



**Karen Wallace**

**meets**

**Stephen Rooks**



*AJB Floorcoverings, a member of the CFA, sees the installation of stone and ceramic flooring as a good opportunity to boost margins.*

HAVING a 30,000sq ft warehouse, allows AJB Floorcoverings to buy materials in bulk and store them for its end-user clients and its own needs.

The company takes its name from co-founder Anthony John Barden. He and Paul Golden established the firm together in 1977 in a small retail shop in Elland, West Yorkshire.

After a few years the supply and installation of contract flooring to businesses and local authorities replaced its retail business.

In 1985 AJB moved to a 6,000sq ft warehouse in Huddersfield, but by 2005 it had outgrown this premises and settled into its present home. Thanks to the new warehouse AJB can pass onto customers the savings from bulk buying and respond to fast-track flooring demands.

By sourcing its own products and employing fitters directly, the firm can be flexible in adapting quickly and easily to changes in scheduling.

Stephen Rooks has recently become md of AJB Floorcoverings. With a sales background in flooring, he plans to increase the number of customers and sales, and develop its relationships with shop fitters.

He also aims to expand the stone and ceramics side of the business. To this end he has hired Graham Collins as contracts manager for ceramic tiling.

Stephen explains: 'Having been in the ceramics business for over 30



Turning to **stone**

years, Graham has brought with him many valuable clients. He will work alongside our other contracts managers Andy Gordash, Mark Warburton and Richard Stothard.

'We see ceramics as becoming a major part of the business over the next few years.'

The company recently installed ceramic flooring at the new Wedgewood Museum in Stoke-on-Trent.

AJB has 17 office-based staff, two warehouse staff and 28 directly-employed installers all working out of the Huddersfield office. When necessary it also uses some 20-30



and we believe we have the skills to meet their requirements.'

Recent contracts include the refurbishment of two Marks & Spencer stores in Perth and Hamilton.

The projects involved removing existing floorcovering, shotblasting old adhesive, laying a new water-based screed and installing InterfaceFLOR and Tarkett and products. All this had to be done while the shop was open for business and under strict health & safety guidelines.

The firm regularly undertakes contracts abroad and recently fitted a Laura Ashley store in Limerick.

Stephen states: 'Our clients accept that there are extra costs if we travel overseas but because of the long-term relationships we have with a many shop fitters, they come back to us time and time again.'

He believes that one of the biggest challenges is the fast-track nature of some work and deadlines forced onto the flooring contractor. 'This results in less time for us to install the floorings. We sometimes have to work late into the night and this forces a compromise on the quality of the finish, not to mention health & safety issues.

'It seems that deadlines and economics override everything.'

A recent squeeze on margins has become a worry for the company.

Stephen comments that since a lot of products are imported into the UK, the strength of the Euro has had a knock-on effect.

'The market is also quieter than normal at this time of year. This is reflected in the number of calls we are getting from sub-contractors looking for work, and this never happens when it's busy.

'We are actively looking for new contacts rather than relying on existing customers and this, along with the increased business we hope to get from stone and ceramics, will hopefully see improved profitability later this year.'

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**Thoresby Hall Hotel in Nottinghamshire, a recent contract for AJB**