed effects, the future for laminate looks secure and exciting.

THE FUTURE FOR PHILLIP:

Phillip is looking forward to retiring to the North of Israel, near the Sea of Galilee in the Jordan Valley, as well as regularly commuting to his other home in Chiang Mai in Thailand. However, it doesn't end there! Those of you who know Phillip, also know that he's a very keen

traveller. One look at his passport (and he fills a passport every 3 - 4 years with visas!), highlights the fact that he's continuing his quest to visit every country in the world. With the best part of 40 countries under his belt, it looks like he'll be a busy traveller for a few years yet!

On being asked about his favourite locations, Phillip replies "Thailand, and South- East Asia", and on his next travelling plans comments, "over the next three years I really want to visit Antarctica, Tibet and Timbuktu! I would also love to travel from London to Saigon by train."

And his farewell comment to his successor, John, "If in the years that John spends at Abet he makes the same long-standing and personal friendships with colleagues from around the world as I have done, then he will be very lucky."

A Warm Welcome

An interview with Abet's new General Manager, John Woodham

John started his career playing football for Charlton Athletic in the late 1970's. Having continued to play semi-professional football for the next five years or so, he left and, as John succinctly puts it, "Got a proper job!"

John spent the next years in the Commercial Banking sector where he gained a very good understanding and footing in business finance. From there, in the late 1980s, he joined thermal footwear manufacturer Derri Boots.

Deciding he needed to join the computer revolution, John took a job with software development company Enlight. This gave him an excellent grounding in IT and all things computer.

Having absorbed this technology, he returned to the manufacturing world joining Sebel, the global furniture manufacturer, as general manager for Europe. Then, on seeing an advert, he applied and was appointed General Manager UK and Ireland for Abet.

THE ROLE AND THE COMPANY

John comments, "I was attracted to this position as the move entailed a role more focused on UK and Ireland. Being a General Manager of Europe is generally too wide a remit as the number of countries involved and the marked differences in their markets make it difficult to formulate a universal strategy."

He further adds "On visiting Abet Laminate in Northern Italy and seeing at first hand the production facilities and

factories, I knew I was joining a world class company. My first two months have been very informative and I have been relying heavily on Phillip's experience. I have also been very impressed with the whole UK operation and team and the way they work together."

This positive start was further enhanced when John started meeting Abet's distribution partners and the 'great and the good' individuals of the industry who immensely impressed him.

THE HOMEWORK!

If it wasn't hard enough having to get through a whole lot of bedside reading about the world of laminates, the unique market and its applications, John is also taking evening classes in Italian. This steep learning curve of not only mastering a new industrial sector but also a new language is

an exciting challenge which John is relishing. Amazingly he also finds time to play football for a local team in his home town of Harlow, as well as looking after his family, (two daughters and one son) plus a couple of dogs.

Commenting on his appointment John says, "I am delighted to be given the opportunity to continue Abet's business in the UK and Ireland. It will be an honour and a privilege to take over from Phillip who has made such an outstanding contribution to Abet's success in the UK as well as to the laminate industry as a whole.

Phillip will be greatly missed by his close colleagues and those within the laminate industry and beyond. We wish him well for the future. I really look forward to working with the Abet team and our distribution partners."



John Woodham (l) welcomed to Abet by Mr Mazzola (c) and Phillip Tuhill (r)

Products in practice

SILVER FOR JOY

High pressure laminate from Abet's new Silver collection has been used to great effect at the JOY homewares and fashion retail store in Norwich. The store is the first of a planned roll-out across the South East of England and Abet's Silver 2705 laminate has been used on the changing room doors and shelves throughout the store.

The scheme was designed by SHH Architects with main contractors, Peach Projects. Commenting on the design, Peach Projects' Mark Kent says, "The Silver laminate looks fantastic in-store and really adds to the overall aesthetic appeal and the retail experience for the customer. The highly reflective surface with its inlaid patterns is interesting and lightens up the changing rooms; it also makes a great covering for the shelving providing a nice footing for the display items".



MAKING A TOPPING

The new Pizza Express restaurant in Manchester's Trafford Centre features Abet's striking and popular Legni collection of woodgrains. Lief Design specified a dramatic mix of materials, furniture, imagery and colour to give the restaurant a striking appearance and strong customer appeal.

The Legni has been used to clad the walls of the new restaurant and the unusual 'booth dining' configuration which has proved to be a particularly popular part of the customer experience.

These woodgrain high pressure laminates adds to the designers palette of oak panelling, natural stone and rich grass-green sprayed glass to create a simple yet defined area.

The laminates are designed to give the warmth and appearance of real wood.



SHOPPING ON LAMINATE

Several styles, colours and finishes including plain colours, metallic and wood grains are being used in the ongoing refurbishment of Marks & Spencer stores throughout the country.

Abet high pressure laminate, specified by Caulder Moore Design Ltd, is used extensively in the Womenswear and lingerie departments as well as throughout other areas. The bright, clean and uncluttered lines of the new displays enhance the customer experience and have totally modernised the displays – giving them a boutique-style appearance.

Abet's high pressure laminate is a popular choice for this type of retail application where a stylish and fashionable finish is of paramount importance and it complements the products on display.



ADDING BODY TO WAITROSE

Oberflex Real Wood Laminate has been used to enhance the new look wine and spirits departments in selected Waitrose branches.

The American Walnut has been used to clad the display stands and shelves to create a vibrant and rich feel to the department as well as complementing the dark wood flooring. The scheme is being rolled out across refurbished stores in this on-going campaign.

Oberflex is a popular choice for architects and designers because it combines the benefits of a real wood veneer with the performance of high pressure laminate (HPL). The slicing method used in its manufacture provides alternative straight-grain or flowered veneer for a book-matched or random-matched result.



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