



A New Home

Kennedy from Willis & Gambier

Cabinet Maker accepts an invite to visit Willis & Gambier's new Peterborough site.

They say life is a book, and those who restrict themselves to never visiting new places are only really reading one page. With that in mind, Cabinet Maker always gets a special kind of thrill when invitations to visit some of the leading names in the UK furniture business land on our desk. Whether it be at a trade show, a special event or in the comfort of their own premises, there really is something to be said for getting to meet up with and get to know the faces behind the companies we're always hearing about.

Being a magazine, the Cabinet Maker office doesn't really require all that much space, so we never fail to be surprised when we arrive at furniture showrooms, warehouses and factories and remember just how big they can be, which is exactly what crossed our mind as we arrived at Willis & Gambier's new home in Peterborough, just a few miles from its previous home. Luckily for us, the company's commercial director, David Lane, is on hand to show us round the substantial site, and in particular the new warehousing facilities.

He also explains how 18 months of preparation have all led up to the big move, which was instigated when the business decided the time was right to start putting down firmer foundations. Until this point, Willis & Gambier had leased the building it occupied. However, thanks to ownership group Samson Holdings and its faith in the company's UK business, today Willis & Gambier is settling into its new



Willis & Gambier commercial director, David Lane

10 acre site.

As David tells us: "The warehouse is a similar size to what it was before, there's a different shape and aspect to it, and one of the key features is that it future-proofs Willis & Gambier for whatever the market place throws at us. The additional land and resource allows us to do whatever we want to do over the next three to five years. At 170,000sq ft, it's a slightly smaller site than where we were before, but we have put in state-of-the-art racking system, which effectively gains us back the

missing 18,000sq ft, making it almost identical in terms of capability."

Representing a significant investment for the business, and one that looks set to continue over the next few years as the area develops, the new site underlines the confidence that Willis & Gambier's ownership has in the UK business. Becoming operational on 14 March this year, other new additions to the site include a phone system and IT servers. As we are guided round we are impressed by the obvious attention to detail that has



The team at Willis & Gambier

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Willis & Gambier's new ten acre site in Peterborough became operational on Monday 14 March

gone into the premises, with everything from motion activated lights to clean and airy aisles and even a cleverly positioning staff area. And for those who have enjoyed visiting Willis & Gambier over the last three years at the company's 'At Home' shows, never fear, for David confirms the events are set to continue later this year, once the final touches are complete on the new 5,500sq ft showroom.

"Our 'At Home' shows have become a great way to communicate with our customers and spend some quality time with them. We aim to do the same here, around October/November time, and are organising our new showroom to fit in with that while also showing off our new home and all it has," David divulges, continuing: "The primary driver for the Home Show is to launch new products and that will be the first time we showcase our new developments, which right now involves trying to get back to our roots. This year will be very much a year of

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products that customers have come to expect from Willis & Gambier.”

For businesses of any size, a transition to a completely new site is never simple, and for one as big as Willis & Gambier the challenge was all the greater. However, it will no doubt have been worth it to assure the long term prospects of the business and, as David confirms, the reception from visitors to the new site has been hugely positive. An update on the company's website, as well as a number of changes to its branding and marketing, have all now been compounded by this long awaited move, and it

appears to already be paying off, as David comments: “We finished 2015 amazingly strongly. The order intakes for December 2015 were higher than some traditionally very strong order intake months and the New Year started equally as strong, although it quietened off into April. Overall, the trading period for the last six months has been very strong for us.”

The core values of Willis & Gambier have always been quality design, service, responsibility, commitment and loyalty. A highly recognisable brand, the business takes its responsibility to the industry very seriously, and nowhere is this more evident than in



The new warehouse features a state of the art racking system

Willis & Gambier's new site. As we say goodbye to David at the end of our visit and set off back home, we can't help but feel a growing sense of anticipation surrounding what the business is capable of achieving later this year once its showroom is open for business.

As David concludes: “This move gives us the platform to develop, move forward and grow as a business. It's about understanding our core values and it's about product. One thing we have tried to get back to is products that are inspirational for the market

we operate in and I think we have been reasonably successful over the last few years.

“There is no reason why we can't get better at that; we have got a great in house design team. We deal with some of the best-known designers in the UK and that itself gives an incredible mix of design variation, which has really been the driving force over the last two/three years to get us back in the game.” ■

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