

investing where it works

Stair manufacturers for more than 40 years, Top Flyte Stairs of Tauranga is a familiar name in the industry. Owned by the Beetham family since 1974, today they have a staff of 13 including 8 on the factory floor, and a full-time salesman in Auckland. They cover the complete range of residential, commercial and industrial stairs, from specialised bespoke jobs through to the standard 'carpet-grade'.

Any company in business over 40 years is clearly doing something right, and Top Flyte have firmly established a name for quality and reliability across New Zealand. While much of their product goes into the Bay of Plenty or Auckland, strong relationships within the industry mean they regularly supply stairs throughout the rest of the country, and at times export up into the Pacific Islands.

A contributing factor to Top Flyte's success is their sensible approach to technology. Managing Director Quentin Beetham explains. "The process of making staircases hasn't changed much since the company started" he says. "It's a manual process. There are some technologies to speed parts of the process up, and where they make a difference we've invested in them. I always have an eye on technology, but I believe it's important that new machinery doesn't come at the expense of the skills and knowledge of well-trained staff."

A clear example of the efficiency of technology is the specialist double-headed router from US Technologies. Processing a pair at a time and up to 6 metres in length, the machine was purchased eight years ago, and today remains at the heart of Top Flyte's manufacturing operation. Replacing a far older machine (which has since been repurposed for a specialist



John Beetham, Top Flyte foreman with the company's new Format 4 from Felder.

product) the machine makes short work of stair stringers. It's not unusual for the machine to process around 30 cube of timber a month just producing the kitset product Top Flyte make on behalf of the merchants.

Top Flyte's most recent investment is their 'exact 63' thicknesser from Format-4 – the premium range from the Felder Group. At 630mm wide and equipped with Felder's renowned 'silent-Power' cutterblock, the thicknesser gets a lot of use.

"We buy in our timber semi-dressed. We then skim one face, then once the lengths are in pairs and buzzed on the sides, the thicknesser is used to dress down to size" says Quentin.

With a digital readout and variable feed rates the exact 63 offers fast and accurate sizing, but these aren't the features that stand out. "It definitely gives a better finish than our old machine" says Quentin, "and it's so quiet! When the old machine was running I couldn't have a conversation on the phone in my office. But these days I have to get up and look out into the factory to even see if it's being used" he explains. "You can stand beside it and have a normal conversation while it's operating!"

As with many businesses in the Bay, Top Flyte Stairs are very busy. With every staircase being unique the company uses a form of lean-manufacture, working with batches of similar stair types at a time. Good relationships

with council and MBIE also keep Quentin busy; he's often called on to help builders or inexperienced inspectors understand the intricacies of staircases, or to help clarify sensible interpretation of the building code.

With the production staff having recently pulled out all the stops to get their delivery window down to an acceptable level, Quentin's positive about the future. "We've got an excellent experienced team here, and we're busy" he says.

The construction boom in Tauranga and Auckland is undoubtedly fuelling the success of businesses across the Auckland/Waikato/Bay of Plenty triangle. But while the good times will only last for so long you get the sense that a company such as Top Flyte have lived through this cycle before – and are well aware of what will inevitably follow. And their healthy respect for skilled staff alongside sensible investment in technology should see them through for another 40 years at least.



The **BENCHMARK** in foam & bubble packaging

- Sheet foam is perfect for protecting carcasses and benchtops
- Open tubes protect the corners of benches and table legs
- Bubble wrap provides extra peace of mind
- Made in New Zealand and recyclable
- Experts in polyethylene foam packaging solutions since 1997



Polyethylene foam & bubble wrap specialists

www.nulonfoam.co.nz | (09) 267 3213

