

# Dishy of the Day

'Dishy is, in a sense, the beginning. Dishy, from a marketing perspective, is a statement, it's "This is me."

We're focusing on Dishy, David Fox's latest breakout range for OCee Design. It's got that trademark Fox understated elegance, subtle touches that add value – and is clearly going to be a volume seller in the corporate and hospitality markets. Dishy's got 'squarial' corners inspired by ceramic tableware and a really restrained light touch with a hint of mid-century. We're big Fox fans, but unusually for a Focus piece, we're not going to dwell too much on the design process that ultimately resulted in Dishy.

Instead, we're going to look at Dishy from a marketing perspective. In many ways, Dishy is much more than a well designed soft seating series. This is a standard bearer, a statement, a declaration of intent. Dishy is the physical manifestation of a company's cultural change.

We're talking with OCee's MD Alistair Gough and Marketing Manager Kate Mulcahey. The conversation is disarmingly frank, and sets out a crystal clear plan. That clarity comes in part from professional lives outside the office interiors; perhaps it's easier to see the wood from the trees that way. But there is also a fascination with, and a fondness for, the interiors industry. No names, no packdrill, but that's not always the





▶▶▶▶case when entrepreneurs buy furniture companies.

We asked Alistair how he came to work with David Fox on Dishy. The enthusiastic answer focused absolutely on the culture, portfolio, marketing and business plan that's rapidly changing the company.

'I invested in OCee Design in May 2010. At that time I found a company with a very positive service culture – our customers enjoyed our reliability. But the problem was our product portfolio, dominated by 'me-too' operator chairs. We offered good service and were generally easy to do business with...but the product portfolio and marketing collateral had its limitations.

'We put together a business plan after a stringent SWOT analysis. The result was that we actually implemented a culture change at OCee. We asked ourselves the basic questions: Where are we? Where do we want to be? How do we get there? We reviewed all of our marketing activity and

concluded we needed new collateral, new photography, a new website. We needed PR too – we had no profile. We were known and respected – but only by those who already knew us.

'And critically, we needed to address our product portfolio in order to differentiate ourselves from the competition. In the task seating market it's highly competitive with decreasing margins. We could see that there were gaps to fill – an example is with meeting chairs – we recognise that the informal/agile meeting and breakout area sector is coming to the fore.

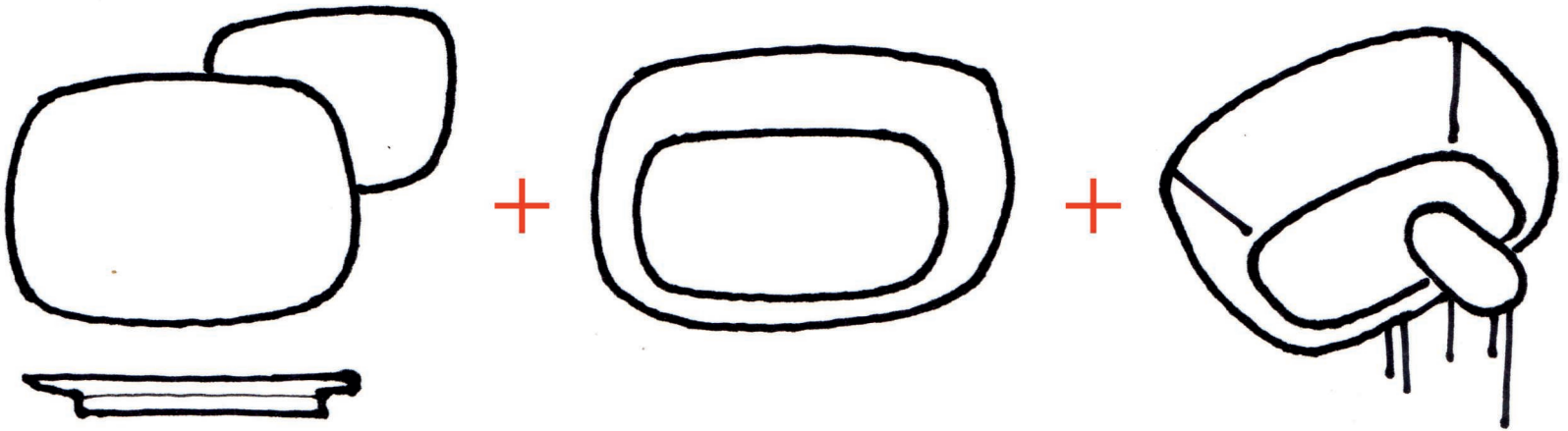
'We saw an opportunity in soft seating to allow differentiation for reasonable investment, and at the same time make quicker progress. We could also build on an existing soft seating portfolio – the upholstery skills are in place. In addition to product portfolio issues, we were only engaging with a limited sector of the market. We had very good relationships with a number of dealers, but not enough

