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Prestigious Queen's Award for Sustainable Furniture Maker

Benchmark, one of Britain's leading designers and makers of bespoke furniture and specialist joinery has been awarded a Queen's Award for Enterprise for its continuous achievement in the promotion of sustainable manufacturing practice within the furniture making industry. The Award was announced on April 21st, the Queen's Birthday. Benchmark is the first furniture maker in Britain to be given the Award in the sustainable development category. It is considered to be the most prestigious accolade a British company can receive. Environmental, social and economic considerations were reviewed by the judges and entrants were measured against strict criteria.

Founded in 1985 by Terence Conran and Sean Sutcliffe, Benchmark is a good example of a rural based British industry competing at world class level. The company provides secure long term employment within the local community and runs an established award winning apprentice training programme for young people. From the outset every effort has been made to maximise the sustainability of its manufacturing processes and end products ranging from the sourcing of certified timbers to its zero waste policy and procurement of local goods and services. It was the first furniture maker in Britain to be Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified. Benchmark has actively promoted sustainable construction practices through a range of self-financed infrastructure projects and encouraged biodiversity in the natural environment by providing habitats for wildlife and improvements to local wetlands and riverbanks.

Sean Sutcliffe said: "Receiving this award is an important milestone for those of us trying to do the right thing in a highly competitive, cost driven industry. Our designers, craftsmen, clients and suppliers can feel proud of this recognition that they are working with a company which is making a positive contribution to the local and wider environment. We are continuing to look at our sustainability profile and considering various other initiatives such as running our vehicles on used cooking oil and further reducing our carbon emissions".

The company's commitment to sustainability has brought business from eco-driven organisations such as the Eden Project, the Kindersley Biodiversity Centre and the National Trust for which Benchmark has completed high profile commissions. "Our business success is due to our core beliefs of intellectual added value, good design, high standards of technical expertise and environmentally sound manufacturing processes. The employment and training of a loyal and committed workforce

combined with a low cost base in converted farm buildings has also been a major factor” added Sutcliffe.

Current commissions include the fit-out and furnishing of IPC Media’s new headquarters behind the Tate Modern as well as a timber structure for the new visitor centre at the Cutty Sark in Greenwich. The company is also making a 16 metre long reception desk in London plane for Make Architects’ commercial redevelopment of the former headquarters of Marks and Spencer at 55 Baker Street. At the Globe Theatre, Benchmark is adapting pieces from its own domestic furniture collection for a high profile new restaurant on the waterfront. The furniture, handmade in a selection of certified timbers, echoes the spirit of Shakespearian England, with chunky and robust tables, benches and stools from Benchmark’s Nelson and Maiden ranges. Other restaurant work includes ongoing commissions at the Eden Project as well as Custom House in Copenhagen. The company is also working with designer Karim Rashid on his latest Myhotel project in Brighton.

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