



Sustainable Business Awards for the South East 2003

Case Study - Ercol Furniture Ltd

Company Background

Ercol is a third generation, family-owned, private company. It was formed in 1920 by Lucian Ercolani, an Italian furniture designer, and has been based in High Wycombe for the last 83 years. The company has two other smaller works in the locality (a sawmill in Amersham and a distribution depot in High Wycombe) and currently employs approximately 270 people.

Sustainability Initiatives

Ercol required a new purpose built factory to amalgamate and streamline its operations. It commissioned the design and construction of a new pavilion styled building in Princes Risborough, just eight miles from High Wycombe, in 2000-2001, as part of a new Enterprise Hub owned by Ercol. Throughout the development, the construction, manufacturing methods, disposal of existing sites, and energy consumption created opportunities to address sustainability issues. Occupation of the new factory took place in the autumn of 2002.

Key Achievements

- All sawdust and waste wood is collected from the factory and stored in an on-site silo for conversion to heat energy in a purpose-made 2 MW boiler.
- Noise emissions from the factory have been reduced so effectively that the acoustic energy escaping is only 2.5% of a standard factory construction.
- Many materials from the demolition of old buildings were recycled.
- Natural light is maximised in all areas of the building.
- Ercol's logging and milling subsidiaries only use renewable and sustainable temperate timbers.
- No solvents are used in finishing Ercol furniture; all stains and lacquers are water-based.

Waste

All sawdust and waste wood is collected from the factory and stored in an on-site silo for conversion to heat energy in a purpose-made 2 MW boiler. 25 tonnes of wood waste is consumed each year, with minimal use of top-up fuel oil, resulting in large savings.

Ercol donates fabric remnants to local schools.

Many materials from the demolition of the old buildings were recycled. Roof slates and timbers were used on other sites and all steel was recycled. All masonry was crushed and separated and used either as hardcore or in concrete in the new factory. Existing topsoil was banded to protect residents from construction noise and then reused for landscaping.

Recycled tarmac was imported for all road sub-bases.



Reception and Showroom in Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire - natural light is maximised in all areas of the building

Noise

The site has residential properties on three sides. As furniture manufacturing is a notoriously noisy process, a noise model of the building was developed. The entire roof and walls of the new factory were constructed as noise absorbent panels and the otherwise normally conspicuous, noisy, dust extraction plant is enclosed within the building fabric. Noise emissions from the factory have been reduced so effectively that the acoustic energy escaping is only 2.5% of a standard factory construction.

Emissions

- Flue gases are cleaned of all grit before being discharged, meeting all the current and foreseeable European Union environmental protection legislation.
- Rainwater from the large flat roof and hard surfaces is stored underground and discharged at a controlled rate to avoid the risk of downstream flooding.
- Ercol converts all its wood waste to heat on-site. Packaging waste is minimal as much of it is recyclable i.e. cartons are two thirds recycled; soft corrugated rolls are 100% recycled material; gusset bags are manufactured using both recycled and virgin materials. Some office waste (paper and plastic coffee cups) is also recycled.

Energy Efficiency

Natural light is maximised in all areas of the building. Along one entire side of the 11,500 m² production area is a 120 meter long by 3.7 meter high window made with solar control glass. This gives production staff wonderful views of the green surroundings. The offices and showroom are almost completely naturally lit, with extensive glazing in all directions.

Careful configuration of the building shape and solar control devices ensures that overheating of the factory and the offices in the summer is controlled without the use of air conditioning.

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Social Responsibility

Ercol's policy is to be involved in and support the surrounding community.

It supports many local charities and organisations, including:

- Princes Risborough Festival.
- Risborough Juniors Football Club.
- Princes Risborough School - Technology Status.
- Wycombe Wanderers Football Club.
- The Environment Centre, High Wycombe.
- Monks Risborough School IT Room.

It has a band which the public can book to play at local fetes and concerts. Ercol pays expenses but small donations are requested and given to the Furniture Trade Benevolent Association. The Ercol Band has played at the Christmas Tree Lighting-up Ceremony in Trafalgar Square for the last 25 years.

All visitors are welcome at Ercol's Works and Showroom at any time. In addition, in October 2002, a Community Day was held where members of the public were invited to come and look at Ercol's new facility and meet members of the workforce.

As recent recipients of a Civic Trust Award for its new building, Ercol now participates in Heritage Open Days. Visitors attending these events are able to learn about key features and technology incorporated in the state-of-the-art building.

Ercol are business partners, alongside Arts & Business and Sustrans Ltd, for the Phoenix Trail project which runs from Thame to Princes Risborough and is part of the National Cycle Network.

Ercol also sponsor the following awards and educational projects:

- Rycotewood College - NVQ Level 3 Handcrafted Furniture.
- Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers- Young Designers Award.
- Young Enterprise- Princes Risborough School.
- Information, Communication & Technology Challenge - Princes Risborough School.
- Two Day Business Challenge- Berkhamstead Collegiate School.
- Management Conference - Wycombe Abbey School.
- Industry Day Competition - Holmer Green School.
- Education & Business Partnership - Holmer Green School.
- Work experience, including special needs placement - Princes Risborough School.

The Furniture Trade Benevolent Fund (FTBA) Cushion Club is Ercol's industry based charity. It is supported by the Ercol Band and other fundraising events that raise the profile of the charity and ensure that sufficient funds are in place to support pensioners and existing employees within the furniture trade in times of need.

Ercol runs a number of apprenticeships each year for school-leavers and it celebrates each member of staff who achieves 21 years of service of which there have now been over 600.



The west facing solar control glass window extends the entire length of the production area

Supply Chain Management

Ercol has full control over its main material resources and supplies. Its American logging and milling subsidiaries use only renewable and sustainable temperate timbers. No solvents are used in finishing Ercol furniture, all lacquers are water-based.

Ercol is committed to building long-term relationships with its major suppliers. Partnership agreements are being formed that will allow selected suppliers to have input into design, specification, manufacture and delivery of Ercol products.

Transport

As part of Ercol's relocation project, the company identified the ways and means by which its employees would travel to the new location. Special rates were negotiated with Chiltern Railways for staff and car sharing was encouraged.

Planned Initiatives

Ercol is currently exploring a joint-venture with Chiltern Rail to erect a bridge from Princes Risborough Station directly on to its new site to improve accessibility for staff and visitors travelling by rail.

Awards

- Civic Trust Award.
- RIBA Award.
- CABA website.
- Digital Office Award (Times & Gestener).
- Arts & Business Award 2002.



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