of those that specialised in the larger more valuable projects.

'When we started the new initiatives in May 2010 we had a turnover of £4 million. Of that, 85% was operator seating, with the balance soft and occasional seating. We were only strong in one sector and we wanted to broaden our appeal to specialist fit-out and design and build projects, where a wider range of higher value products are required.

'Two years later, it's changed dramatically. We now have 70% sales of task seating. It's important to make the differentiation – operator chairs with standard components now represent a smaller percentage of the portfolio. And our higher value soft seating portfolio has grown from 10% of turnover to 30%, whilst sales have risen to £6.5 million. We are in a strong financial position and our profitable growth has enabled us to continue to invest even in a difficult market. Continued growth in seating and the acquisition of the UK and Ireland licence for the unique Kite table system means that▶▶▶▶





▶▶▶▶we're on course to grow that top line figure to £9.5 million by May 2013.'

Just in case we've forgotten, this success flies in the face of high quality competition in a tough economy. Where is that growth coming from?

'Our dealer profile has certainly changed; there are more dealers now who are working on larger projects. We've got better sales staff too: every salesperson had grown business in their area by 40-55%. This growth is across the board too – even our entry level products have grown sales well.

'The soft seating portfolio has grown significantly in the last two years. In May 2010 it consisted primarily of Dorchester, Giggle and Klub. Two years later, Solace is established, as is OCee, with recently introduced products such as Touch, Dots and Dashes and Dishy all winning business. We've also introduced our Bistro collection, which combines well with our soft seating in breakout areas.'

Where do you want to be?

'We're working on clearer segmentation: different offers to different areas in different ways...with a different package,' says Marketing Manager Kate Mulcahey. 'We need to evaluate the portfolio and improve our channel segmentation so that a dealer might look to us for a variety of product solutions and not just one model.

'We want to continually add value to our dealer network so that they promote our full range of relevant products to their market sector.

'As ever we are investing to maintain and improve our quality. Our new upholstery training programme is providing the next generation of OCee craftsmen. All of our marketing activities have brought us to a good place, which is great, but we don't want to settle for that!'

'Dishy, from a marketing perspective, is a statement, it's 'This is me' – look at the product. Now we need more products in

that vein. We're now saying 'You know the OCee brand and the good things that it represents, now look at the product. It's cementing the relationship – a key supplier that you can trust.'

'Dishy is, in a sense, the beginning,' adds Alistair, 'as we build the portfolio and build too on the relationships we're beginning to establish through better engagement, communication and promotion. We've invested heavily in CRM and we've put our sales team through NLP workshops. It's all about maximising everyone's potential and personal capabilities.

'The next step is to continue to develop our product portfolio, and engage with the A&D and FM companies through our dealer network. We're looking hard at how we achieve that. Kite gives us access to a new set of clients and dealers and has accelerated the opportunity.

'That's why we need more products like Dishy – unique and exclusive.' ●

