

MAKING THE RIGHT MOVE

Moving across Leeds to a new showroom has been a big success, says Arlington Interiors' director Ben Russell

Words **Amelia Thorpe** Photos **Paul Craig**

What a difference a move makes. At least, that's what Ben Russell, director of Arlington Interiors says of the business' move across Leeds to a new showroom in Farsley, which officially opened its doors in February. "It's been a huge success," he says. "Looking at the last quarter, sales are 50% up."

The new 3,000sq ft showroom is slightly smaller than Arlington Interiors' previous premises on an industrial estate, but it has a significant advantage. "We wanted more of a high-street presence, because previously we had no passing trade," explains Russell. Based in a former cloth mill which operated for 180 years, the exposed brick walls and timber beams make for an atmospheric showroom location, a stone's throw from the centre of Farsley. Neighbours include other high-end retailers, an art gallery, cafés and creative businesses, making it a lively destination for local people. "Because we were able to design the showroom from the ground up, it is better laid out [than the previous showroom], with 11 displays," says Russell.

Russell attributes the upsurge in business not just to the increased visibility of the showroom, but also to the opening weekend event, which included Friday-to-Sunday cooking demonstrations, food and drink, and live music. Local advertising, a visit from *The Yorkshire Post* to do a Facebook Live video, which garnered about 8,000 views, a social media campaign – with teasers showing the transformation from chair-making workshop "knee-deep in sawdust" to stylish kitchen showroom – encouraged plenty of visitors. "At times during that weekend, we were almost too busy to see all the customers walking through the door," he says. "Five months' on, and customers continue to mention that they visited during that opening weekend", he adds.

The showroom has recently been laser scanned and is available to view as a Matterport 3D walk-around reality experience on the Arlington Interiors' website. "It enables customers to do their research online and acts as a call to action – they then come in to have a look and touch things to appreciate the quality first hand," he says.

Arlington Interiors' has also chosen to take part in Zip's "Reuse Refill Refresh" campaign, offering chilled filtered water from its HydroTap, designed to cut down on single-use plastic bottle waste. "We've got to try to help out wherever we can," says Russell of the environmental benefits of the campaign. "We're never particularly mobbed in the showroom," he says – it was about one potential customer per day in the previous showroom, now it's two to three coming to browse – "and it only takes a 20 second conversation [to fill a water bottle]," he says. "And the more people we have in the showroom, the better and obviously that's an underlying objective from my point of view."

Russell says that the plan is to grow sales by at least 20% over the next couple of years. "We've been in the industry long enough to see peaks and troughs, so if we just maintain steady growth, that would be great." ■



Director Ben Russell inside the new Arlington Interiors showroom



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Ben Russell, director, Arlington Interiors



Sheraton Savoy White handleless units with Corian Glacier White worktop and solid walnut trim



RETAILER PROFILE

Arlington Interiors

Who are we? Ben Russell, director

Where are we? 4 The Spinning Mill, Sunny Bank Mills, Farsley, Leeds, LS28 5UJ. Tel: 0113 255 5566. www.arlington-interiors.co.uk

What we do Independent kitchen retailer

Business history Arlington Interiors is owned and jointly run by directors Ben Russell, Nick Tindall and Richard Bates. Former employees of kitchen importer Arlington Group, the three acquired its retail business about 14 years ago in a management buy-out. Originally based at the Arlington Group HQ, Arlington Interiors opened its new premises in February 2018. All three directors are involved in designing kitchens. The new showroom features displays by Kuhlmann and Sheraton. Appliances by Miele, Siemens, Neff, and Bora. Sinks and taps by Franke, Caple, The 1810 Company, Zip, and Quooker. Kitchen prices from £10,000; average about £30,000; most expensive to date, £75,000

Sales stats "Annual turnover is about £750,000," says Russell

Staffing levels Four, including the three directors and designer, Hayley Reid



As part of the Zip Reuse Refill Refresh campaign, showroom visitors are encouraged to fill their water bottles from the Zip All-in-One Celsius Arc tap in Rose Gold, which dispenses chilled filtered and sparkling water, as well as boiling, and 'standard' hot and cold



Sheraton Shaker Light Grey island with Steel Grey leathered granite worktop, Bora Basic induction hob with extraction system, and Iroko breakfast bar

» **What is your greatest opportunity?** "To capitalise on what we've done [in moving showroom]. The hard work is probably only just starting," says Russell

» **And your greatest challenge?** "Being able to maintain the level of customer service as the business expands – we mustn't take our eye off the ball, leaving customers by the wayside," he adds

» **Strange but true** "The tailor moving in next door saw the quality of our showroom and asked us to help with the fit out of his new studio. Who knows? We could start branching out into shop fittings," he says



A pull-down door opens to reveal a gin bar in this Kuhlmann Feel Matt Black island



Sheraton Manor House painted Shaker units in Anthracite and Limestone, with Silestone Eternal Calacatta Gold worktops

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Ben Russell, director, Arlington Interiors



The Zip HydroTap is available in 12 finishes, including Brushed Gold, shown

Sheraton In-line units in Gloss Limestone with Dark Mountain Oak laminate worktops



PROFILE

Zip Water UK

Who are we? Russell Owens, marketing director

Where are we? 180 Exmouth House, 3-11 Pine Street, London, EC1S 0JH. Tel: 03456 005 005. www.zipwater.co.uk

What we do Manufacturer of instant drinking water appliances

Business history Zip Industries has been manufacturing Australian-designed instant boiling water appliances and filtered drinking water systems since 1947 and began operating in the UK in 1991. Today, the company is focused on the delivery of instant filtered boiling, chilled and sparkling water appliances, and is best known for its HydroTap. In 2017, Zip was acquired from its private equity owners by water treatment specialist Culligan. The company remains headquartered in Sydney, Australia, and its appliances are installed in over 76 countries around the world. In the UK, Zip has a London showroom and office in Farringdon, and headquarters in Dereham, Norfolk. Most products are made in Australia and some countertop boiling water products for the catering industry under the Instanta brand are manufactured in Southport. The latest product is the HydroTap All-in-One Celsius Arc, which instantly dispenses five different water types from a single tap, including filtered boiling, chilled and sparkling water, plus unfiltered hot and cold water for washing up. It is available in 12 finishes, including rose gold, platinum and gunmetal. “We have the full suite of products: boiling only; boiling and ambient; boiling, chilled and sparkling – very few [other products] will offer combinations of all three – or all five as in the All-in-One Celsius,” says Owens. “We believe our tap very much fits with the higher end of the market, and there’s an opportunity for retailers to make more cash margin by selling a more expensive, more desirable product.” He adds: “Sales through independent kitchen retailers are one of our highest performing areas in terms of growth,” he explains. “We are actively looking to increase the size of our sales force to cover this area and are recruiting more engineers, from 60 to 83, because of demand.” Owens joined the business in 2015 as marketing director, after working for Samsung for 12 years, the last three of which he worked as commercial director for home appliances

Sales stats UK turnover is £40m

Staffing levels 250