

Loving stone

Amare is Italian for 'love'. With so much stone coming from Italy, Steve Turner thought Amarestone was an appropriate name for his company when his eldest daughter suggested it



Steve Turner is just back from Earls Court, where his Amarestone company, based in Aborfield, Berkshire, were exhibiting at the National Home Improvement Show. They were introducing new French and Spanish limestones that they have added to their range. They were well received.

Steve has a lot of faith in exhibitions. He had one of the six small stands in the 'stone zone' at Ecobuild in March. He was showing British and European stones because he said the show had helped make architects aware of

the CO₂ and ethical issues involved in some imported stone.

It was the third year he had been there. He has exhibited at Ecobuild for three consecutive years now and although the first year was relatively quiet, the second was hugely successful, gaining three large orders including one for Italian Statuario and Greek Thassos marble for an interior design project in London, where his team are still working. So, he was back again this year, when there were more interesting enquiries once again.

Below left. Steve Turner (left), with Kevin and Jenny Drake and Ben Dixon (right) in the new showroom shared by Amarestone and Vokes & Beck, who work closely together.

Below and bottom. A private swimming pool for an interior designer customer. The client wanted to use large format Crema Marfil tiles to line the pool and for the surround. The stones were cut by the quarry and the detail finished by Vokes & Beck. Fila's technical department in Italy tested the sealers proposed (Fila Hydrorep and Fob) on the marble when used in conjunction with this particular type of pool chlorination system. Amarestone were then able to demonstrate to the customer that the solution was viable before work commenced. This is the sort of project Amarestone enjoy.



He believes exhibitions are about more than sales. "It almost doesn't matter if we don't get any business from it. It raises our profile. Exhibiting has an accumulative effect over a number of years."

He also acknowledges the role played by the Business Health Club. He admits he was not very good at marketing because he had not had to do any before. He says the Business Wealth Club, which he first came across at an exhibition in Oxford, has given him a lot of ideas and support – and some business as the result of the networking opportunity provided by the fortnightly meetings, because among the Club members' networks are architects, interior designers and fitters.

Amarestone are importers and facilitators. They take projects and they make them happen, working in close collaboration with masons Ben Dixon and Kevin Drake of Vokes & Beck, based in Kingsworthy, Winchester. The two companies have just jointly built a showroom at Vokes & Beck's premises in The Old Dairy at North Winchester Farm.

The floor displays a variety of stones, including Purbeck limestone, Carrara marble with cabochons in SSQ's Riverstone, ⇨





Above. Stone being worked in the Vokes & Beck workshops at Kingsworthy for an Amarestone project. Vokes & Beck and Amarestone are separate companies but Steve Turner of Amarestone likes working with Vokes & Beck because of the quality of their work. "They are real craftsmen," he says.

Below. Steve Turner at one of the shows where his company, Amarestone, exhibit. He says that, being a small company, he does not need to get much work to make an exhibition pay and that exhibitions are important for promoting his business. "Exhibiting has an accumulative effect over a number of years," he says.



Montmoyen from France, Rosal from Portugal and other French and Spanish limestones.

And they really are from France and Spain. At one exhibition at which Amarestone showed Steve asked another exhibitor who was showing stone labelled as 'French limestone' which part of France it came from. "The Turkish part," was the answer.

In the new Amarestone / Vokes & Beck showroom there are bathroom and kitchen worktop displays and the reception desk has a top and front in Shibakashi granite. A section of stone spiral staircase has been made by a company in Reading who make staircases for Amarestone. A table has a Portland Roach top to it protected by glass over it.

"The idea is that architects and designers can come here and get answers to their questions," says Steve. "You can't go to any old tile shop and get the right information."

The showroom will be open to callers but is intended to inspire and inform rather than to be a shop where the public will come to choose a kitchen worktop or bathroom from the materials on show. It is not on a busy road and is not a site that people will find by chance. Amarestone see their website as their shop window. Their showroom is for professionals and their clients. And they are expected to make an appointment to visit it after discussing their requirements with Steve, who will make sure the right people are on hand to provide the answers to the questions posed by architects, designers and clients when they visit.

Other Amarestone partners will also be involved. Amarestone use Fila stone care products and Mapei adhesives and grouts, and both companies want to use the showroom to run training courses on

the use of their products.

Amarestone use John Montgomery, who has carried out a lot of top end projects, for fixing. Again, he will be on hand if required when customers visit.

Steve Turner is focussed on the top end of the market, which, of course, is weathering the current economic storm better than most – and, as a result, so are Amarestone and their associates.

In the past year or so, says Steve, the average value of the projects they have been involved in has more than trebled. "I think that's a result of a combination of things: partly the exposure from the shows, but also our own attitude and growing confidence that we can tackle these types of projects."

Amarestone call on trading partners at the quarries in France and Italy whose technical expertise is among the best in the world.

Steve: "This means we can offer advice to interior designers and architects that is not simply based on our own experience but on that of some of the world's leading stone experts. It's a guarantee of success for their projects."

He is passionate about delivering projects to customers who demand the highest standards of workmanship and quality of products. "We love working with 'picky' customers who insist on perfection. It challenges us – it brings out the best in us."

Steve does not come from the stone industry, which he believes has enabled him to bring a fresh perspective to the business. His background is in IT. He was a consultant working with Hewlett Packard until 2000, but after the millennium scare about computers crashing, that work tailed off. He then started making and managing websites for local businesses. He did about 40 of them. One of them was for someone importing travertine from Turkey, who invited Steve to join him in that business.

In 2003, Steve launched his own company. He and his family were sitting round the table discussing the venture. Steve had established a company called Turner Bespoke Services Ltd, but his eldest daughter, Katie, suggested a better name would be Amarestone, because Steve loves stone, a lot of it comes from Italy and 'amare' is Italian for 'love'.

At the beginning, Steve thought Amarestone's market was supplying stone to tile shops, kitchen and bathroom showrooms and tilers, but he quickly realised that with the contacts he had with quarries in France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Germany, he was in a better position to supply solutions to projects. ■

