

kbbreview

How to get ahead



Ways even the most experienced
retailers can increase margins and
maximise upselling opportunities to
grow their business

Special focus inside

'It's important to remain positive'

Halcyon Interiors has three kitchen showrooms in London and Buckinghamshire, including a flagship store on Wigmore Street. We spoke to showroom and design manager **Graham Robinson** to find out more about the business and why it's been successful...



Halcyon Interiors Wigmore Street showroom in London

Q & A



Q: How did Halcyon Interiors come about?

A: It was established in 1981 by Steve and Sue Gobel, who started selling and installing kitchens.

In 1989, they opened their first showroom in Hatch End [north-west London], where it still remains. Eight years later – in 1997 – they started their relationship with the Alno brand, and, in 2005, opened the Alno flagship showroom on London's Wigmore Street. Since then, we have opened our third showroom, in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire.

Our Hatch End showroom is our centre for admin and project management. Wigmore Street has 10 displays set over two floors and our Beaconsfield showroom is an unusual space – it's a building from the 1600s.

We have a warehouse in Watford, which we own, and we employ a full-time logistics team, which gives us total control.

Q: Who's your customer base and how do you promote and market your business?

A: We have a broad spectrum of clients, from interior designers and architects, to individuals who are looking to improve their kitchens, as well as volume contracts, too.

A large proportion of our work comes from recommendations, so our service and reputation is very important to us. We advertise and are active with PR events and on social media.

Q: How many staff do you employ?

A: We have five designers, four admin staff, two in logistics and an eight-strong fitting team.

Q: Which end of the market do you aim at and why?

A: We aim at the premium end of the market, as this is a true reflection of the quality of the brands we supply and the service we provide.

finishes, unique, stone and steel fronts and the ability to be bespoke.

Appliances are from Miele, Gaggenau, Siemens, Sub-Zero, Wolf, Barazza, Westin, Elica, Fisher and Paykel and Bora. Our worktops are from Silestone, Caesarstone, CRL, Corian and Spekva, and sinks and taps from Dornbracht, Blanco and 1810.

Q: How's the current market? Is it tough and what are you doing to stay on top of it?

A: Retail has changed dramatically over the past few years, but it is important to remain positive. Last month was our busiest sales-wise for two years.

It is paramount to look at every detail of the business – to provide the best service, while improving efficiency to reduce waste.

We have a schedule of events of different types to bring people to our showrooms, and we are always open to opportunities that can lead to a new client visiting us.

Q: How has the business achieved its success?

A: We pride ourselves in giving great individual service, regardless of the size of the project. We tailor each kitchen to the client's needs.

Every project is followed through to completion by the designer, so close relationships are developed. Due to this, our service is often recommended. Even once the kitchen is finished, we are still on hand to demonstrate appliances, or help with any service issue that may arise.

Q: What are your future plans for the business? Are you confident going forward?

A: We are continually looking at our showroom space and the way we use it to make the most of the locations.

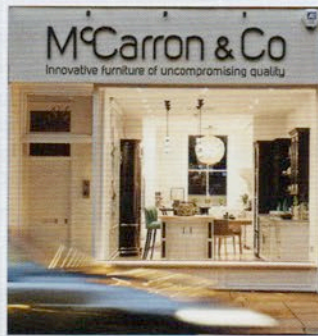
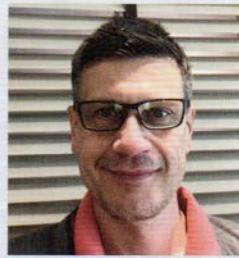
We are certainly confident for the future, as we have a great range of products. Combined with recent innovations from appliance manufacturers, there is a lot to be excited about. **kbb**



Alno by Halcyon – in the Wigmore Street showroom

'Our customers require a truly personal touch'

Wiltshire-based **McCarron & Co**, which was recently acquired by Lux Group Holdings, is a British bespoke luxury kitchen maker with a Chelsea showroom. The key to success is offering a truly personal, quality service, says creative services director, **Andy Barette...**



Q & A

Q: Can you tell us the background to McCarron & Co?

