

Furniture with a touch of Cypriot magic

“From the shore of the Southern coast of Cilicia may be seen to the south the beautiful island of Cyprus, which was the realm of the goddess Venus”

– From the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, 1104

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean, situated in the eastern part of the basin, with a population of over 800,000. It has an exposed coastline of about 500 miles – 778 km – and indeed, apart from its capital Nicosia, all of its cities are located on the coast. It is a country with a long and rich history, and is also a land with many traditional skills – not least in the area of quality furniture making. In fact, if you thought that you knew all you need to know about furniture, think again – think Cyprus.

Over generations, the art of furniture making has existed in Cyprus. For many years it was characterised by factory shops which catered for all aspects of home

furniture making. However, in recent times, with more competition and the need for greater efficiency, the position has changed – and yes, businesses have disappeared.

However, not all have done so, and there are many examples of furniture industries that are now growing and are very successful, based upon their traditional skills, but specialising and trading to meet the new opportunities.

This article looks at six such Cypriot furniture companies recently visited by the writer of this article, Professor John Moverley, which should prove interesting and hopefully rewarding.

Traditional skills

Klirco Furnishings Ltd (www.klirco.com) was established in 1977 as an artisan enterprise. The vision of the business, since inception, has been to deliver high quality and competitive products which give a character of long-lasting reliability.

On my visit, I met George Papageorgiou, who works in the business with his father, and who talks enthusiastically about the long tradition of furniture making in his family. Initially, Klirco continued to make and sell a wide range of home furniture, but in recent times the company has recognised the need to specialise. Its home production is now focused on chairs and tables, which has created improved efficiency and lower costs.

Touring the production area, the love of the product and the care and design of chairs and tables became very clear. The business still relies on much hand labour, and the focus is on quality and ensuring standards are maintained.

The business is seeking to develop its export markets where the focus is very much at the quality end, offering real choice to customers and allowing true custom design – something that they feel that bigger factories cannot often provide.

It seeks to produce something different – stylish, high quality, and competitively priced. Whether it is the chairs and tables traditionally found in the Mediterranean or more modern variations, they can provide the answer. As well as home production, they now buy in components from Italy for assembly in Cyprus – a more cost-effective approach.

They also need to import wood, as their furniture is broadly 90% beech and 10% oak. Despite the priority being quality, pricing is set to be very competitive – certainly compared to shops in the UK and Europe – with focus on an excellent after-sales service.

Cyprus is not immune to the current economic challenges faced in so many



Klirco Furnishings Ltd

Formatek Components Ltd



countries, and George accepts that the production business is currently operating at less than capacity.

However, with its clear mission, Klirco seems well set – not just to weather the current economic storm, but to emerge stronger and fitter.

Focusing on exports

Formatek Components Ltd (www.formatek.com.cy) is built upon another family business but has now taken an ambitious course with a heavy focus on exports. Averaged over the last three years, exports have made up 60% of sales, with current annual turnover over €10m. Founded in 1992, its investment strategy has focused on providing capability to meet the requirements of large, medium and minor projects, both at home and abroad.

The company is a leading component manufacturing enterprise, using the latest computerised technology, high specification machinery and the finest quality raw materials. It holds certificates issued by the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC), and the Soil Association Woodmark.

The company specialises in complete fitted kitchens and wardrobes as well as office and modular furniture, and sums up its offer by the words “diversified but specialised”. They emphasise meeting

customers’ needs – whatever the dimensions, raw material or design – at competitive prices, with a focus on specialisation, undertaking only those tasks which they can do so most economically and buying in where the right quality can be provided at lower costs.

They are a lean, flexible work force with capacity to meet big orders when needed but operate at lower levels just as efficiently. In their factory, all their staff can operate across the whole production process and not just specialise on particular activities – this is key to their ‘just in time’ approach, flexibility and vision.

They have joined forces with Ergo, another Cypriot company, with Formatek providing the production facility, and recent export contracts have included complete hotel refits in Qatar, housing furniture fits in Saudi Arabia and the refurbishing of luxury apartments in the UK.

Chris Fasouliotis, General Manager, explains their offer: “Flexibility, competitive pricing and high capability with modern machinery,” he says. “We aim to exceed customer expectations every time, design and arrange everything, and all at a truly competitive price.”

Their base in Nicosia means that they can serve markets both in the Middle East and Europe, at a distance which allows them to give the high level of after-sale service they

believe is essential. They have developed a quality range of bamboo furniture, less pricey than oak but of outstanding quality. Their development is accelerating – certainly a company to watch.

