

Village Business Wychwood Wrought Iron

Start -Up

Philip set up *Wychwood Wrought Iron* in 2000. He had been a welder for fifteen years, employed as a contractor in heavy engineering with Smiths

Hydraulics. When that part of the business moved from Witney to Romford, Philip and his wife Helen decided this was the perfect opportunity to do what they had always wanted to do - run their own business. There was no redundancy money, it was risky, but they did it anyway! Philip had always been interested in wrought iron since school when he didn't get on with the woodwork teacher!

The Pratley Family

Pratley is a well known name in the Wychwoods. Philip is indeed one of the local Pratleys, he and Helen now live in the family house in Ascott with their grey mare called Avril and two cats Morse and Lewis who are also very much part of the family

Philip started by making the curtain poles and candelabra Helen wanted for the house and they have never looked back! It is fortunate that the house has plenty of workshop space for Philip's welding shop. Also that Helen, originally a nurse from South Wales, had the people skills needed in her current role as the marketing arm of the business.



They both believe that there is a market for quality/bespoke wrought iron. It's a craft thing - and they have the production base. Philip takes in steel bars (sourced locally) and from them produces wonderful curtain

tie backs and finials (one in the very popular Wychwood leaf design), candelabra lamps and wall lights. Curtain poles were added to the list after Helen had been to look at what the shops offered and concluded: "We can do better". They tailor -make all their own designs, one thing leading to another so that making curtain poles leads to lights that match and then lamps to go with the lights.

However this can be a problem for Helen. One day Philip made her a lovely standard lamp - but now it has gone - sold to someone who couldn't resist. This Christmas Philip has made her a wrought iron four poster so Helen hopes you don't want it otherwise she will lose that too!!

A Unique Product Range

They make things which aren't in the high street, different, unique, like their chandeliers, fabulous pokers and baskets for roasting chestnuts. They recently made a magnificent flower arrangement holder with candles for Blenheim Palace. They make every type of finial; one little boy fell in love with a ball and claw type design - which he thought looked like

something Harry Potter might use in a quidditch game!

They can also make things to any size, from a fireguard for a tiny fireplace to a huge inglenook. There is always a mix between traditional products for cottages and inglenooks and contemporary design, such as using wonderfully coloured Italian Murano glass as finial ends and even on garden obelisks! .In fact they are always thinking up new ideas, Philip's grandfather was a Professor at Kew, a botanic artist, so perhaps some of Philips creativity comes from him.

From Castles to Offices

They advertise, very successfully, in *Country Living* and *The Wychwood...* In fact one of their favourite celebrity clients found them through The Wychwood. They recently supplied Greenpeace offices in London with Atlantis lamps. They have also equipped a castle in Italy, shipped to the States and recently to Japan- to a little village which is a Japanese miniature Stratford! You might wonder how this "global reach" is possible from a small family run business in the Wychwoods. The answer is that from the very beginning Philip saw the possibilities of the internet in helping them reach customers. through secure on-line shopping. Of course customers also come to see them from all over the country, from curtain makers, to specialist shops from interior designers to individuals just coming in on spec. Customers come with an idea and Philip and Helen gain great pleasure from helping to translate ideas into reality.



Personal relationships with customers are important. Philip and Helen are very accessible by email and their showroom is a pleasure to see and walk round. They are friendly and charming and very happy to welcome people who, at least first time round, just want to browse!

It's Personal and Local

Philip and Helen are deeply rooted in the Wychwoods. Cotswold scenes feature prominently in all their publicity. As Helen says: "The Wychwoods is where

we are, we have a - particularly amazing local Oak Tree,-the oldest tree in Wychwoods, we use this in our marketing material."

They are passionate about being part of the local community.

Philip sees it as a two way street, they are pleased to support the Wychwood Project, the Village shop, Shipton Fete, this magazine and the Pre-school. Wychwood Wrought Iron is very much a team effort, sourcing steel and powder coating locally and working closely with local talent such as Paul Cunningham, www.borsuk.uk.net, who designed their excellent website and Andy Meadon, who is their graphics guru, www.andymeadon.com.

Their Aladdin's cave display area is at the back of their house, right by the Ascott Shop. They are open 7 days a week; call for an appointment on 01993 832850 or see their advertisement on Page 8 (shortly to be in colour!) for website details.

Liz Clarke- Watson