A: We formed in 2009 and we focus on truly bespoke joinery for the whole home. It was started by eight former Mark Wilkinson Furniture colleagues and we've progressed to having a 1,400sq ft showroom in Chelsea and one of 1,000sq ft at our manufacturing site in Bromham, Wiltshire.

We employ 40 staff. The Chelsea showroom is positioned in the 'Chelsea Cross' area, which is a known design destination. There are several interior designers and bathroom retailers in the area, so clients can spend time looking at a variety of interiors shops.

Q: Who is your customer base and how do you promote and market your business? Are you omni-channel?

A: Customers are high-net-worth individuals and they require a truly personal touch to their projects. We mix materials and finishes in a way that our competitors do not.

Our business has grown through recommendations and referrals and we have a following on social media.

We aim at the premium end of the market – the materials and processes we adopt do not fit

into a lesser bracket. Our timbers, veneers and metallic finishes are all Grade A selected.

Q: Which brands have you chosen to work with and why?

A: Sub-Zero, Wolf, Gaggenau and Miele for appliances, Artisans for flooring and Joseph Giles for handles. All of these companies have a similar ethos to us regarding quality and service.

Q: What would you say are the factors that have led to your success?

A: Listening to a brief, applying our own design skills and then delivering a quality product and service. I believe that is the key to success within our industry.

Q: How are you finding the market? Is it tough at the moment?

A: It has been tough for 18 months, but as long as the quality of product and service is maintained and continually improved upon, there will be willing clients.

Q: What are your plans for the business going forward?

A: We have recently been acquired by Lux Group Holdings, which has plans to revolutionise the way bespoke furniture is presented and the experience the client receives. The future is very positive for our clients and us.

and aspirations of your brand."

Celtic Interiors in Cork updates its website regularly with blogs, a Kitchen of the Month feature and also has videos of its showroom online.

Says a spokesperson for the company: "We have a service where the public can subscribe to be sent a newsletter of our Kitchen of the Month. We also have completed projects professionally photographed and we post them regularly to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We find this works well, as we often have prospective clients call in with a specific kitchen from a social media post in mind."

A virtual showroom?

Kitchen designer Francesca Quansah, founder of Manchester-based Design By Helium kitchen, doesn't have a showroom – she relies on word of mouth, her website – www.designbyhelium.co.uk – and social media presence on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to get business.

"A lot of my clients are so busy – they feel like they don't have time to go to showrooms and so many of them have told me they find the showroom experience overwhelming," she says.

"For the time being, I will keep running my service at home. I have minimal overheads, which means I can price my kitchens very competitively for what they are. If my clients do want the traditional showroom experience, I take them to my suppliers of cabinets, worktops and appliances and give them the tour."

She adds: "In terms of people seeing the product, I get a lot of business from word of mouth, so I usually connect people with one of my previous clients – they already know someone and have seen the kitchen – and we view finished projects.

"If I had a bricks-and-mortar location, I'd make it a priority to get involved with local people and even try to really become a part of the community. I think that is one of the most important things you can do as a small business."

If showroom space is an issue and prevents you from displaying a wide range of products and designs, then one option that's out there is virtual reality (VR).

Software and CAD brand Virtual Worlds offers 4D Theatre technology, which creates a simulation of a kitchen or bathroom for customers.

Says Nathan Maclean, the company's managing director: "Transporting customers into a virtual world where they can feel like they are actually stepping into their new kitchen or bathroom is certainly a step up from leaving them to wander around a few display units looking for inspiration, but with no clear idea of what will actually work in the real world.

"Rather than being restricted by physical showroom space, using VR retailers are able to show an infinite number of colours and finishes. While only taking up one bay's worth of physical space, 4D Theatre enables the showroom to expand exponentially – in effect it becomes a showroom with no limits."

Meanwhile, back in the real world, there's no doubt that making your showroom part of an omni-channel experience is the way forward.

Concludes T21's Laville: "We're a long way from

