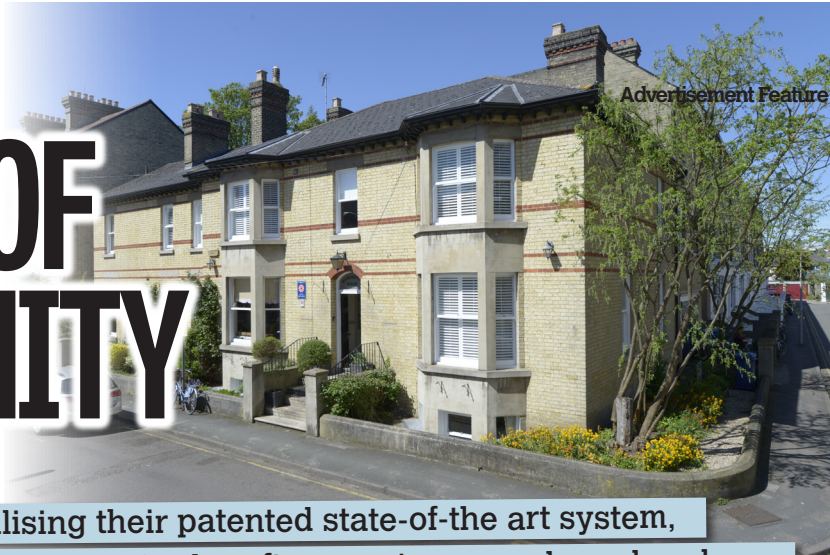


WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY



Cambridge Sashcraft was developed in 2013 from your property business Collins Developments. What inspired that enterprise?

I was a PE teacher prior to setting up Collins Developments Ltd - a small, family-based enterprise; essentially made up of my Dad, Tim, Roy Brewer (who unfortunately is no longer with us), Helen and I. It started with a renovation of a small Victorian house in 1999. Fortunately, my Dad had a wide skillset and lots of experience to draw upon. I went on courses, cutting traditional roofs and worked with tradesmen to build my skills, and we brought in specialists as needed. Helen was very supportive as we went from a stable situation with two children to pandemonium, living in temporary accommodation kindly provided by our families as our family grew to six children! As part of the journey, we extended and converted properties to create apartments and started a self-catering accommodation business. We launched Prospero Homes with my brother and his wife in 2004, which Helen manages.

What was the catalyst for Cambridge Sashcraft?

A lady Helen worked with asked me to look at her home in Harrow, which was a listed building with original sash windows that had rot, wouldn't open, and had been condemned. My parents own a property in Cambridge with sash windows and my Dad taught me how to hang the sashes. We had guys cutting out the rot, splicing in new timber combined with a resin system and I re-hung the sashes.

We also managed to incorporate a rudimentary draught proofing system. During the process I realised that there could be a more precise system to fitting sash windows and a better way to draught proof, so when I came back, I felt really enthused by the challenge. I began researching various seals and how conservation-approved double glazing could be installed in sash windows to provide the benefits of a new sash window without changing the aesthetic.

Utilising their patented state-of-the-art system, Cambridge Sashcraft renovate, upgrade and replace wooden sliding sash, casement windows and doors, while preserving their historical integrity. Husband and wife owners, Liam and Helen Collins tell us more

How effective was the sash window system you devised?

It has served us well because we can now upgrade peoples' windows without changing their appearance, with conservation-approved glass which has a very low U-Value of 1.1.

We're also accredited users of vacuum glazing so can get that U-Value down to 0.7. An existing sash window has a U-Value of around 5.8, so there's a huge difference. Combined with that, we've come up with a draught/noise proofing system for which we have a UK patent and have applied for the European patent.

What range of services do you offer today?

We renovate and upgrade, offer sash replacement and complete replacement. A local joiner, Paul Bailey, and his team at Rosewood Joinery, make our replacement sashes. I made a proposal to Paul asking if he would focus his efforts on our replacement sashes.

It was a big ask as he is a very accomplished joiner with a super team working at the top end of their field. From the day we shook hands, we've never looked back as our joint focus is on the quality and development of the product. We also cover stained and leaded glasswork, rebuilding and replacing stonework, specialist leadwork, all aspects of highline works including roofs, seamless gutters and a full decorating service. Our dedicated scaffolding supplier ensures safe access and is very flexible and accommodating should the scaffold need to be modified for extra works.

What are the benefits of sash replacement?

Better insulation and sound-proofing. We are accredited users of Accoya which is a very sustainable timber that is 40 per cent better in terms of insulation than a hardwood, so most replacement sashes are made from Accoya housing conservation-approved glazing, which is filled with krypton rather than argon. We

also use memory foam seals as part of our patented system which are very effective as they mould to the contours they touch which is particularly important when working with existing frames and boxes.

Can you tell us about your clientele?

Our clients range from schools and colleges such as The Perse, Fitzwilliam, and Gonville & Caius to a big domestic market in Cambridge.

The best form of advertisement is usually recommendation and we have virtually become a permanent feature in some locations: particularly around Hills Road, Lyndewode Rd and the Kite. Mark and the team are on first name terms with numerous homeowners.

From the 445 jobs so far, the biggest was Sefton Lodge in Newmarket where we upgraded 96 units including French doors.

What do your customers love about Cambridge Sashcraft?

They love the 'swish' noise of the windows and the fact that our team of period window specialists – Chris, Lewis, Dan, Ben and Sam – supervised by Mark, do such a clean, efficient job. We also now have a specialist decorator Dave, who has slipped seamlessly into our team. Clients also love the fact that on most occasions we are not pulling out boxes or frames which means disturbance is limited. Someone on Hills Road said having our windows fitted was like having a blanket put over her house because it cut out so much noise and cold!

What makes your business unique?

We're passionate about sustainability in the products we use and the way we operate and Liam cycles to jobs on his bike!

We are also truly local and offer a very personal service, so the relationships we form with people are positive and genuine."

Find out more about Cambridge Sashcraft at cambridgesashcraft.co.uk, email info@cambridgesashcraft.co.uk or call (01223) 511043



Sashcraft team