Responding to challenge

Prunabon Enterprises Ltd (www.prunabon.com) have their headquarters at Limassol, a fast-developing city. With origins yet again in a family business, Prunabon was established in 1979 and is considered to be among the leading furniture manufacturers in the categories of bamboo, rattan, synthetic and teak woods.

Until recently, they had three shops on the island and two factories. However, tragedy struck last year and a factory was burnt down. This created a challenge – but one that they have positively responded to with no loss in production and, indeed, continued sales growth.

Future plans include re-opening the factory and further shop expansion as well as developing their regional office, which focuses on serving the market of the United Arab Emirates. Prunabon exports to Europe, especially to Italy and Greece, building upon their strengths in delivering competitively-priced product, especially for outdoor use.

They already specialise in the construction of African umbrellas and garden kiosks, but are increasingly extending their remit to a wider range of furniture for garden and landscape use. The approach is to provide stylish solutions using weatherproof materials – a touch of class at reasonable prices.

Whilst offering a wide variety of materials, the inclusion of bamboo/rattan and water hyacinth is interesting. The latter, often known as water grass, is a fast-growing plant. Harvested from rivers and lakes, dried and then twisted to make rope, they provide raw material for strong and appealing furniture.

The business is keen to further expand its range and sales of outdoor furniture in Europe – and especially in the UK, with its well-known love of gardens. Bamboo offers a solution with style and a product which is extremely resilient to climate. In Cyprus, their primary market is provision for hotels, certainly at the higher end. Seeing it as very much their market, they work hard to maintain their position.

Building upon reputation

My next visit was to Nora Furnishings Ltd (www.nora.com.cy). Yet another strong family business, it was established in 1969 and has built its reputation as a quality home furniture business. Despite the fact that they no longer produce home products but specialise in office furniture, they still get public into their shops seeking advice and replacements for items purchased many years ago – as well as looking for that badge of quality that is Nora.

The decision to move to office furniture as a specialism was not taken lightly. It came about with recognition of the competitive marketplace, and with imports of cheaper, lower quality home furniture arriving – a

Prunabon Enterprises Ltd



market they did not want to enter. At the time of change, there was only one other Cypriot company in the office sector. Whilst there are now three significant companies in the sector today, the business has once again developed a reputation for high quality, pricing and excellent service.

It has a major factory and warehouse in Cyprus for constructing and distributing its products. They are interested in greater exports, but only if that does not mean reduction in standards and ensuring their core market continue to receive quality service. Whilst they do not, as said, seek to sell cheaply, their pricing is very competitive for the quality achieved.

Pambos Ioannides, Sales Manager at Nora, is keen to emphasise design in terms of materials, choice of colours, etc. He sees the marketplace as one of both big projects – which he felt were largely for the bigger worldwide players – and smaller projects, an area in which he sees that his company can certainly deliver.

Future plans are to build an export market based on quality projects, where flexible design and meeting specific customer needs is the key requirement. Pambos sums up the business with the words “quality, competitive pricing, durability and an established name”.

They are proud of their heritage – Pambos’ enthusiasm shone through and he is excited about the future, recognising his responsibility for maintaining standards and that hard-earned reputation.

