

“It’s a no brainer”

So says Ken Caldwell, Director of Nicks Timber Joinery. He’s discussing his decision to buy a briquetting press to go with their Felder RL350 Clean-Air extractor. “The combination of the RL extractor and a briquetting press has resulted in a 90% reduction in our volume of waste. That’s huge. It was an easy decision.”

Just back from a measure up on Waiheke Island, Ken explains what lead him to invest in the combination of a Felder extractor and briquetting press. “Prior to the RL machine we were running big bag units attached to each machine. We were forever emptying dust bags. After a couple of hours running the Weing Cube (*Nicks purchased the first Cube in Australasia*) then we’d have to stop and empty several large bags of dust and chips. And if you got any leaks then there’d be dust everywhere. When I think back to the production time lost while we were emptying bags, sweeping up ... the 4 – 8 hours a week wasted has gone and now it only takes few minutes to wheel collection bins holding 1.2m³ out and back in.”

Pre-Felder RL, there was also the problem of the space required to locate the old bag units adjacent to each machine. “We had a lot of valuable workshop space taken up by our bag extraction units” says Ken. While their workshop is large, Nicks has a lot of machinery, so having the RL350 unit against the wall and ducting running to the machines means they’ve freed up a lot of floor space. So much in fact they’ve found room for a nearly 9-metre long five-axis Format-4 CNC machine. That’s a story for another day.

In 1991, Nicks Timber grew out of what remained of G Nicks and Son – a third-generation Takapuna based business. Pre-war it was one of the original timber yards on Auckland’s North Shore. The company never recovered from the 1987 crash, so facing

the prospect of no job, Ken and two colleagues clubbed together to buy and rebrand as ‘Nicks Timber Joinery Ltd’ (NTJ). In 2003 ‘Nick’s Components and Accessories’ was split off and managed separately. Twenty-eight years later the two companies are still side by side, only now they’re located further north, in Silverdale.

NTJ is renowned across the wider Auckland region for specialised solutions for solid timber doors and windows. Catering to the top end of Auckland’s residential building and renovation market, Ken and his team are responsible for framing some of the most expensive and expansive views in the Harbour City. Their reputation for quality keeps them busy: monitoring where their work originated from showed in any given month 85% came from existing clients, 14% from referrals and just 1% from other sources.

For Ken the old problem of dust in the air is also a personal one. Earlier in his career he’d developed asthma from the Cedar dust he worked with. He’d have to wear a full facemask with filters, all day, every day in the workshop. Therefore, investing in technology that would keep the workshop air clean wasn’t just a compliance decision, but an ethical one too. “Clean air is good for morale” he says. “A better work environment means happier staff. Me included. Staff enjoy their environment and turnover is low - they work more efficiently, and they stay.”

Felder’s RL series of Clean-Air extractors come in a variety of sizes and prices, but all offer dust emissions of less than 0.1 mg/m³. Unlike conventional extractors the fan is positioned at the clean air side, creating a negative pressure throughout and prevents any dust escaping. Options include a jet-filter cleaning system to continuously clean the filters, automatic dry-powder fire suppressant, automatic start for up to 8 machines, and configuration to fit a briquetting press in place of the collection bin.



Ken Caldwell in front of his Felder extractor – the briquette machine can be seen at the bottom in blue. Top right: the briquettes the machines produce.



during the filter cleaning process. “In the past we’ve arranged the cleaning to be done during the Christmas break,” explains Ken. “However, as we get busier this process needs to be done more frequently so a spare set would give us flexibility around the timing of this.” Another lesson has been to be prepared for the weight of the briquettes. “They’re heavy!” says Ken. “While the volume of your waste goes down significantly, you’ve got to be prepared for how much they weigh.” NTJ are currently using an old chemical storage cage - 1.2 x 1.0 x 1.0m - on wheels to collect the briquettes, making moving them out of the workshop a simple process.

A busy workbook, skilled staff, and a great reputation means Nicks Timber Joinery remains efficient and successful. Ken’s willingness to embrace new technology supports the company’s holistic approach to competitive workmanship balanced alongside a healthy working environment. It’s easy to see why the company has the excellent reputation it deserves: Nicks Timber Joinery is an example of the success and longevity that comes from well-planned investment, a responsibility to staff and sustainability of renewable resources, and top-quality service for customers.

Fitting the briquetting press under their Felder RL350 was a simple decision. “Something that massively reduces the volume of waste, saves emptying the hopper, and gives us a product we can use or sell – what’s not to like?” says Ken. “The briquettes that come out burn really well. Currently we give them away rather than sell them - because we’re not organised to prove our waste stream can’t contain treated timber shavings. Untreated briquettes burn really hot, so well in fact you can almost light them without kindling. Our cost of waste has dropped significantly and emptying the extractor is now a dust-free process.”

As an early adopter, Ken – and by association Jacks, who supplied the units – have learned a few lessons along the way. Perhaps the key one has been the need to hold spare filters to avoid the downtime



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