



Are you the Best of British?

There are many advantages for recipients of the prestigious Manufacturing Guild Mark – and some very good reasons why you should apply for one.

Many of you will have already heard of The Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers. It's a well-established, highly respected organisation – one of the City of London's Livery Companies – and its mission is to support and encourage "a thriving British furniture industry with a talented workforce delivering high quality products". Nowadays more commonly known as The Furniture Makers' Company, its charity supports those in need from the industry, while its Manufacturing Guild Marks confer peer-audited recognition of quality, best practice and Made in Britain status – recognisable differentiation for your company and its products, which, in the hands of the marketing savvy, is a promotional tool *par excellence*.

Ben Burbidge, Chairman of the Manufacturing Guild Mark and a well-known figure in the furniture manufacturing sector, explains the benefits of the Guild Mark and why you should consider applying for one:

"The Manufacturing Guild Mark is not only proof of British quality manufacturing and something furniture manufacturers aspire to and want to achieve," he told Furniture Journal, "It's a visible symbol that can be used by all those who have earned it to increase the emphasis on buying British. It's a subtle way of saying yours is a quality product that's certified as Made in Britain

and it comes from a well-run company with high standards you can trust."

The purpose of the Manufacturing Guild Mark is to recognise and award UK-based manufacturers of furniture and furnishings. At the same time as providing recognition for both your company and its products (and inimitable confirmation of their Britishness), it will provide an uplifting boost to the esteem and pride of all those whose dedication has gone into their design and manufacture, and, if you use it to the max, it will propel your company up the ladder in the eyes of both consumers and future employees. It's intended as a badge of honour, and what's very encouraging is that you can't simply buy the badge and use it in your marketing material. It has to be earned on merit.

Although the purpose of this article is to encourage you to make an application, it's worth noting that a good few companies have been turned away from the outset because they don't meet the application criteria. The first hurdle is often the Britishness test – and assembling in the UK isn't enough to get you over it. "There are 100-plus items in the qualification criteria," explained Ben. "And seven key criteria that each company is assessed against that result in a complete check of the whole business. To pass each one is a real achievement and

something all staff at the business can be proud of. They cover many aspects, like process, evidence of design, how a company looks after its employees, Health and Safety, its marketing capabilities – it's a holistic view of a company's activities and it includes all the elements we believe should be present in a good manufacturing company. All companies that apply for the Manufacturing Guild Mark are reviewed and inspected in conjunction with Bruce Lovell at FIRA, a recognised expert in his field."

The number of Manufacturing Guild Mark holders currently stands at a couple of dozen with more lining up to show they are the Best of British. It's a select group that Ben and his new Guild Marks Manager, Meera Samani, are aiming to grow by one or two companies every month, but among them are some of the best-known names in the industry – companies like Wren, Ercol, Relyon, Tresk, Burbidge & Son, and, most recently, one of the UK's largest kitchen manufacturers, Howdens Joinery.

Speaking at their official presentation on 12th February, Lee Parish, Head of Manufacturing Operations at Howdens Joinery, confirmed, "We are very proud of our British manufacturing heritage and continue to invest heavily and develop our operation, people and products. We believe we have a fantastic culture and there is





Lee Parish receives the Manufacturing Guild Mark for Howdens Joinery from Ben Burbidge

something worthwhile for all concerned with our business... This award acknowledges the exemplary standards to which our teams operate.”

“We were thrilled to include Howdens,” added Ben. “They already have a Royal Warrant. They were a little bit sceptical at first, but they went through everything very thoroughly and we were pleasantly surprised when they applied.”

Alongside the Manufacturing Guild Mark, the Furniture Makers’ Company also offers a Bespoke Guild Mark for designer-makers and producers of one-off commissions as well as a Design Guild Mark that, typically, receives around 100 entries every year. The Design Guild Mark also includes designers working in 2d, such as surface design.

One of the biggest areas of development for the Furniture Makers’ Company over the last decade has been the growth in its Corporate Membership. Through their contributions, furniture manufacturers, retailers and suppliers to the industry help fund the Guild Marks – but when Ben approached Steve Bulmer, Biesse UK’s Managing Director, there was another reason he wanted Biesse UK on board besides Corporate Membership: “When I was approached by Ben, I didn’t really know anything about The Furniture Makers’ Company,” Steve admits. “But when Ben explained what he needed, both from a company perspective and a personal



Steve Bulmer

perspective I wanted to get involved. Biesse is in contact with a lot of people in the industry, so we are a good vehicle to spread the word about The Furniture Makers’ Company. We started as a Corporate Member, then we took the decision to become a partner of the Manufacturing Guild Mark – something we share with Lectra Systèmes. Our partnership is not about Biesse getting lots of mileage, it’s about us helping to support the Guild Marks and trying to be something of a vehicle to promote them among the people we are talking to on a daily basis.”

Steve is convinced too few British manufacturers shout enough about their products: “We should be making more of a collective noise about things we’re really good at, and having a Manufacturing Guild Mark adds weight to the Made in Britain

message and that collective pride in great British workmanship. The Guild Marks are gaining momentum but we need more people involved.”

So, what would a Guild Mark mean to your company? Think of the pride it would instil in your workforce, the satisfaction that would come from peer-proven recognition of your status as one of the best in Britain, the marketing advantage of having a certified Made in Britain accolade to add to your promotional materials, and the tangible differentiation your very own prestigious Manufacturing Guild Mark would lend to your products. And smile. You know your company deserves it. Just pick up the phone and call Meera Samani for more information on 020 7562 8520 or email guildmarks@furnituremakers.org.uk

If you’d like to do a bit more research into entry criteria and the audit process, or you are interested in becoming a Corporate Member and want to know more, touch the background picture at the start of this article using the free Furniture Journal App, or visit www.furnituremakers.org.uk/excellence/manufacturing-guild-mark/ Download the guidelines to apply for a Manufacturing Guild Mark by touching [here](#) or for an application form in PDF format, touch [here](#). To make your application, visit www.furnituremakers.org.uk/excellence/manufacturing-guild-mark/#applyAnchor