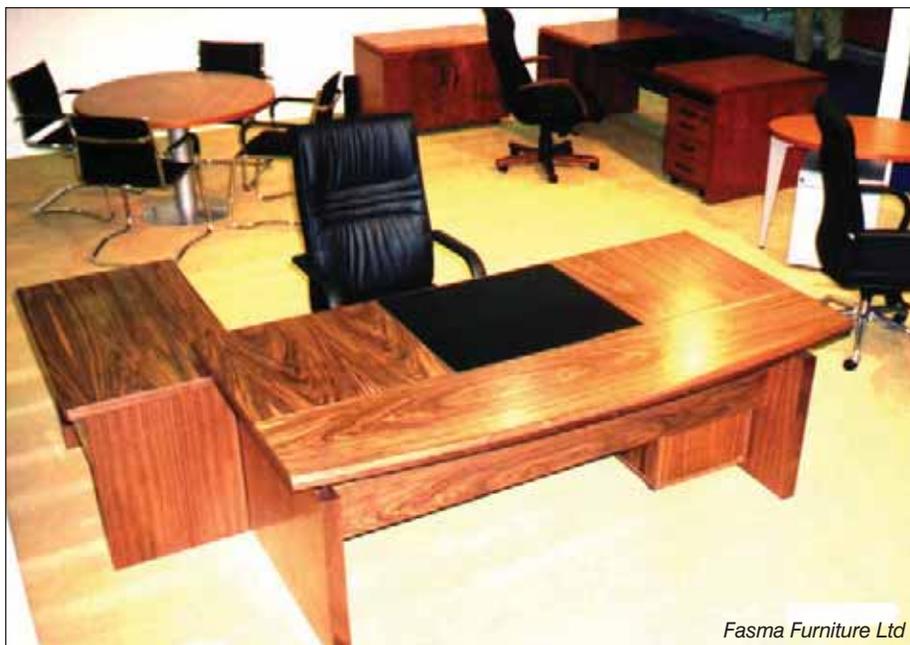
A passion for wood

At Fasma Furniture (A.N. Pittas) Ltd (fasmafurniture@cytanet.com.cy) I met Christina Pittas, whose father started the original business in 1963, drawing on experience from working for a large company in China.

In its early days, it was very much a working factory dealing with architects’ commissions, and indeed any custom-made furniture orders. In the 1980s, the business specialised more, recognising that the home market was small, and the firm ventured into exports including to the Greek and Arabic regions. Such developments led to the creation of the current business by Christina’s brother, as a sister company.

Although both ventures remain very much family-owned and operated, Fasma specialises in office furniture and initially manufactured the majority of its sales, although it bought in chairs, bases, filing units etc – indeed, anything they could not produce to what was seen as the standards set by Italian and German businesses.

Whilst those involved in the business enjoy working with wood, they recognised the changes occurring in furniture design and construction. They now offer a complete range of office furniture, but focus on design and detail, working closely with their customers. They offer an executive



Fasma Furniture Ltd

range crafted from wood by their skilled workforce, but otherwise import bases and related equipment and fit together completed units and melamine worktops in their own factory.

Despite the percentage of wood construction declining, it remains their passion – but, in undertaking such projects, they work to specific orders received from organisations. The original business is now incorporated within Fasma, and the team spirit is clear, and focused on the core family involvement. The business seeks to develop exports, but based on niche markets, and allowing their flair for design, quality and working with wood to be at its heart.

In challenging economic times it is right to be cautious, but Fasma is very much a well-established venture and certainly lives up to its claim to be in the leading group of such businesses operating in Cyprus.

Providing solutions

Takis Charalambous & Co Ltd (www.takis.com) takes its name from its founder, father-in-law to the Managing Director Demetris Kofteros, whom I met on my visit. A factory was established in northern Cyprus in 1968, but, after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, relocation was necessary – firstly to smaller premises in Nicosia and then to a new factory at the same place.

The early business sought to produce furniture for other companies with exclusive designs, again focused on the office furniture sector. Since the sad death of the founder, the business has been developed with a network of showrooms across the island. Whilst the factory business remains, the showrooms are now



Takis Charalambous & Co Ltd

jointly marketed as Studio Office, providing appropriate differentiation between the trading activity and the manufacturing capability.

This is another business which focuses on office furniture. Whilst the business started with a broad remit and continues to meet all types of customer demand at the required quality and competitive prices, it has also developed a focus on markets at the higher end. Future plans still reflect that office furniture is the core business, but also take into account the development of the contract market, providing a wider range in quantities available to both an internal and export market.

The business seeks to maintain its position in the Cypriot market, but also emphasise its credentials internationally, especially in Europe. Their objective is to provide solutions, and they particularly

seek to work with customers from the outset of a project, designing and creating solutions to meet specific needs.

As with others in their sector of the market, they buy in components where it makes sense in terms of quality and price. They seek incremental growth as their priority is satisfied customers. Export growth will be focused on those customers who seek an individual approach to construction and design.

Demetris emphasised the importance of people and a team approach in their business, a vital ingredient of success. He believes that the factory capability and the range of showrooms, as well as the quality of his design and construction team, provide the required platform for future growth and success.

Meeting and exceeding customer expectations

The art and business of furniture making is strongly established in Cyprus, handed down through the generations. It is a sector which has successfully adapted to change and has developed its markets – not just internally, but also for export. A recurring theme is one of quality, meeting and exceeding customer needs, and providing excellent customer service.

As elsewhere, this has involved specialisation, and there is an undoubted range of quality suppliers based in Cyprus. Their location provides good accessibility to both the European and Middle East markets, and for the provision of components as and when needed. Certainly, my visit made clear the advantages – so, as said at the start of this article, when thinking of Cyprus, as well as considering all the other attractions of this sun-drenched island, certainly think furniture!

For further information about products from Cyprus please visit the website of the Cyprus Trade Centre at www.cyprustrade.com



Nora Furnishings Ltd