SUHNER®

Fabricators make their marque with Jag …and are on song with Sony

Metal basher shines bright

A not-so traditional metal basher is raising a glass to the leisure sector supplying stainless steel furniture for hotels including the Hilton chain.

The marble flooring, shattered glass ceilings, spectacular wooden columns and three-tonne chandelier for the exclusive five star Hilton Cardiff Hotel were all hand crafted in South Wales but the most eye-catching feature without doubt are the ballroom doors, made of polished stainless steel with an embossed finish that were fitted by Customised Sheet Metal.

Three years ago, sheet metal engineering made up three quarters of sales at Customised Sheet Metal. That has now fallen to about 25 per cent as the Bridgend-based firm has moved to make parts for mobility chairs and medical testing equipment.

UTC 7R TUBE GRINDER: THE SMOOTH FACTS

MOTOR: 240V 500W
SPEED: 3,000-7,000rpm
BELT SIZE: 12-33mm x 520mm
WEIGHT: 2.4kg

Ideal for removing weld seams up to dia. 60mm

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SMOOTH OPERATOR: Fabricator Jeremy Donovan at work with the high performance UTC 7R. Belts are available in aluminium oxide and non-woven surface conditioning.

And it produces fabrications for sculptors such as Sebastien Boyesen whose work can be seen just down the road at Blackwood – a towering six-metre high statue of a man striding across the landscape that is a lasting reminder for generations to come of the Chartist riots in the 19th century.

The company has enjoyed particular success in boosting business making fabricated parts in the transport, defence, aerospace and electrical industries, and it already boasts a blue-chip customer base including Jaguar, Sony, Philips and Panasonic.

It specialises in prototype work for the electronics industry at its 9,000 sq ft factory in Brackla Industrial Estate where everything from balustrades and hand rails to decorative panels is fashioned out of mild steels, aluminium all grades of stainless steel, pure zinc, brass and copper.

Director Malcolm Pearce says: "We have continued to work in general engineering but have also branched out to specialise in architectural work. We also make furniture to customers' individual requirements – when people set up new restaurants, buying new bars and sinks is part of their investment."

Malcolm set up the original business 16 years ago in a double garage providing sub-contract services to a range of customers in the engineering industry. He was joined by Jonathan Templar, who became a partner when Customised Sheet Metal became a limited company in 1999.

Customised Sheet Metal now employs 17 staff. "Engineering is a very competitive industry. Our success is down to being a business where no job is too big or too small and our customers know they can come to us at any time of the day or night and expect a quality and reliable service to deadline," said Malcolm.

He added: "I was a lad from the shop floor and decided to give it a go. At the time I think I needed locking up.

"It was very tough at first, I had to start everything from scratch. This business is all about word of mouth. Absolutely everything went into keeping the company going. Nobody said 'here's £50,000 of work to get you started'. For the first two years I ploughed everything back into the company.

"Bigger companies need big projects to service their large overheads and lots of this volume work is going to India, China and Poland. But because we specialise in bespoke stainless steel work, typically for bars, restaurants and hotels we are able to compete."

Added Jonathan: "Our quality is one of our strengths and our ability to do the unusual is what makes people come back to us. Around this area there aren't many people who have the experience. Over the years we have learnt what is effective, what is not, as well as the ability to do all our polishing in-house."



Happy with a job well done

CUSTOMISED Sheet Metal needed a way to polish stainless steel handrails. To get the job done, they turned to Suhner's UTC 7R dedicated tube and pipe sander, which allowed them to accomplish the necessary finish in half the time manual polishing would have taken.

The project called for fabricating about 200 feet of 1 ½ -inch stainless steel pipe for handrails and stairway railing at Hilton Hotel.

The challenge for Customised Sheet Metal was not so much in the size of the project as in the finish required. A polished look was specified for all components of the job, which involved a large number of 90-degree corners.

Said Jonathan: "We had to be very careful with the rail polishing because the customer required it for aesthetic purposes. The finish produced by a conventional 4-inch angle grinder just isn't acceptable. A swirl pattern rather than a polished finish would be the result from this type of grinding which is caused by the circular rotation of the grinding disc moving the abrasive against the grain of the pipe.

"We could have achieved a uniform grain by hand polishing with steel wool, but we considered that method too time-consuming, and it required a great deal of manual effort. The UTC 7R is a tried and tested piece of kit, and it does the job."